
Character Biography Elendur of Númenor

By Oshun

Elendur of Númenor is the eldest son and heir of Isildur and the grandson of Elendil. He is not to be confused with another Elendur who assumes the kingship of Arnor much later in the Third Age, a descendant of his youngest brother Valandil.

Elendur the son of Isildur is one of the last, if not the last, man to have been born in Númenor. Most secondary sources (online glossaries) refer to Meneldil, the son of Anárion, as the last man born in Númenor. In a confusing set of draft documents collected in *The Peoples of Middle-earth*, each with numerous alterations and emendations, there is a reference also to Elendur as the last-born of the line of Elendil in Númenor.

In the chronological outline that follows in B as in C, the birth-date of Anarion is 3209 and of Isildur 3219; Meneldil was born in 3299, and it was Kiryandil son of Isildur who was the last man to be born in Numenor (3318).¹

Kiryandil, above, is an earlier name given to Elendur. The importance of whether Elendur or his cousin was the last man born in Númenor becomes less than vital information, given that Elendur does not survive his father Isildur. Of Isildur's four sons, Elendur, Aratan, Ciryon, and Valandil, only the youngest son, Valandil, is mentioned in *The Lord of the Rings*. "He [Valandil] was the fourth son of Isildur, born in Imladris. His brothers were slain in the Gladden Fields."²

Christopher Tolkien notes in *The Peoples of Middle-earth* that

[o]nly Isildur's youngest son, Valandil, is named in *The Lord of the Rings*. In the very late work *The Disaster of the Gladden Fields* the three elder are named Elendur, Aratan, and Ciryon (*Unfinished Tales* p. 271 and note 11); on one of the copies of the typescript D (p. 190) my father pencilled a note remarking on this, and saying that the names found in 'Gladdenfields' were to be accepted.³

In one of the notes [footnote 26] to the section *The Disaster of the Gladden Fields* in the *Unfinished Tales*, Tolkien writes of a strong resemblance of Elendur not only to his grandfather Elendil but also to Aragorn.

It is said that in later days those (such as Elrond) whose memories recalled were struck by the great likeness to him, in body and mind, of King Elessar, the victor in the War of the Ring, in which both the Ring and Sauron were ended forever. Elessar was according to the records of the Dúnedain the descendant in the thirty eighth degree of Elendur's brother Valandil. So long was it before he was avenged. [Author's note.]⁴

The name *Elendur* is probably a variation on the name of his grandfather *Elendil*, which means 'Elf-friend' (*eled+ndil*), formed similarly (*eled+ndur*) but with a subtly different meaning. Tolkien's *Letters* provide a detailed explanation.⁵

This provides the key to a large number of other Elvish Q. names, such as *Elendil* 'Elf-friend' (*eled+ndil*), *Valandil*, *Mardil* the Good Steward (devoted to the House, sc. of the Kings) *Meneldil* 'astronomer' etc. Of similar significance in names is *-(n)dur*, though properly this means 'to serve', as one serves a legitimate master: cf. Q. *arandil* king's friend, royalist, beside *arandur* 'king's servant, minister'. But these often coincide: e.g. Sam's relation to Frodo can be viewed either as in status *-ndur*, in spirit *-ndil*. Compare among the variant names: *Eärendur* '(professional) mariner'.⁶

While not mentioned in *The Lord of the Rings*, Elendur is named in *The Silmarillion*, but he does not play an active role.⁷ In the version in *Unfinished Tales*, he is not simply a name but an actor. In order to properly describe the significance of the role of Elendur in the tale's end, one must first examine the evolution of Tolkien's thinking on the acquisition of the Ring by Isildur and his disposition of it.

In the Mythgard Academy's class series on the *Unfinished Tales*, the lecturer Corey Olsen points out that the *Disaster of the Gladden Fields* chapter of *Unfinished Tales* is not one that we can look at and think, "Now finally I am learning what really happened," for this, in fact, is not the case. This is not the full story that was in Tolkien's head while he was writing *The Lord of the Rings* but that he did not have time or space to include. In actuality, the *Unfinished Tales* version is far more than a fleshing out of details of *The Lord of the Rings* or *The Silmarillion* accounts of Isildur and the Ring. Instead, it is actually a newer and much-altered conception of Isildur's role in those events.

The "Disaster of the Gladden Fields" as presented in the *Unfinished Tales* is neither contemporary to the initial writing and revising of *The Lord of the Rings*, nor was it created shortly thereafter, as was *Of the Rings of Power and the Third Age* that is included in the published *Silmarillion*. It is among Tolkien's very latest works and contains some dramatic changes in emphasis relating to the character of Isildur and the death of his sons and the loss of the Ring.⁸ Christopher Tolkien says,

This is a 'late' narrative – by which I mean no more, in the absence of any indication of precise date, than that it belongs in the final period of my father's writing on Middle-earth, together with 'Cirion and Eorl', 'The Battles of the Fords of Isen', 'the Drúedain', and the philological essays excerpted in 'The History of Galadriel and Celeborn', rather than to the time of the publication of *The Lord of the Rings* and the years following it.⁹

One of the substantial changes, although one might not immediately notice without comparing the two sets of texts, is that Isildur is treated with greater understanding and sympathy. He is no longer the irrational person transformed beyond redemption by having grasped the Ring whom we read about in *The Lord of the Rings*. Elrond, in his account of Isildur and the Ring at the Council of Elrond, does not leave Isildur much dignity. Isildur rejects the advice of Elrond and rushes off to his fate, betraying his friends and allies and endangering his sons and heirs.

'But Isildur would not listen to our counsel.

'This I will have as weregild for my father, and my brother," he said; and therefore whether we would or no, he took it to treasure it. But soon he was betrayed by it to his death; and so it is named in the North Isildur's Bane. Yet death maybe was better than what else might have befallen him.¹⁰

While Elrond's frustration and anger at Isildur's action are implicit in his words and manner in the Council of Elrond scene, the tale as told in *The Silmarillion*¹¹ is even more negative in its assessment of Isildur's motivations and actions.

When Isildur refuses initially to destroy the Ring, he sounds, in *The Silmarillion* account, more like Gollum than a courageous leader of his people and worthy heir to his father.

And the Ring that he held seemed to him exceedingly fair to look on [shades of "my precious!" here]; and he would not suffer it to be destroyed. Taking it therefore he returned at first to Minas Anor, and there planted the White Tree in memory of his brother Anárion. But soon he departed, and after he had given counsel to Meneldil, his brother's son, and had committed to him the realm of the south, he bore away the Ring, to be an heirloom of his house¹²

On his journey to the north with a company of men, including the three oldest of his sons, Isildur runs into difficulty when he neglects to set a watch and they are overrun by Orcs who have been tracking them. The entire company is wiped out, including all of his sons, with the only exception being his squire who was sent off to Imladris with the shards of Narsil.

Isildur himself escaped by means of the Ring, for when he wore it he was invisible to all eyes; but the Orcs hunted him by scent and slot, until he came to the River and plunged in. There the Ring betrayed him and avenged its maker, for it slipped from his finger as he swam, and it was lost in the water. Then the Orcs saw him as he laboured in the stream, and they shot him with many arrows, and that was his end. Only three of his people came ever back over the mountains after long wandering; and of these one was Ohtar his esquire, to whose keeping he had given the shards of the sword of Elendil.¹³

This is a painful and ignominious end to the life of a formerly heroic figure: inept captain, uncaring father, slave to the greed and malice wrought upon him by the Ring. The picture is one of a deserter rather than a leader, hiding behind the invisibility granted him by the Ring until he loses it and, finally, meeting a humiliating death riddled with arrows in the muddy shallows and reeds of a river while he struggles to escape. This is also the version, in its essentials, which is incorporated into Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings* films. It is difficult to reconcile this view of Isildur with the bold man of cunning and tireless loyalty who retrieved the fruit of the White Tree in Númenor, thus preserving it from destruction.

In dramatic contrast, the engagement between Isildur's company and the Orcs at Gladden Fields as described in *Unfinished Tales* is a description of a man of strength tested and nearly overcome by the malice of the Ring, but who, in the end, tries to do the right thing.

In *Unfinished Tales*, Isildur decides to take the Ring to Rivendell and trust in Elrond to know how to dispose of it. Exhausted and marching on foot, Isildur and his company of some two hundred men, including all three of his older sons, discover they are being tracked by Orcs.

Elendur takes a major role in the tale

This, finally, is where Elendur enters into the narrative as an active participant in the tale, the beloved eldest son and heir and a trusted councilor to his father.

Notable in the *Unfinished Tales* version is the manner in which Tolkien uses Isildur's last words with Elendur to express concern and fair intentions, not least of which are his love and affection for Elendur and his sorrow at his initial failure to destroy the Ring when he might have done so. In those final moments, we see Isildur as a fallible but noble and courageous man--not a Ring-ruled monster. He is written as someone who seeks to mitigate the damage he has done by holding onto the Ring until he may deliver it safely into wiser hands. He says to Elendur,

'The vengeance of Sauron lives on, though he may be dead,' he said to Elendur, who stood beside him. 'There is cunning and design here! We have no hope of help: Moria and Lórien are now far behind, and Thranduil four days' march ahead.'¹⁴

Elendur seeks to offer practical counsel to offset his father's desperate assessment of their situation.

'And we bear burdens of worth beyond all reckoning,' said Elendur; for he was in his father's confidence. The Orcs were now drawing near.'¹⁵

Elendur's words have a positive effect of turning Isildur's mind from ruminations of regret and past errors in judgment to important useful considerations.

Isildur turned to his esquire: 'Ohtar,' he said, 'I give this now into your keeping'; and he delivered to him the great sheath and the shards of Narsil, Elendil's sword. 'Save it from capture by all means that you can find, and at all costs; even at the cost of being held a coward who deserted me. Take your companion with you and flee! Go! I command you!'¹⁶

Later, while they are conscious of being tracked by Orcs but there has as yet not been any engagement, Elendur reaches out again to his father.

Elendur went to his father, who was standing dark and alone, as if lost in thought. 'Atarinya,' he said, 'what of the power that would cow these foul creatures and command them to obey you? Is it then of no avail?'¹⁷

One may shudder to read this question, having read much of the power of the Ring to corrupt, but Elendur does not have this knowledge. Isildur, however, has learned the hard way that this power is not one which he can ever desire to wield.

'Alas, it is not, senya. I cannot use it. I dread the pain of touching it. And I have not yet found the strength to bend it to my will. It needs one greater than I now know myself to be. My pride has fallen. It should go to the Keepers of the Three.' At that moment there came a sudden blast of horns, and the Orcs closed in on all sides, flinging themselves against the Dúnedain with reckless ferocity. Night had come, and hope faded.'¹⁸

The number and ferocity of the Orcs is beyond the capacity of the Dúnedain to withstand. One by one, the men are falling. They may slay five Orcs to every man who dies, but it is not enough.

Ciryon was slain in this way and Aratan mortally wounded in an attempt to rescue him. Elendur, not yet harmed, sought Isildur. He was rallying the men on the east side where the assault was heaviest, for the Orcs still feared the Elendilmir that he bore on his brow

and avoided him. Elendur touched him on the shoulder and he turned fiercely, thinking an Orc had crept behind. 'My King,' said Elendur, 'Ciryon is dead and Aratan is dying.

Your last counsellor must advise, nay command you, as you commanded Ohtar. [Emphasis added. Here Elendur takes responsibility for insisting that Isildur must prevent the Ring from being taken by the Orcs at any cost.] Go! Take your burden, and at all costs bring it to the Keepers: even at the cost of abandoning your men and me!¹⁹

The Isildur of this passage, is not the Isildur of The Silmarillion version who, after failing to set a guard, leaves his sons and company to their fate, taking the Ring and running, hoping to save the Ring for his own purposes.

Isildur was overwhelmed by a host of Orcs that lay in wait in the Misty Mountains; and they descended upon him at unawares in his camp . . . for he was heedless and set no guard, deeming that all his foes were overthrown. There well nigh all his people were slain, and among them were his three elder sons, Elendur, Aratan, and Ciryon; but his wife and his youngest son, Valandil, he had left in Imladris when he went to the war. Isildur himself escaped by means of the Ring, for when he wore it he was invisible to all eyes . . .²⁰

Instead, in contrast, the *Unfinished Tales* version paints the picture of one who leaves with great reluctance and only at the insistence of Elendur, in an attempt to take the Ring to Elrond in order to achieve help in safely disposing of it.

'King's son,' said Isildur, 'I knew that I must do so; but I feared the pain. Nor could I go without your leave. Forgive me, and my pride that has brought you to this doom.' Elendur kissed him. 'Go! Go now!' he said.²¹

Of course, Isildur is unable to escape the Orcs pursuit of him. He plunges into the Anduin when he reaches it, first casting away his armour and weapons, with little hope even thus unburdened that he will reach the other side of the river.

There suddenly he knew that the Ring had gone . . . first so overwhelming was his sense of loss that he struggled no more, and would have sunk and drowned. . . A great burden had been taken away. . . There he rose up out of the water: only a mortal man, a small creature lost and abandoned in the wilds of Middle-earth. But to the night-eyed Orcs that lurked there on the watch he loomed up, a monstrous shadow of fear, with a piercing eye like a star. They loosed their poisoned arrows at it, and fled. . . So passed the first victim of the malice of the masterless Ring: Isildur, second King of all the Dúnedain, lord of Arnor and Gondor, and in that age of the World the last.²²

And what of Elendur? He has shown himself a loyal and capable son who takes the responsibility of confronting his father, offering honest and worthy advice, not knowing if it will be welcome or unwelcome. Elendur falls in order to allow his father to escape and fulfill his mission of keeping the Ring out of the hands of the Enemy.

So perished Elendur, who should afterwards have been King, and as all foretold who knew him, in his strength and wisdom, and his majesty without pride, one of the greatest, the fairest of the seed of Elendil, most like to his grandsire.²³

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About the Author

Oshun's *Silmarillion*-based stories may be found on the [SWG archive](#).