

A flying balrog

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A Tolkien fan is rereading the Appendices in *The Lord of the Rings* yet another time. Somewhere in the back of the reader's mind are the old problems of *Do Balrogs have Wings?* and *Do Balrogs Actually Fly?* The reader comes across a passage in Appendix A, Section III, Durin's Folk, and for the first time becomes aware of some text that says in black and white that the Moria Balrog can "fly". The reader believes that he or she has found the proof that no-one else has ever noticed and has solved the problem. The text is (with emphasis by me):

Thus they roused from sleep a thing of terror that, **flying** from Thangorodrim, had lain hidden at the foundations of the earth since the coming of the Host of the West: a Balrog of Morgoth.

The reader excitedly tells a friend of this fantastic news. The friend is surprisingly uninterested. This is old hat. The word flying is not unambiguous in meaning and the passage has been known for years.

Our hero is unconvinced — and wrong. Flying does have more than one meaning. One must prove the case by at least listing all uses of the word flying and fleeing in the main text of *The Lord of the Rings*, and breaking them down by meaning. I list them each in a short quotation, usually a single sentence providing for each as its source the book number from I to VI in Roman numeral, the chapter number, and then the page number in the Allen & Unwin hardcover edition of 1966.

Moving through the air

... there were pillars of coloured fires that rose and turned into eagles, or sailing ships, or a phalanx of **flying** swans; (I, 1, 35)

*There **flying** Elwing came to him,
and flame was in the darkness lit;* (II, 1, 247)

Away in the South a dark patch appeared, and grew, and drove north like **flying** smoke in the wind. (II, 3, 298)

Flocks of birds, **flying** at great speed, were wheeling and circling, and traversing all the land as if they were searching for something; and they were steadily drawing nearer. (II, 3, 298)

'Regiments of black crows are **flying** over all the land between the Mountains and the Greyflood,' he said. (II, 3, 298)

I have also glimpsed many hawks **flying** high up in the sky. (II, 3, 298)

Later as the sun was setting, and the Company was stirring and getting ready to start again, he descried a dark spot against the fading light: a great bird high and far off, now wheeling, now **flying** on slowly southwards. (II, 9, 401)

He seems to be **flying** now away, from this land back to the North. (III, 2, 25)

It wheeled and went north, **flying** at a speed greater than any wind of Middle-earth. (III, 11, 201)

Looking up they saw the clouds breaking and shredding; and then high in the south the moon glimmered out, riding in the **flying** wrack. (IV, 2, 237)

Then Frodo and Sam staring at the sky, breathing deeply of the fresher air, saw it come: a small cloud **flying** from the accursed hills; a black shadow loosed from Mordor; a vast shape winged and ominous. (IV, 2, 237)

They were very small to look at, yet he knew, somehow, that they were huge, with a vast stretch of pinion, **flying** at a great height. (IV, 3, 253)

Yet the same, or another like to it, a **flying** darkness in the shape of a monstrous bird, passed over Edoras that morning, and all men were shaken with fear. (V, 3, 66)

Even as the Nazgûl had swerved aside from the onset of the White Rider, there came **flying** a deadly dart, and Faramir, as he held at bay a mounted champion of Harad, had fallen to the earth. (V, 4, 94)

The **flying** rain had ceased for a time, and the sun gleamed up above; but all the lower city was still wrapped in a smouldering reek. (V, 8, 134)

Gulls! They are **flying** far inland. (V, 9, 149)

I think this place is being watched. I can't explain it, but well: it feels to me as if one of those foul **flying** Riders was about, up in the blackness where he can't be seen. (VI, 1, 189)

*To the Sea, to the Sea! The white gulls are crying,
The wind is blowing, and the white foam is **flying**.* (VI, 4, 234)

And before the Sun had fallen far from the noon out of the East there came a great Eagle **flying**, and he bore tidings beyond hope from the Lords of the West, crying: (VI, 5, 241)

Hair in the wind

There on the hill-brow she stood beckoning to them: her hair was **flying** loose, and as it caught the sun it shone and shimmered. (I, 8, 146)

He was blowing a great horn, and his yellow hair was **flying** in the wind. (III, 6, 116)

Moving swiftly over the ground

He heard there oft the flying sound

Of feet as light as linden-leaves, (I, 11, 204)

It was answered; and to the dismay of Frodo and his friends out from the trees and rocks away on the left four other Riders came **flying**. (I, 12, 225)

Gandalf came **flying** down the steps and fell to the ground in the midst of the Company. (II, 5, 340)

Over the plains Shadowfax was **flying**, needing no urging and no guidance. (III, 11, 201)

And out of the darkness the answering neigh of other horses came; and presently the thudding of hoofs was heard, and three riders swept up and passed like **flying** ghosts in the moon and vanished into the West. (V, 1, 20)

Fleeing

He had suddenly realized that **flying** from the Shire would mean more painful partings than merely saying farewell to the familiar comforts of Bag End. (I, 2, 73)

I am **flying** from deadly peril into deadly peril. (I, 5, 114)

But it is no good **flying** blindly this way with the pursuit just behind. (II, 5, 338)

Even as Aragorn and Boromir came **flying** back, the rest of the bridge cracked and fell. (II, 5 345)

She seemed to be looking inside me and asking me what I would do if she gave me the chance of **flying** back home to the Shire to a nice little hole with-with a bit of garden of my own. (II, 7, 373)

'See! Some of the Southrons have broken from the trap and are **flying** from the road.' (IV, 4, 269)

How Shelob came there, **flying** from ruin, no tale tells, for out of the Dark Years few tales have come. (IV, 9, 332)

Already men were breaking away, **flying** wild and witless here and there, flinging away their weapons, crying out in fear, falling to the ground. (V, 4, 93)

The last word to come from outside the walls was brought by men **flying** down the northward road ere the Gate was shut. (V, 4, 95)

Men are **flying** from the walls and leaving them unmanned. (V, 4, 98)

Men **flying** back from the burning passed him, and some seeing his livery turned and shouted, but he paid no heed. (V, 4, 101)

Well nigh all the northern half of the Pelennor was overrun, and there camps were blazing, orcs were **flying** towards the River like herds before the hunters; and the Rohirrim went hither and thither at their will. (V, 6, 114)

Ere that dark day ended none of the enemy were left to resist us all were drowned, or were **flying** south in the hope to find their own lands upon foot. (V, 9, 152)

Out of the turret-door the smaller orc came **flying**. (VI, 1, 182)

The Captains bowed their heads; and when they looked up again, behold! their enemies were **flying** and the power of Mordor was scattering like dust in the wind. (VI, 4, 227)

Weird metaphor

A short way beyond the way-meeting, after another steep incline, a **flying** bridge of stone leapt over the chasm and bore the road across into the tumbled slopes and glens of the Morgai. (VI, 2, 193)


The word 'fleeing'

I do not know what they are about: possibly there is some trouble away south from which they are **fleeing**; but I think they are spying out the land. I have also glimpsed many hawks flying high up in the sky. (II, 3, 298)

We do not serve the Power of the Black Land far away, but neither are we yet at open war with him; and if you are **fleeing** from him, then you had best leave this land. (III, 2, 35)

And this also: it would seem by the signs that they were **fleeing** westward when they fell. (V, 5, 109)

Reckless we rode among our **fleeing** foes, driving them like leaves, until we came to the shore. (V, 9, 152)

The word *flying* is used to mean 'moving through the air' 19 times, more than any other single meaning, but the word *flying* is used 20 times to mean either 'fleeing' or 'moving swiftly over the ground'. Usage is no help in interpreting the Balrog passage, which remains ambiguous. Our fan might try to argue that Tolkien in the Appendices was generally using more modern language than in his literary text. But this is only special pleading as the text of this portion of the Appendix A, in fact, is written as though adapted from an older document. 

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