
Character Biography Tar-Meneldur

By Oshun

Tar-Meneldur, the fifth king of Númenor, was born of the House or Line of Elros (a direct descendant of the brother of Elrond and first king of Númenor).¹ He was the third child and only son of King Tar-Elendil and received the given name of *Írimon*.² During that period of Númenórean history, the line of descent of the kings of Númenor passed through the eldest male heir. So the elder daughters of Tar-Elendil, Silmariën and Isilmë (who become significant in the later history of Númenor in their own right), were not eligible to inherit the throne.

In anticipation of a long reign on the part of his father, the young heir Írimon had ample time and resources to pursue other interests.

Meneldur was a man of gentle mood, without pride, whose exercise was rather in thought than in deeds of the body. He loved dearly the land of Númenor and all things in it, but he gave no heed to the Sea that lay all about it; for his mind looked further than Middle-earth: he was enamoured of the stars and the heavens.³

He was to become well-known for his interest in astronomy, and it was from that abiding fascination that he acquired the name *Elentirmo*, which means "Watcher of the Stars."⁴ At some point in his young adulthood, Írimon withdrew to the mountains at the far north of the island where he was able to study the heavens.

The Forostar was the least fertile part; stony, with few trees, save that on the westward slopes of the high heather-covered moors there were woods of fir and larch. Towards the North Cape the land rose to rocky heights, and there great Sorontil rose sheer from the sea in tremendous cliffs. Here was the abode of many eagles; and in this region Tar-Meneldur Elentirmo built a tall tower, from which he could observe the motions of the stars.⁵

He took for himself the name Meneldur, a Quenya name like all of his others, which meant "Heaven-servant."⁶

It is interesting to note that this great love for star-gazing by this gentle and modest king-to-be was at the very least somewhat out of sync with the direction in which the realm was moving. This is the period of the beginning of the great Númenórean Age of Sail. At the same time that Írimon was lamenting the fact that he would have to eventually relinquish his study of celestial objects to attend to the business of governance, his compatriots were looking to the sea and Middle-earth to satisfy their curiosity about their world.

There is, among ancient mariners of our primary world, a close and necessary connection between the study of the movements of the stars and sailing, especially when sailors move beyond journeys from port to port along a coastline and begin long journeys upon the open sea. These ancient seafarers developed systems of celestial navigation, reference points for north or

south, and "evidence suggests that ancient seafarers utilized guide stars and 'star paths' (a Polynesian practice) to point them in the direction of their navigation."⁷

Tolkien mentions no such motivation spurring Írimon/Meneldur's great interest in the heavens, nor does he anywhere imply that the royal stargazer's desires extend beyond an abstract acquisition of knowledge to cross over into potential usefulness during the increasingly outward-looking period into which he was born. It is most frustrating that we are not told what exactly fascinated Meneldur. Did he approach his astronomical studies as a mystic/poet or a scientist? Or perhaps a little of both? We do not know what he discovered or how he interpreted it. One might assume, rightly or wrongly, that Tolkien did not develop these themes in his legendarium related to the golden age of Númenor because of the unresolved status of the cosmology of his created world at the time of the composition of this narrative (i.e., the Round World vs. Flat World concept of the physical reality of Arda).⁸ Tolkien does, however, include in the tale of *Aldarion and Erendis* tantalizing hints that they do live in a round world. For example,

Thus it came to pass that on a morning of fair sun and white wind, in the bright spring of the seven hundred and twenty-fifth year of the Second Age, the son of the King's Heir of Númenor sailed from the land; and ere day was over **he saw it sink shimmering into the sea, and last of all the peak of the Meneltarma** as a dark finger against the sunset.⁹ [Emphasis added.]

And further down that same page one finds another instance.

There was joy in Rómenna and Armenelos when men saw the great ship Númerrámar (which signifies 'West-wings') **coming up from the sea**, her golden sails reddened in the sunset.¹⁰ [Emphasis added.]

This sinking into or rising out of the sea is what one perceives when watching a ship on the horizon or a landmark on a coastline in a round world. In flat world, the watcher would only see the object of their attention grow smaller or larger. The text does not lead one to believe that Meneldur was studying the skies to enhance the science of navigation, quite the contrary.

He loved dearly the land of Númenor and all things in it, but he gave no heed to the Sea that lay all about it; for his mind looked further than Middle-earth: he was enamoured of the stars and the heavens. All that he could gather of the lore of the Eldar and Edain concerning Ea and the deeps that lay about the Kingdom of Arda he studied, and his chief delight was in the watching of the stars . . . where the airs were clearest, from which by night he would survey the heavens and observe all the movements of the light of the firmament.¹¹

Nonetheless, Meneldur could not have been unaware of the rapid and dramatic changes occurring in the world into which he had been born. Númenórean seafarers continued to venture farther and farther. Their ships became more seaworthy and capable of longer voyages. A wanderlust that left Meneldur untouched drove their technological development. (The Valar's second attempt to isolate and protect a favored group was no more successful than their first in bringing the Eldar to Aman where they would be "safe." It appears to be part of the yearning shared by Elves and Men to try to shape their own destiny, which pushes them to strain against the bounds of the gilded cages the Valar build for them.)

When six hundred years had passed from the beginning of the Second Age Vëantur, Captain of the King's Ships under Tar-Elendil, first achieved the voyage to Middle-earth. He brought his ship Entulesse (which signifies 'Return') into Mithlond on the spring winds blowing from the west; and he returned in the autumn of the following year. Thereafter seafaring became the chief enterprise for daring and hardihood among the men of Númenor. . . .¹²

Meanwhile, Meneldur's choice of spouse will be a matter of great significance in the development of Númenor because of the influence of his father-in-law upon his son and heir. He marries Almarian--the daughter of that very same Vëantur mentioned in the citation directly above--first among navigators and explorers in Númenor and the driving force behind the politics, technology, and industry surrounding Númenórean seafaring.

Almarian bore Meneldur three children: his heir Anardil (who would later ascend to the throne as Tar-Aldarion) and two younger daughters Ailinel and Almiel.¹³ Now, Almarian is said to be a "beauty," but of further relevance to the future of Númenor and to Meneldur himself, she brings with her, in the form of her father, a powerful mentor for their son. Vëantur will instill within Aldarion an unshakeable passion for the sea: "[T]hough she herself loved ships and the sea no more than most women of the land, her son followed after Vëantur her father."¹⁴

Strangely enough, Meneldur, the dreamy stargazer and would-be scholar, has produced a son who will become known as one of the most relentless voyagers and navigators to sail out of Númenor. Aldarion will continue to further develop and renew the connections made by his maternal grandfather--diplomatic, strategic, and otherwise--between the island of Númenor and Middle-earth. Through the inspiration and tutelage which Aldarion received from Vëantur, the people of Númenor are able to renew their friendship with Círdan and Gil-galad and build mutual alliances, which will serve them in the future.

One assumes that the three children of Meneldur and Almarian were born in the far north in that period when the heir to the throne was still his own man, i.e., studying the night sky and making notes on his observations. But, as one will read later, in his dealings with his son and his thoughts upon the task and responsibilities of the king of Númenor, Meneldur always put duty before personal preference.

When Meneldur received the Sceptre he removed, as he must, from the Forostar, and dwelt in the great house of the Kings in Armenelos. He proved a good and wise king, though he never ceased to yearn for days in which he might enrich his knowledge of the heavens.¹⁵

Meneldur obeys the conventions he had been taught demarcating the limits within which a good ruler should exist. He marries a beautiful, appropriate woman and together they produce two lovely daughters, and, most importantly by their standards, the son and heir that is expected of them. Meneldur does allow his son, albeit somewhat reluctantly, to learn of the sea and sailing from his grandfather and, not without misgiving, allows him to make his first voyage to Middle-earth as a young man with Vëantur. When his son returns, Meneldur is aware that he is definitely infected by sea-fever.

For Aldarion had become enamoured of the Great Sea, and of a ship riding there alone without sight of land, borne by the winds with foam at its throat to coasts and havens unguessed; and that love and desire never left him until his life's end.¹⁶

It must have seemed paradoxical to Meneldur at times that he had given up his studies of the stars to serve what he saw as the greater good of his country and yet raised a son who refused to do the same when it came to his abiding passion for seafaring and the sea.

Meneldur features largely in the tale of *Aldarion and Erendis*, which Tolkien describes in a letter to be the "the story of Aldarion and his tragic relations with his father and his wife."¹⁷ These so-called 'tragic relations' concern a decades-long struggle between Meneldur and his son over Aldarion's perceived lack of interest in his father's concerns—the welfare of Númenor and its governance—and his obsession with exploring and the sea. Meneldur's disapproval of Aldarion's constant and frequently years-long absences on voyages to Middle-earth leads to an often rancorous relationship between the king and his heir. Simultaneously, Aldarion falls in and out of love with Erendis, who shares Meneldur's disgruntlement with his obsessive focus upon shipbuilding, the sea, and Middle-earth. The woman who will eventually marry Aldarion loathes the sea as much as he loves it. If it were not complicated enough, Meneldur's daughter-in-law-to-be antagonizes his son with near identical complaints to his own. Meneldur wants to see Aldarion safely married and producing children—the clichéd heir and a spare at the very least. Aldarion often views his wife and his father as unified in their disapproval of him and determination to keep him land-bound.

Finally, after arguably the longest and rockiest road to a wedding in all of Tolkien's tales, Aldarion marries Erendis. Their respite (and the readers') of marital bliss is frustratingly short. Erendis presents Aldarion with a girl-child, and unconscionably, by the Númenóreans' Elvish child-rearing practices, a few short years later he takes to sea again.

It is stated that the Númenóreans, like the Eldar, avoided the begetting of children if they foresaw any separation likely between husband and wife between the conception of the child and at least its very early years. Aldarion stayed in his house for a very brief time after the birth of his daughter, according to the Númenóreans' idea of the fitness of things.¹⁸

During his absence, far longer than he had promised, Erendis withdraws to the central part of the island, as far from the sea as one could be on that star-shaped island, to the bucolic fields of Emerië.

. . . her love of Aldarion was wounded to the quick. She hated the Sea; and now even trees, that once she had loved, she desired to look upon no more, for they recalled to her the masts of great ships. Therefore ere long she left Armenelos, and went to Emerië in the midst of the Isle, where ever, far and near, the bleating of sheep was borne upon the wind. 'Sweeter it is to my ears than the mewing of gulls,' she said, as she stood at the doors of her white house, the gift of the King; and that was upon a downside, facing west, with great lawns all about that merged without wall or hedge into the pastures. Thither she took Ancalimë, and they were all the company that either had.¹⁹

When Aldarion returns, he bears with him an urgent letter from the High King Gil-galad, addressed to his father the king. His father greets him with the admonition to attend to his own house, asserting that he has neglected his personal life and it needs serious and immediate attention. Aldarion rides to Emerië, where he finds that he is no longer welcomed by Erendis. This last voyage and his delayed return have finally tested Erendis beyond what she is able to bear. They are never to live together again.

Angry and thwarted, Aldarion travels back to the court to harangue his father for supposedly supporting Erendis against him once again. He expects to receive the usual tongue-lashing from his father but encounters instead an unexpectedly altered attitude. In his absence, Tar-Meneldur has read and carefully considered the letter from Gil-galad, telling of Aldarion's usefulness to him and asking the king to give military aid and succor to the beleaguered peoples of Middle-earth. The language of the letter itself explains Gil-galad's respect for Aldarion and the situation in Middle-earth better than any summary:

Ereinion Gil-galad son of Fingon to Tar-Meneldur of the line of Eärendil, greeting: the Valar keep you and may no shadow fall upon the Isle of Kings.

Long I have owed you thanks, for you have so many times sent to me your son Anardil Aldarion: the greatest Elf-friend that now is among Men, as I deem. At this time I ask your pardon, if I have detained him overlong in my service; for I had great need of the knowledge of Men and their tongues which he alone possesses. He has dared many perils to bring me counsel. Of my need he will speak to you; yet he does not guess how great it is, being young and full of hope. Therefore I write this for the eyes of the King of Númenórë only.

A new shadow arises in the East. It is no tyranny of evil Men, as your son believes; but a servant of Morgoth is stirring, and evil things wake again. Each year it gains in strength, for most Men are ripe to its purpose. Not far off is th

e day, I judge, when it will become too great for the Eldar unaided to withstand. Therefore, whenever I behold a tall ship of the Kings of Men, my heart is eased. And now I make bold to seek your help. If you have any strength of Men to spare, lend it to me, I beg.²⁰

As Meneldur reads on, the letter explains how much Aldarion has done in Middle-earth, how great is the remaining need, and makes it clear that war may be the only possible response to their situation while begging the military support of the King of Númenor. Gil-galad ends with a warning to the king.

Behold! The darkness that is to

come is filled with hatred for us, but it hates you no less. The Great Sea will not be too wide for its wings, if it is suffered to come to full growth.²¹

For Tar-Meneldur, this is a moment of incandescent understanding. He has underestimated his son and understood almost nothing of how his time has been spent across the sea.

With his usual modesty and sincerity, Meneldur admits first to himself and then to Aldarion that he does not feel competent to make a decision and respond to Gil-galad's letter. He does not let Aldarion off the hook for not explaining better what has kept him so long in Middle-earth in the past, but he does recognize (or believe) that he himself is not suited to continue to rule. He explains to Aldarion:

"Nevertheless, the King, though he has now ruled the land of Númenor for one hundred and forty-two years, has no certainty that his understanding of the matter is sufficient for a just decision in matters of such high import and peril." He paused, and taking up a parchment written in his own hand he read from it in a clear voice:

Therefore: first for the honour of his well-beloved son; and second for the better direction of the realm in courses which his son more clearly understands, the King has resolved: that he will forthwith resign the Sceptre to his son, who shall now become Tar-Aldarion, the King.

"This," said Meneldur, "when it is proclaimed, will make known to all my thought concerning this present pass. It will raise you above scorn; and it will set free your powers so that other losses may seem more easy to endure. The letter of Gil-galad, when you are King, you shall answer as seems fit to the holder of the Sceptre."²²

Thus, in acknowledgement of his duty, honestly, and without bitterness or spite, Meneldur relinquishes his kingship to his son. Aldarion accepts the challenge of leadership from his father in the spirit in which it is given. He appears to have followed his father's example in the end: to be a good and diligent king, although not without at least a few more sometimes controversial returns to Middle-earth.

In a letter, Tolkien notes that the tale of *Aldarion and Erendis: The Mariner's Wife*

is supposed to have been preserved in the Downfall, when most of Númenórean lore was lost except that that dealt with the First Age, because it tells how Númenor became involved in the politics of Middle-earth.²³

This is a particularly noteworthy and poignant detail, because, without the preservation of this tale, the reader would know nothing about Tar-Meneldur aside perhaps from dates and names in an index or genealogical table. And his story is a worthy one, not simply a personal tragedy, but the story of a good man, who did the best he could in a transitional period under realistic and believable familial and governmental challenges. His tale is a rich addition to Tolkien's legendarium.

Works Cited

1. *Unfinished Tales*, "The Line of Elros: Kings of Númenor."
2. *Unfinished Tales*, *Aldarion and Erendis: The Mariner's Wife*, "The earlier generations of the Line of Elros."
3. *Unfinished Tales*, *Aldarion and Erendis: The Mariner's Wife*.
4. *Unfinished Tales*, *Aldarion and Erendis: The Mariner's Wife*, Note 1.
5. *Tales*, *Aldarion and Erendis: The Mariner's Wife*.
6. Ibid.
7. Davis, Danny Lee. *Navigation in the Ancient Eastern Mediterranean*. College Station, Texas: Office of Graduate Studies of Texas A&M University, 2001. Online.
8. For further information about Tolkien's evolving conceptions of his cosmology see: *Morgoth's Ring*, *Myths Transformed* and *The Peoples of Middle-earth, Last Writings*.
9. *Unfinished Tales*, *Aldarion and Erendis: The Mariner's Wife*.
10. Ibid.

-
11. Ibid.
 12. *Unfinished Tales*, "A Description of the Isle of Númenor."
 13. *Unfinished Tales, Aldarion and Erendis: The Mariner's Wife*.
 14. Ibid.
 15. *Unfinished Tales, Aldarion and Erendis: The Mariner's Wife*.
 16. Ibid.
 17. *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, "276 To Dick Plotz, 'Thain' of the Tolkien Society of America."
 18. *Unfinished Tales, Aldarion and Erendis: The Mariner's Wife*. Note 22.
 19. *Unfinished Tales, Aldarion and Erendis: The Mariner's Wife*.
 20. Ibid.
 21. Ibid.
 22. *Unfinished Tales, Aldarion and Erendis: The Mariner's Wife*.
 23. *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, "276 To Dick Plotz, 'Thain' of the Tolkien Society of America."

About the Author

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