

In Númenor, the ring began to talk.

It was never literal speech so much as whispers in the back of Mairon's mind. Just out of reach of being understood, distant and foggy. Anytime he attempted to concentrate on them, they seemed to disappear, only to reappear at random fleeting moments.

It intrigued him, as it made little sense for it to do such a thing unless it had begun to separate itself from him. For the ring to form a consciousness of its own was a worrying aspect. If it formed its own mind, then it ran the risk of disobeying him, defying him, and possibly, outright abandoning him.

And yet, against his better judgement, he allowed himself to push the worries to the side. Always telling himself it was temporary, that there would be time to address it later, before it became a problem. He was too busy now, putting all his focus into the corruption of Númenor, into the blood rituals.

Unfortunately for him, it wasn't until much later—too late—that he realised the rituals made the voice stronger. When the voice one day started to become coherent, and he was able to pick out sounds and letters from it. Now this worried him greatly, and it presented a problem. He could continue his rituals, risking the ring abandoning him, or he could abandon everything he had worked so tirelessly on. Abandon—him. Well, obviously that was not an option.

Ultimately, he decided to risk the ring's allegiance and continue with the rituals.

The ring began to call to him. Although he still could not quite understand the words, the intent was clear enough. A slight pull on his mind, demanding that he move his attention to its whispers. Sometimes he could swear that the ring seemed frustrated, annoyed at the fact that he could not understand, though he was never entirely sure that was not just his own frustration on the matter.

There were days he sat in his chambers, concentrating on the ring's whispers to the point of pain, piercing headaches quickly becoming a regular occurrence. He grew more agitated as the weeks turned into months, his rituals and sacrifices becoming more and more frequent, until finally, he demanded the King's daughter.

Pharazôn was hesitant to offer up his only heir, but through Mairon's coy words and sweet speaking, eventually relented. Míriel had to be locked in her chambers, in hysterics. Having Pharazôn's last annoying voice of reason locked away where she could no longer speak against his words was, in itself, a victory.

That night, under a full moon, royal blood was spilt in Melkor's name. Mairon lavished himself with it, drenching the ring and allowing it to fully absorb the power of the life he had taken. For many minutes, he sat in silence, the sound of his heavy breathing the only noise to be heard.

Through the silence, the ring spoke. ***Precious***. It called to him.

And Mairon wept.