
Character Biography

Ar-Pharazôn

By Russandol

Ar-Pharazôn the Golden, mightiest and last King of Númenor, was the victim of his own deluded pride, spurred by the lies of Sauron the Deceiver, who promised him no less than immortality and the kingship of the world if he stood against the Valar. When he attempted to claim these prizes he sealed his doom and that of his people, and even Sauron was aghast at the devastating consequences of his deception.

So, who was Ar-Pharazôn?

Ar-Pharazôn, son of Gimilkhâd and nephew of the King Tar-Palantir, was born in Númenor, the Land of Gift granted to the Edain by the Valar after the War of Wrath, in the year 3118 of the Second Age (1).

The published version of *The Silmarillion* does not give us a description of Ar-Pharazôn. One, however, was written and can be found in *The Peoples of Middle-earth* (2):

He [Ar-Pharazôn] was a man of great beauty and strength/stature after the image of the first kings, and indeed in his youth was not unlike the Edain of old in mind also, though he had strength of will rather than of wisdom as after appeared, when he was corrupted by the counsels of his father and the acclaim of the people. In his earlier days he had a close friendship with Amandil who was afterwards Lord of Andunie ...

Tolkien also tells us that he was a captain and “a leader in the wars that the Númenóreans made then in the coastlands of Middle-earth, seeking to extend their dominion over Men” (3). When Ar-Pharazôn’s father died he returned to the island bearing many riches and the people of Númenor welcomed him back warmly.

In 3255 (4), following his uncle’s death, he wedded Tar-Palantír’s only daughter Míriel by force and against the laws of his land, which forbade marriage between first-degree cousins, and usurped the sceptre that belonged to his wife. In this way he became the twenty-fifth (5) King of Númenor.

Ar-Pharazôn was his Adûnaic name, derived from *pharaz*, which means *gold* in this language. His Quenya title was Tar-Calion; though the use of the Elven tongues had been forbidden by his grandfather Ar-Gimilzôr in defiance of the Valar, it is likely that this was the name inscribed in the Scroll of Kings. Superstition still demanded to keep this tradition, lest evil should befall the island and its rulers if the ancient customs were forsaken.

Through reports from his captains, Ar-Pharazôn heard of the might of Sauron, whose realm in Middle-earth had grown to the point where he had given himself the title of King of Men, and of his intent to destroy the Númenóreans and their island. The King of Númenor would not put up

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with this outrage: that another ruler would become as powerful as to rival him, the heir of Eärendil, even less to threaten him. He decided that Sauron could be nothing but his vassal. So he prepared a huge army and sailed to Middle-earth. He landed in Umbar in the year 3261 (6) and everyone fled from the coastal areas at the sight of his ships. He made camp and sent heralds out commanding Sauron to come before him and swear fealty.

Sauron, disciple of Melkor the first Dark Lord, is usually associated with the idea of domination and violence, leader of ruthless armies and master of many slaves. That he might be as devious as to answer Ar-Pharazôn's high-handed summons and surrender himself to the Númenóreans he hated so much seemed most unlikely, but this he did, because he had realised he would not overcome his foe with strength.

He humbled himself, and came himself on foot before Ar-Pharazon, and did him homage and craved pardon for his offences. And Ar-Pharazon spared his life; but took from him all his titles, and made him prisoner, and carried him at length back to Numenor to be hostage for the submission and faith of all who had before owed him allegiance.

'This is a hard doom,' said Sauron, 'but great kings must have their will', and he submitted as one under compulsion, concealing his delight; for things had fallen out according to his design. (7)

Sauron, a Maia of great power, must have been rather confident of his chances to seduce his enemy before placing himself in his hands. After all, he had recently proved his skills at manipulating the Children of Ilúvatar against the Gwaith-i-Mírdain, the People of the Jewel-smiths in Eregion, whom he had tricked into forging the Rings of Power under the fair guise of Annatar, the Lord of Gifts.

We must assume that Ar-Pharazôn ignored the tragic fate of Eregion at Sauron's hands. Otherwise logic would have demanded him to keep a prudent distance from the Dark Lord, even if he appeared harmless and subdued. But the Númenóreans, except for the Faithful, had estranged themselves from the Elves and it is therefore quite likely that news of what had befallen the Elves of Eregion had never reached the ears of Ar-Pharazôn. In all likelihood he was also ignorant about the One Ring and its power. To dominate the wills of others to that of its master.

Ignorance is dangerous, even more so when dealing with a foe such as Sauron the Deceiver. But the King of Númenor, blinded by arrogance, grossly underestimated his enemy. One can only imagine Sauron's glee when he was given free passage to Númenor as a prisoner and hostage.

Once on the island he saw the glory of Númenor and was filled with hate and envy. But he hid his purpose and instead managed to gain relative freedom, and most importantly to his designs, access to Ar-Pharazôn. He did not waste time: "ere three years had passed he had become closest to the secret counsels of the King" (8).

We can but envision how Sauron's keen perception of Ar-Pharazôn's fears and desires shaped his honeyed words to achieve a position of influence and a reputation of wisdom. Flattery mixed with apparently genuine submission and the sharing of knowledge beyond that possessed by

Men must have been irresistible. His whispers echoed the very thoughts that Ar-Pharazôn and several of his predecessors had harboured for many years: how the Valar were keeping immortality from them and how the noble race of Númenor deserved better than the Gift of Ilúvatar that robbed them of riches, power and achievements on Arda.

And slowly but surely Sauron wormed his way into the King's favour and began to control his mind and, through it, the fate of Númenor. Guile and patience had indeed proved more fruitful than violence. Through them he had become the real ruler of the Land of Gift, and worked towards its corruption and ruin.

Sauron knew that as a hostage he would never rise to be accepted as the lord and deity he had been to his subjects in Middle-earth. Instead he destroyed the bonds between the Númenóreans and the Valar. He accomplished this severance by warping Eru Ilúvatar into a fictional entity created by the Valar to force the compliance of the Númenóreans to their arbitrary rules and to discredit the true Lord of Arda: Melkor. According to Sauron, his master Melkor was the "Lord of the Darkness", from what the world was made, and the "Giver of Freedom" who would grant Ar-Pharazôn all the boons that the Valar and Eru allegedly withheld from him. First in secret and then openly, the King began to worship the Dark and Melkor its Lord in a temple built by Sauron, and his people followed him, lured by the promise of immortality.

Only a minority of the people of Númenor rejected the Sauron's counsel and remained true to their friendship with the Eldar and their reverence to the Valar and "kept Ilúvatar in their hearts" (9). They were called the Faithful and were led by Amandil, lord of Andúnië, who was dismissed, no doubt at the instigation of Sauron, from his position of councillor to the King.

Sauron also persuaded the King to fell Nimloth, the White Tree of Númenor, to remove the last link to the Eldar and Valinor. At first Ar-Pharazôn refused, because of the prophecy by Tar-Palantir that bound the tree to the dynasty of the Kings, but Sauron found arguments to change his mind and Ar-Pharazôn relented. Only because of the courage of Isildur, Amandil's grandson, was a fruit preserved and planted by the Faithful, so that Nimloth's seedling would later grow in the Citadel of Minas Anor in Gondor.

As time went by, the worship of Melkor became more demanding and bloody, until it came to offering human sacrifices in the hope that the Lord of Darkness would save them from death. Many of the victims were taken by force from amongst the Faithful under pretexts such as treason.

The final days of the Faithful must have been dark indeed, if the disturbing description included in *The Lost Road* is anything to go by:

... His [the king's] displeasure falleth on men, and they go out; they are in the evening, and in the morning they are not. The open is insecure; walls are dangerous. Even by the heart of the house spies may sit. And there are prisons, and chambers underground. There are torments; and there are evil rites. ... Even our gardens are not wholly clean, after the sun has fallen. And now even by day smoke riseth from the temple: flowers and grass are withered where it falleth. The old songs are forgotten or altered; twisted into other meanings. (10)

Unsurprisingly Melkor did not answer the prayers of his new followers, and death did not depart from Númenor; on the contrary, the lifespan of its people shortened and their end became uglier, marred by madness, sickness and fear. There was violence and murder, which Sauron instigated by speaking lies to set people against each other.

When Ar-Pharazôn felt his own old age approaching “he was filled with fear and wrath” (11). The year was 3310 of the Second Age of the Sun, according to Tolkien’s *Tale of Years* (12). Those of the pure blood of Númenor had been granted a longer lifespan to that of other Men, but during the later generations it had dwindled greatly, even for those of the line of Elros. Ar-Pharazôn was less than two hundred years old but his three immediate predecessors on the throne of Númenor had not reached 230 years before their deaths (13).

At this time Sauron played his final card. He incited the King to invade the Undying Lands and thus wrest immortality from the Valar on the grounds that their Ban was imposed only to prevent the Kings of Men from surpassing them, that the powerful and worthy King of Númenor, “to whom Manwë alone can be compared, if even he,” (14) could not be denied such a gift. Ar-Pharazôn must have been completely under Sauron’s spell by then, as well as terrified of death, and he prepared a great fleet to invade the Blessed Realm and claim his reward.

The Faithful learnt of these designs and started to fear the retribution of the Valar if the King was to go ahead with his plan. They also began preparations to flee, at the advice of Amandil, who sailed West in an attempt to seek the pardon from the Powers before it was too late.

The signs of the approaching doom were everywhere: the weather turned hostile, ships sank in the sea, clouds in the shape of eagles appeared from the West and darkened the sunset. Some men were afraid; others, including the King, became more resolved in their defiance.

At last lightning struck the temple of Melkor, but Sauron survived unharmed and the people acclaimed him as a god and ignored the final warnings when “the land shook under them” and smoke came out from the peal of the Meneltarma where the hallow of Ilúvatar stood. Blind and deaf to all signs, Ar-Pharazôn continued building his fleet. His ships “darkened the sea upon the west of the land, and they were like an archipelago of a thousand isles; their masts were as a forest upon the mountains, and their sails like a brooding cloud; and their banners were golden and black” (15).

It was the year 3319 when all was ready (16). The King went aboard his ship, Alcarondas, Castle of the Sea, and though there was little wind “they had many oars and many strong slaves to row beneath the lash” (17) and the fleet moved West among the sound of loud trumpets, and at last they broke the Ban of the Valar when the Land of Gift disappeared on their Eastern horizon. In the meantime, wary of the consequences of Ar-Pharazôn’s folly to attempt to wage war against the Valar, Sauron remained inside his temple, believing himself safe from their wrath.

The fleet reached Avallónë and Tol Eressëa, and finally reached the coasts of Valinor. The Elves had fled: “all was silent, and doom hung by a thread” (18). At this point, Ar-Pharazôn almost turned back at the imposing sight of the Blessed Realm and Taniquetil itself. But in the end his pride won the day and he disembarked and claimed the land.

Manwë, High King of Arda, called upon Eru Ilúvatar and temporarily laid down his kingship. What happened next not even Sauron could have foreseen. No other words but Tolkien's can describe better the fate of Ar-Pharazôn and his followers, or the Fall of Númenor:

But Ilúvatar showed forth his power, and he changed the fashion of the world; and a great chasm opened in the sea between Númenor and the Deathless Lands, and the waters flowed down into it, and the noise and smoke of the cataracts went up to heaven, and the world was shaken. And all the fleets of the Númenóreans were drawn down into the abyss, and they were drowned and swallowed up for ever. But Ar-Pharazôn the King and the mortal warriors that had set foot upon the land of Aman were buried under falling hills: there it is said that they lie imprisoned in the Caves of the Forgotten, until the Last Battle and the Day of Doom. (19)

One wonders why such a cataclysmic punishment was meted out by Ilúvatar to the Númenóreans when nothing of the same scale was triggered when the kinslayings took place in Alqualondë, Doriath or the Havens of Sirion; or while Sauron, caught utterly by surprise at this catastrophic outcome, was not brought to judgement but allowed to escape, forsaking his bodily form to flee across the sea and return to plague Middle-earth for another whole age.

His only punishment was that, from then on, “he was unable ever again to assume a form that seemed fair to men, but became black and hideous, and his power thereafter was through terror alone” (20). He returned to Mordor to lick his wounds and began to plot revenge against Elendil, Amandil's son, and his sons. But that is another story...

And what about the One Ring?

Was Sauron's corruption of Ar-Pharazôn aided by the power of the One Ring? Did Sauron leave it in Mordor or take it with him across the sea? To abandon his mightiest weapon, into which he had poured his very power, to leave it behind where it might be found and used against him seemed an unlikely course of action. So, if Sauron took the Ring to Númenor (21), he would have kept it secret, or at least named it a worthless trinket.

Though Ar-Pharazôn's actions could not yet be wholly justified by having become a victim of the Ring, at least its presence would help explain the ease with which Sauron, an enemy hostage and prisoner, managed to seduce and dominate him and his subjects; for after all, was it not “*One Ring to rule them all*”?

Who would have resisted the Dark Lord and his One Ring when they offered the luring image of one's deepest desires laid out, ready to be taken, upon the white beaches of Valinor?

Notes on earlier versions of Ar-Pharazôn's story

In the first version of the fall of Númenor (22) Ar-Pharazôn is named Angor. Sauron comes as a great bird to the island to preach the second coming of Morgoth; and Angor “assailed the shores of the Gods, and he cast bolts of thunder, and fire came upon the sides of Taniquetil” (23).

In a later, more elaborated but incomplete draft of the tale, which can be found as part of *The Lost Road and other Writings* Ar-Pharazôn is named Tar-Kalion or Tarcalion. Also, Sauron

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sailed freely to the island answering the summons of the King, thus invalidating the protection that the Valar had granted Númenor against the Dark Lord: “For the Lords said that Sauron would work evil; but he could not come hither unless he were summoned” (24).

The other key difference in Ar-Pharazôn’s earlier incarnations can be found in *The Peoples of Middle-earth*. In this version of the story he did not force marriage on his cousin, but she was instead enamoured of his wealth and beauty. She forsook her beloved, the brother of Amandil to whom she was about to be betrothed, and when her father Tar-Palantir died, not only did she marry Ar-Pharazôn willingly, but also of her own volition did she yield the sceptre to him (25).

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3. *Akallabêth, The Silmarillion*.
4. “Appendix A: Annals of the Kings and Rulers”, *The Lord of the Rings*.
5. Tolkien recorded him in some texts as the twenty-fourth.
6. “Appendix A: Annals of the Kings and Rulers”, *The Lord of the Rings*.
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12. In the appendices of *The Lord of the Rings*.
13. From birth and death dates listed in “The Line of Elros: Kings of Númenor”, *Unfinished Tales*.
14. *Akallabêth, The Silmarillion*.
15. Ibid.
16. “Appendix A: Annals of the Kings and Rulers”, *The Lord of the Rings*.
17. *Akallabêth, The Silmarillion*.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
20. “Appendix A: Annals of the Kings and Rulers”, *The Lord of the Rings*.
21. This point is not mentioned in *The Silmarillion*, but seems to be confirmed by Tolkien (Letter 211 To Rhona Beare, *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*).
22. “The Fall of Númenor: The First Version of The Fall of Númenor”, *History of Middle Earth, vol. V: The Lost Road and Other Writings*.
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About the Author

Russandol has quietly suffered under the spell of Middle-earth for over 25 years, from the first time she read *The Lord of the Rings*. Then, as recently as two years ago, while on an Internet quest to learn to write Tengwar, she stumbled upon the world of Tolkien fan fiction. As a result her affliction flared up and became sadly incurable. Russandol lives in Berkshire, England, and every time she goes for a walk or a ride in the woods she hopes to find a mallorn.