
Character Biography

Haleth

By Oshun

There is much discussion over whether Tolkien's women in general, among Elves and Men, get short shrift from the Professor in comparison to their husbands and brothers. However, if one were to compare the women of *The Silmarillion* to the women of *The Lord of the Rings*, one would have to admit that, with the exception of Éowyn and Galadriel (the latter whose history and motivation are rooted in *The Silmarillion*), all of the truly significant roles for women in Tolkien are to be found in *The Silmarillion*. First there are Miriel, the case study of extreme postpartum depression, and Indis, the other woman. But then, almost immediately, we read of Nerdanel, who comes off as considerably more interesting, highly skilled, creative, and wise-- but there is no question that Fëanor gets all the good lines. From there forward, follow the stories of a series of women who are strong and outward-looking in comparison to the LotR women, including Aredhel, Galadriel, Lúthien, Elwing, Idril, and Morwen, just to name a few.

However, among the accounts of all of these women and others, the story of Haleth, daughter of Haldor, albeit short and not greatly developed, is the only one of a woman who is an acknowledged leader of a people. The Lady Haleth led the Second House of the Edain, whose people had been brought together by her father Haldad early in the First Age to withstand the increasing assaults by Morgoth's minions. After the Second House of the Edain, which came to be called the Folk of Haleth, were first unified under Haldad, they were forced to defend themselves against an Orc-raid in a fortress they had constructed between the Ascar and Gelion Rivers in East Beleriand. Haldor was killed in that defense, along with Haleth's twin brother Haldar. "Then Haleth held the people together, though they were without hope; and some cast themselves in the rivers and were drowned" (*Quenta Silmarillion*, Chapter 17, "Of the Coming of Men into the West"). With the loss of Haldor and the death of his son Haldar, who doubtlessly would have otherwise succeeded him, Haleth was chosen as the chieftain of Haldor's people because of her "great heart" and her recognized valor.

The version in *The Silmarillion* of the battle at the Ascar-Gelion Stockade tells of how Haleth was able to hold together the surviving Haladin for several days. "But seven days later, as the Orcs made their last assault and had already broken through the stockade, there came suddenly a music of trumpets, and Caranthir with his host came down from the north and drove the Orcs into the rivers."

Much is made in fanfiction over the possible nature of the relationship between Caranthir and Haleth. This, of course, is pure fanon. The only information that appears even implicitly in the text is that Caranthir held a high regard for Haleth and her people, and Haleth, although grateful for his timely intervention, valued her independence and that of her folk over the not inconsiderable assistance that the Elf lord offered to provide them. Haleth thanked Caranthir graciously, gathered the scattered remains of her people together, and moved onto Estolad (in eastern Beleriand, bear the borders of Doriath).

The Folk of Haleth did not remain in this area for long, but moved farther westward again. Encountering danger and peril, they were not able to find any respite until they finally reached the Forest of Brethil, between the Teiglin and Sirion Rivers to the west of Doriath, outside of the Girdle of Melian. Interestingly, when Haleth came to Brethil, which King Thingol considered to be part of his realm, he sought to drive them out, but was dissuaded by Finrod Felagund, who argued on their behalf. Thingol's condition for granting them permission to remain in Brethil was that they must guard the Crossings of the Teiglin against the enemy and allow no Orcs into the surrounding woods.

Haleth spoke up boldly in reaction to all of these negotiations with the words: "Where are Haldad my father, and Haldar my brother? If the King of Doriath fears a friendship between Haleth and those who have devoured her kin, then the thoughts of the Eldar are strange to Men."

One of the interesting additions or variations upon the story Haleth and her people is contained within *The Unfinished Tales*, written later and not incorporated in the account given in *The Silmarillion*. There they are described as, "a small people, chiefly concerned to protect their own woodlands," who were said to excel in "forest warfare." It is said that even Orcs trained in this method of combat stayed away from their borders. But most fascinating to one studying the character of Haleth is the following passage:

One of the strange practices spoken of was that many of their warriors were women, though few of these went abroad to fight in the great battles. This custom was evidently ancient; for their chieftainess Haleth was a renowned Amazon with a picked bodyguard of women.

Haleth and her people were able to reach an agreement with Thingol and resided in Brethil for the remainder of her life. *The Silmarillion* states that, upon Haleth's death, "her people raised a green mound over her in the heights of the forest, Tûr Haretha, the Ladybarrow, Haudh-en-Arwen in the Sindarin tongue."

About the Author

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