
Character Biography Ithryn-Luin (Blue Wizards)

By Oshun

The Ithryn Luin (Blue Wizards) is the collective name for two out of five of Tolkien's Istari who came to Middle-earth from Aman and are written to have passed into the East of Middle-earth. The earlier individual names given for Ithryn Luin, Alatar and Pallando, are to be found in the *Unfinished Tales* version of their story.¹ As with the accounts of most characters and events in Tolkien's work, there are different versions of their history, of the timeframe, and the circumstances surrounding the arrival of the Istari in Middle-earth.

We know nothing of the placement within that hierarchy of the Blue Wizards. In the *Unfinished Tales* version of the history of the Istari, the group comprised five Maiar sent to Middle-earth in the year 1000 of the Third Age, to assist the free people of Middle-earth in resisting the return of Sauron. Along with Gandalf, Manwë sent a group totaling five:

Of the Blue little was known in the West, and they had no names save Ithryn Luin 'the Blue Wizards'; for they passed into the East with Curunír, but they never returned, and whether they remained in the East, pursuing there the purposes for which they were sent; or perished; or as some hold were ensnared by Sauron and became his servants, is not now known.²

The Valar sent these angelic helpers, messengers, or counselors to assist the Men, Elves, and Dwarves when the powers of the Far West (beyond the Sea) discerned signs of increasing activity from Sauron. This group formed from among the ranks of the Maiar ("spirits whose being also began before the world, of the same order as the Valar but of less degree"³) came clad in the bodies of Men, fallible and vulnerable, although wise and with a memory of the Undying Lands:

For it is said indeed that being embodied the Istari had need to learn much anew by slow experience, and though they knew whence they came the memory of the Blessed Realm was to them a vision from afar off, for which (so long as they remained true to their mission) they yearned exceedingly. Thus by enduring of free will the pangs of exile and the deceits of Sauron they might redress the evils of that time.⁴

They inhabited these Mannish forms in near permanence, not taking them off and putting them back on again throughout their Middle-earth mission, for they had been

. . . forbidden to reveal themselves in forms of majesty, or to seek to rule the wills of Men or Elves by open display of power, but coming in shapes weak and humble were bidden to advise and persuade Men and Elves to good, and to seek to unite in love and understanding all those whom Sauron, should he come again, would endeavour to dominate and corrupt.⁵

In the case of the so-called Blue Wizards, their Sindarin name *Ithryn Luin* consists of *ithryn* ("wizards"; the plural of *ithron*) and *luin* (the color "blue").⁶ The Blue Wizards who went into the East of Middle-earth and never returned are described as being clad in sea-blue robes:

Others there were also: two clad in sea-blue, and one in earthen brown; and last came one who seemed the least, less tall than the others, and in looks more aged, grey-haired and grey-clad, and leaning on a staff. But Círdan from their first meeting at the Grey Havens divined in him the greatest spirit and the wisest; and he welcomed him with reverence, and he gave to his keeping the Third Ring, Narya the Red.⁷

Those two lost Blue Wizards are discussed under the names of Alatar and Pallando in the essay *The Istari*: "Whereas in the essay on the Istari it is said that the two who passed into the East had no names save Ithryn Luin 'the Blue Wizards' (meaning of course that they had no names in the West of Middle-earth), here they are named, as Alatar and Pallando. . . ."⁸

The history of the Blue Wizards is to be fine-tuned again, arguably in what is intended to be a final adjustment, in Tolkien's *Last Writings*. But, first, Christopher Tolkien notes in the *Unfinished Tales' Istari* section that many of "the remaining writings about the Istari (as a group) are unhappily no more than very rapid jottings, often illegible." But, fortunately, neither the *Istari* essay nor the *Last Writings* contain the only sources of information about all five wizards from Valinor, as there are the brief references on the history of the Istari, concentrating primarily upon Gandalf and/or Saruman, in *The Lord of the Rings*, within the narrative as well as in the Appendices.

One account of the deeds of the Blue Wizards states that they disappeared into the East, corrupted by the forces of Sauron at worst, or perhaps forgotten and/or forgetful of their original purpose. In *Unfinished Tales* they are briefly described as follows:

Of the Blue little was known in the West, and they had no names save Ithryn Luin 'the Blue Wizards'; for they passed into the East with Curunír, but they never returned, and whether they remained in the East, pursuing there the purposes for which they were sent; or perished; or as some hold were ensnared by Sauron and became his servants, is not now known.⁹

In his much-cited letter "211 To Rhona Beare," dated 14 October 1958, Tolkien further follows that same line of thought:

I think they went as emissaries to distant regions, East and South, far out of Númenórean range: missionaries to 'enemy-occupied' lands, as it were. What success they had I do not know; but I fear that they failed, as Saruman did, though doubtless in different ways; and I suspect they were founders or beginners of secret cults and 'magic' traditions that outlasted the fall of Sauron.¹⁰

Therein is contained, in a few words, a mother lode of speculative information which might stir the heart of any creative writer of Tolkien fanfiction. Other theories include the concept that they could have lived outside of the sight and mind of those whose struggles are best known in Tolkien's works, working against the forces of evil and restraining those darker elements still under the influence of Sauron and, therefore, change the course of the struggle for Middle-earth: "They must have had very great influence on the history of the Second Age and Third Age in weakening and disarraying the forces of East."¹¹

One might choose to accept the later, more powerful and positive account of the role of the two Blue Wizards developed in the *Last Writings*. It certainly is an appealing commentary upon their work and its influence. Rather than simply disappearing from view, falling under Sauron's control, and/or failing in their tasks, they might have imposed significant limitations upon the power of Sauron. Within that scenario, they had come to Middle-earth earlier and alone, in the Second Age, sent as the others would be later at the command of the Valar to assist the free peoples of Middle-earth in the dark times after Sauron had forged the One Ring.¹²

They are said to have journeyed far into the East, known there under the names of Morinehtar and Rómestámo of Quenya origin, interpreted respectively as Darkness-slayer and East-helper.¹³ They labored out of sight of the majority of the political forces and alliances of Elves, Men, and Dwarves in the more western and northern areas of Middle-earth. Their charge was to obstruct Sauron's machinations in the East. It is said that their true strategic role was to thwart Sauron's influences upon the tribes of Men settled there, assisting a minority that had rebelled from Melkor-worship. Ensuring that the forces allied with Sauron never actually presented a monolith in the east, the Blue Wizards in those circumstances could have provided a shift in the balance of power which facilitated the ultimate success of the peoples of the West over Sauron and his lackeys in the War of the Ring.¹⁴

Works Cited

1. *Unfinished Tales. The Istari.*
2. *Unfinished Tales. The Istari.*
3. *The Silmarillion. Valaquenta, "Of the Maiar."*
4. *Unfinished Tales. The Istari.*
5. *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring. "Many Meetings."*
6. *Unfinished Tales. "Index."*
7. *Unfinished Tales. The Istari.*
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien. "Letter 211 To Rhona Beare."*
11. *The History of Middle-earth, Volume XII: The Peoples of Middle-earth. Last Writings.*
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.

About the Author

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