
Character Biography

Nahar

By Oshun

The Vala Oromë, always in the company of his mighty steed Nahar, was the most reluctant among his brethren to leave the lands of Middle-earth and return to Aman. Along with Nahar, the Great Hunter¹ continued to ride those forests throughout the Years of the Trees.²

Nahar is the name of his horse, white in the sun, and shining silver at night. The Valaróma is the name of his great horn, the sound of which is like the upgoing of the Sun in scarlet, or the sheer lightning cleaving the clouds. Above all the horns of his host it was heard in the woods that Yavanna brought forth in Valinor; for there Oromë would train his folk and his beasts for the pursuit of the evil creatures of Melkor.³

The next reference to Nahar is in the first chapter of the *Quenta Silmarillion* itself. Oromë clearly loves his horse (or is that projection on my part here?—what's not to love about a great, beautiful, white horse, who delights in chasing evil creatures in the earliest tales of Middle-earth?) and animals love Oromë. The reader is presented with Oromë and Nahar as inseparable partners in their Middle-earth adventures throughout the Years of the Trees.

And Oromë tamer of beasts would ride too at whiles in the darkness of the unlit forests; as a mighty hunter he came with spear and bow, pursuing to the death the monsters and fell creatures of the kingdom of Melkor, and his white horse Nahar shone like silver in the shadows. Then the sleeping earth trembled at the beat of his golden hooves, and in the twilight of the world Oromë would sound the Valaróma his great horn upon the plains of Arda; whereat the mountains echoed, and the shadows of evil fled away, and Melkor himself quailed in Utumno, foreboding the wrath to come. But even as Oromë passed the servants of Melkor would gather again; and the lands were filled with shadows and deceit.⁴

One of the most charming mentions of Nahar is one that inserts a note of touching realism into a narrative thus far steeped in the mythic tone of the *Valaquenta* and moves the tale from the deeds of the Valar to the tales of the Elves as they are to be recounted in the *Quenta Silmarillion* and the other histories of Middle-earth. (One may say the story shifts from prehistory and backstory into the main events of *The Silmarillion*.) The Great Rider⁵ upon his trusty steed is to be found riding as usual through the dark and dusky starlit forest. It is the horse who first alerts his master to the Elves walking in starlight near the shores of Cuiviémen.

And on a time it chanced that Oromë rode eastward in his hunting, and he turned north by the shores of Helcar and passed under the shadows of the Orocarni, the Mountains of the East. Then on a sudden Nahar set up a great neighing, and stood still. And Oromë wondered and sat silent, and it seemed to him that in the quiet of the land under the stars he heard afar off many voices singing.⁶

He neighs in excitement and interest, not aggressively, but as though to say, "*Who are you? I know you are out there.*" And then he stops and waits in silence, listening until his master

becomes aware as well of those faraway voices singing. What a moment! It is Nahar who brings the authenticity and vividness to this scene. Tolkien uses the horse to move from a formulaic fairytale-like retelling of events from a distant make-believe world and instead draws the reader into the point of view of Oromë. A scene of a starlit shadowy forest comes alive, silent but for the predictable ambient sylvan sounds coupled with the scents of nature. Then the horse detects the presence of a previously unknown creature, one who not only speaks, but sings. Oromë guesses that this can only be the long-awaited Quendi or Firstborn of Eru. Based upon this description, one must adjudge that it is, in fact, Nahar, rather than Oromë, who first encounters the Elves.

Another interesting fact about this splendid horse is that his name in *The Silmarillion* is derived neither from Quenya nor from Sindarin, but from Valarin, the language of the Valar and Maiar. We are told in the article *Quendi and the Eldar* that "[f]ew of the Eldar ever learned to speak Valarin, even haltingly; among the people as a whole only a small number of words or names became widely known."⁷ That same article states that the name Nahar is derived of the form that is recorded by Rúmil as *Næxærra*.⁸ No one will hold it against you if you cannot pronounce that root word. Even among the Eldar, probably only Fëanor would have been willing to try: "[B]efore the growth of his discontent, [Fëanor] is said to have learned more of this tongue than any others before his time."⁹ I cannot resist quoting Tolkien on Valarin here (the citation is too beautiful to let pass): "For the tongues and voices of the Valar are great and stern, and yet also swift and subtle in movement, making sounds that we find hard to counterfeit; and their words are mostly long and rapid, like the glitter of swords. . ."¹⁰ In any case, Nahar is a form simplified and adapted for Eldarin ears and tongues.

To backtrack a little, Melkor had already been up to his soon-to-be-repeated tricks when Nahar and Oromë came upon the Children of Ilúvatar. The Dark Vala had spread rumors of and sent out evil dark riders from whom the Eldar must flee or meet the direst consequences: "Now Melkor greatly hated and feared the riding of Oromë, and either he sent indeed his dark servants as riders, or he set lying whispers abroad, for the purpose that the Quendi should shun Oromë, if ever they should meet." This meant that, when Oromë and Nahar rode first among the Eldar, the fearful Elves withdrew and hid themselves from them. But this avoidance of Oromë was not to last for long.

Thus it was that when Nahar neighed and Oromë indeed came among them, some of the Quendi hid themselves, and some fled and were lost. But those that had courage, and stayed, perceived swiftly that the Great Rider was no shape out of darkness; for the light of Aman was in his face, and all the noblest of the Elves were drawn towards it.¹¹

Oromë races back across the sea to inform his brethren of the awakening of the Quendi and the machinations of Melkor that place them under immediate threat. The Valar make terrible, destructive war against Melkor and his monsters in Middle-earth.¹² After defeating Melkor and binding him, the Valar then debate amongst themselves about what should be done with the Elves and cannot instantly come to an agreement. The majority of them "feared for the Quendi in the dangerous world amid the deceits of the starlit dusk; and they were filled moreover with the love of the beauty of the Elves and desired their fellowship."¹³ Eventually, they settle upon a plan to remove them from the dangers of Middle-earth.

When Oromë organizes the long march of the Elves over the mountains and across half a continent to bring them to the sea and carry them to the lands of the Valar, Nahar is an

important figure: "It is told that when the hosts of the Eldalië departed from Cuiviénen Oromë rode at their head upon Nahar, his white horse shod with gold; and passing northward about the Sea of Helcar they turned towards the west."¹⁴

The chapter "Of Thingol and Melian" tells of how Elu Thingol, the erstwhile leader of all of the Teleri, encounters Melian the Maia in the forest and falls under her enchantment, forgetting his people and staying with her, resulting in division within the ranks of the Teleri—including those who eventually leave to cross the sea in response to the summons of the Valar and those who stay in Middle-earth searching for their missing leader.¹⁵ When a large portion of them finally reunite with Thingol, they become known as the Sindar, "the Grey-elves of starlit Beleriand."¹⁶ One reads of a comparatively short-lived period of near-idyllic peace among the people of Thingol and Melian, during which time they secure and develop their kingdom. It is during that time frame that Oromë and Nahar are mentioned again.

In Beleriand still at times rode Oromë the great, passing like a wind over the mountains, and the sound of his horn came down the leagues of the starlight, and the Elves feared him for the splendour of his countenance and the great noise of the onrush of Nahar; but when the Valaróma echoed in the hills, they knew well that all evil things were fled far away.¹⁷

Meanwhile, in the land of the gods, where the departed Elves finally have settled into a world supposedly far from the grief or threats of Middle-earth, and where they should have been happy and well-cared for under the Light of the Two Trees of the Valar, strife once again appears. The Valar forgive and unleash a supposedly repentant Melkor (indeed, it staggers the imagination, but that's how the story goes) and he immediately begins to foment discord.¹⁸ The upshot is that unrest takes root from seeds planted perhaps by the Valar themselves, coupling their less-than-perfect understanding of the Eldar with their desire to both protect and control them. Melkor, however, is the malicious and skillful gardener of these flowers of discord.

The development of strife among the Noldor in Valinor and the Valar's inept handling of it is a long and important story and must be dramatically curtailed here. Melkor hooks up with Ungoliant, a massive light-eating spider, and together they kill the Two Trees, stealing all light from the world, as well as murdering Finwë King of the Noldor, the great Fëanor's father, in order to secure the greatest artifacts of the Noldor, the Silmarils, which contain within them what remains of that precious light. The Valar as a whole seem unable to prevent or mitigate this catastrophe, but it is Oromë and Nahar, with some early assistance from Tulkas, who eventually pursue Melkor into Middle-earth, where they lose the sinister Vala in the darkness.

Then the pursuit was begun; and the earth shook beneath the horses of the host of Oromë, and the fire that was stricken from the hooves of Nahar was the first light that returned to Valinor. But so soon as any came up with the Cloud of Ungoliant the riders of the Valar were blinded and dismayed, and they were scattered, and went they knew not whither; and the sound of the Valaróma faltered and failed.¹⁹

This is last direct intervention of Nahar into the stories of the peoples of Middle-earth we read of in the tales of *The Silmarillion*. One does encounter the occasional inconclusive discussion among Tolkien aficionados of the relationship of Nahar to the origins of the famous Noldorin horses, many of whose "sires came from Valinor, and they were given to Fingolfin by Maedhros in atonement of his losses, for they had been carried by ship to Losgar."²⁰ Further, and perhaps related, is the apocryphal references online to unspecified citations showing that it is written

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somewhere in Tolkien's work that the Mearas are descendants of Nahar. I did not find such a reference anywhere. (If anyone else does know of such a citation, please comment and provide it.) It definitely says in the Indices to *The Lord of the Rings* that the Rohirrim believed that the horses of their noble line, the Mearas, were descendants of Amanyaran horses brought by Oromë to Middle-earth.

These were the mearas, who would bear no one but the King of the Mark or his sons, until the time of Shadowfax. Men said of them that Béma (whom the Eldar call Oromë) must have brought their sire from West over Sea.²¹

In conclusion, what can be more fitting to end the biography of a historic and valiant horse in the history of Middle-earth than a beautiful piece of prose wherein he is mentioned if not by name, then by obvious reference.

Fey he [Theoden] seemed, or the battle-fury of his fathers ran like new fire in his veins, and he was borne up on Snowmane like a god of old, *even as Oromë the Great in the battle of the Valar when the world was young. His golden shield was uncovered, and lo! it shone like an image of the Sun, and the grass flamed into green about the white feet of his steed.* For morning came, morning and a wind from the sea; and darkness was removed, and the hosts of Mordor wailed, and terror took them, and they fled, and died, and the hoofs of wrath rode over them.²²

Works Cited

1. *The Silmarillion*, "Index of Names."
2. *The Silmarillion*, *Valaquenta*.
3. Ibid.
4. *The Silmarillion*, "Of the Beginning of Days."
5. The Great Rider is one of the names given to Oromë in *The Silmarillion*, "Of the Coming of the Elves and the Captivity of Melkor."
6. *The Silmarillion*, "Of The Coming of the Elves and the Captivity of Melkor."
7. *The War of the Jewels, Quendi and Eldar*, "Note on the 'Language of the Valar'."
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. *The Silmarillion*, "The Coming of the Elves and the Captivity of Melkor."
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
15. *The Silmarillion*, "Of Thingol and Melian."
16. *The Silmarillion*, "Of the Sindar."
17. Ibid.
18. *The Silmarillion*, "Of Fëanor and the Unchaining of Melkor."
19. *The Silmarillion*, "Of the Darkening of Valinor."
20. *The Silmarillion*, "Of Beleriand and its Realms."

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21. *The Lord of the Rings, The Return of the King*, Appendix A, "The House of Eorl."
 22. *The Lord of the Rings, The Return of the King*, "The Ride of the Rohirrim." [Emphasis added to highlight the allusion to Oromë astride Nahar.]
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About the Author

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