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## Character Biography Caranthir

By Silver Trails

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Morifinwë Carnistir, son of Fëanor and Nerdanel, was black-haired like his grandfather, and had a ruddy complexion, like his mother. He was called *Moryo* by his father, though as all the sons of Fëanor save for Curufin, Caranthir preferred his “mother name”. (1)

There is some debate about when he was born. Caranthir is always listed fifth in the *History of Middle-earth* (HoMe) books, which would lead us to believe that he is the fifth son of Fëanor if Christopher Tolkien hadn't said that Caranthir is the fourth son in *The Silmarillion*:

Caranthir: **The fourth son of Fëanor**, called the Dark; 'the harshest of the brothers and the most quick to anger'; ruled in Thargelion; slain in the assault on Doriath. (2, emphasis mine)

But in *The Peoples of Middle-earth* (Home 12), we find this quote about Fëanor's sons:

His sons were too occupied in war and feuds to pay attention to such matters, save Maglor who was a poet, and **Curufin, his fourth and favourite son** to whom he gave his own name; but Curufin was most interested in the alien language of the Dwarves, being the only one of the Noldor to win their friendship. It was from him that the loremasters obtained such knowledge as they could of the Khuzdûl. (3, emphasis mine)

As we know, it was Caranthir who had business with the Dwarves, not Curufin (4), but he never befriended them. This is why this remains open to debate, though if we take into account the many changes Christopher Tolkien admittedly introduced into *The Silmarillion*, we could reasonably believe that Caranthir was meant to be the fifth son. There is also the fact that Fëanor's sons are always grouped according to age. Maedhros spends time with Maglor, so does Celegorm with Curufin. They look for Caranthir at times, but Caranthir also spends time with the twins, Amrod and Amras.

Caranthir's name changes a few times in the books. He is called *Crantor* in *The Book of Lost Tales 2* (5), which is his first appearance in Tolkien's universe. His name changes to *Cranthir* in *The Lays of Beleriand* (6), and he will keep that name, though there is a marginal note in *Morgoth's Ring* (7), saying that his name will be changed to *Caranthir*, which is done in *The War of the Jewels* (8).

The only reference about Caranthir's marital status is in HoMe 12:

Others who were wedded were Maelor, Caranthir. (9)

Caranthir must have helped to burn the ships at Losgar, and he was with his father and brothers in the battle of Dagor-os-Giliath, where Fëanor was mortally wounded by Gothmog. Later, after Maedhros was ambushed and captured by Morgoth, Caranthir settled with his brothers near

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Lake Mithrim. When Fingolfin and his host arrived on Middle-earth, tension arose, and so the Fëanorians moved to the southern shore of the lake. It is said that not all the brothers agreed with Maedhros' decision to give up the kingship of the Noldor, and one might believe that Caranthir was one of them, but we really don't know. After all he never tried to usurp anyone's crown and lived peacefully in his lands until Morgoth's creatures destroyed Thargelion.

One thing we can be certain of, and it is that Caranthir didn't like Finarfin's sons, and he distrusted them when it came to their dealings with Thingol (10). One could say that Caranthir believed the Noldor were better than the Sindar, but he was also quite aware that his cousins' kinship with Thingol might tip the already fragile balance between the two peoples. After all, the Fëanorians, save for Maedhros, had burned the ships and betrayed the rest of the Noldor. Maedhros, who was more concerned with keeping the peace, rebuked Caranthir, but the harm had been done. Angrod didn't forget, and when Thingol demanded the truth about Alqualondë, he told his uncle about the kinslaying, the Doom of Mandos, and the burning of the ships (11).

When the Fëanorians left Lake Mithrim and headed East, Caranthir and his people settled beyond the upper Gelion. The Grey Elves used to live in these lands before, and they called the land *Talath Rhúnen* (12). Caranthir's lair was near Lake Helevorn (Black Glass). The lands between the Gelion, the Ered Luin (the Blue Mountains), Mount Rerir and the Ascar, were called Thargelion (Land beyond Gelion) or Dor Caranthir (Land of Caranthir). His people fortified the mountains east from Maglor's gap and built a fortress on the western slopes of Mount Rerir (13). They climbed the Ered Luin and met the Dwarves. Caranthir didn't conceal his scorn for the unloveliness of the Dwarves, neither did his people, or Elves in general. This quote makes this quite clear:

In their own tongue the Dwarves name themselves Khazad; but the Grey-elves called them the Nyrn, **the hard**. This name the exiled Noldor likewise took for them, but called them also the Naugrim, **the stunted folk** ... (14, emphasis mine)

If we remember the Petty-Dwarves, exiled by their own people, and hunted down by the Grey-Elves, we can see that there was much mistrust between the peoples of Middle-earth. This distrust and resentment didn't disappear, but it was lessened when the people of Caranthir and the Dwarves from the Ered Luin started to trade and to share knowledge, and realized that they had a common enemy:

Nevertheless since both peoples feared and hated Morgoth they made alliance, and had of it great profit; for the Naugrim learned many secrets of craft in those days, so that the smiths and masons of Nogrod and Belegost became renowned among their kin, and when the Dwarves began again to journey into Beleriand all the traffic of the dwarf-mines passed first through the hands of Caranthir, and thus great riches came to him. (15)

There is a version in *The Shaping of Middle-earth* (HoMe 4), where the Dwarves are evil and the Eldar make war on them, but this version changed later. The Home 12 quote above about Curufin being interested in the language of the Dwarves, when his and Caranthir's characters were swapped, implies that Caranthir and his people might have learned some Khuzdûl during their trade with the Dwarves. So we could say that Caranthir was good at making business and increasing his wealth. His people seemed to have led a good life, and even Celegorm and Curufin used to spend time riding in the woods with Caranthir.

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When the Haladin came to Beleriand, the Green-Elves were unfriendly to them, so they turned north and reached Thargelion. Caranthir allowed them to stay in his lands, and paid little attention to them. For a while there was peace, but Morgoth sent his Orcs to attack the Men. They were besieged, and Haldad, their leader, was killed in a sortie, and Haldar, his son, was killed while trying to defend him. Haleth, Haldad's daughter, was left as their leader. After seven days, Caranthir and his host came to the rescue and drove the Orcs into the rivers. Seeing how valiant Men could be, Caranthir offered Haleth and her people free lands and protection. She thanked him, but left the area and settled with her people in Estolad.

Morgoth attacked the Elves in what became the Battle of Sudden Flame, and though Himring was never taken, Thargelion was destroyed, and Lake Helevorn defiled. Caranthir was forced to cross the Gelion with his people and they joined Amrod and Amras, settling in Amon Ereb. The Green-Elves joined them, and the Orcs' advance was stopped. The Men Tolkien called swarthy came into Beleriand in those days, and the sons of Ulfang the Black, Ulfast, Ulwarth, and Uldor the accursed, swore allegiance to Caranthir, but in the end betrayed him in the Battle of Unnumbered Tears. They were slain by Maglor in *The Silmarillion*, but it was Caranthir who did so in earlier versions:

But the sons of Ulfang reaped not the reward that Morgoth had promised them; for Caranthir slew Uldor the Accursed, the leader in treason, and Ulfast and Ulwarth were slain by the sons of Bor, ere they themselves fell. (16)

Then the rumour came that Dior was wearing the Nauglafring, with a Silmaril fixed in it, so the Oath started to torment the sons of Fëanor again. They sent messengers to claim the jewel, but there was no answer so the Fëanorians marched to Doriath in the middle of winter. The Silmaril was lost as Elwing, aided by servants, escaped with it, but Dior was killed by Celegorm, and Curufin and Caranthir were slain there too, pierced with arrows. There are many versions of which son of Fëanor dies in this second kinslaying, but Caranthir dies in all of them:

There fell Celegorm by Dior's hand, and there fell Curufin, and dark Caranthir; but Dior was slain also, and Nimloth his wife, and the cruel servants of Celegorm seized his young sons and left them to starve in the forest. Of this Maedhros indeed repented, and sought for them long in the woods of Doriath; but his search was unavailing, and of the fate of Eluréd and Elurín no tale tells. (17)

Caranthir was said to be quick to anger, haughty, and somewhat unruly, but it was him who befriended other peoples of Middle-earth, not thinking of the war against Morgoth alone, but also of the benefits of acquiring new knowledge, and of living a peaceful life. Caranthir was not averse to make money and protected those weaker than him. He was loyal to his family and died trying to fulfil the Oath he swore with his father and brothers in Tirion.

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