
Power and Choice in the Second Age: A Political Primer

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I. Introduction

Fantasy fiction is often conceived to aid escapism in a world as complex and threatening as ours. It is also an important tool for reflecting on and critiquing our political and societal norms and deficits, serving as a helpful lens to understand politics, power, choice, order, and justice. However, the breadth of political scholarship regarding Professor Tolkien's literary creations, particularly *The Silmarillion* and extended works, is, in my view, still too narrow. In the Second Age of Middle-earth, we have been given a world rife with geopolitical tensions—wars, sieges, territorial struggles, ethnic groups, internal clan struggles, royal successions, great power politics, inter-ethnic trade, colonialism, and corruption. By understanding the events of this time in Middle-earth, we may find one possible way to reimagine and navigate our own troubled times.

This paper is driven by a primary question, that being: what defines politics during the Second Age? Generally, politics is a social process of competition and cooperation resulting in decisions made for and upon a group that are binding upon that group. More than that, when broken down, politics can be defined as how power is accumulated, legitimised, and exercised, as well as who gets to make common decisions for whom, and how these decisions are reached and carried out—what qualitative and quantitative factors move people, what convinces or coerces

them, to make the political choices that they do. The subtitle of this paper, "power and choice", is a reference to the popular student text *Power & Choice: An Introduction to Political Science* by W. Phillips Shiveley, which is useful as a conceptual framework to analyse the structures and factors of political activity. To create a political primer looking primarily through the lenses of power and choice, means looking at two things: first, how the power aspect of politics determines how people in a society and system are managed. Second, looking at the element of choice determines what decisions and possibilities lie within a society and system, and how their needs are met.

At first glance, the First Age might seem to be the obvious focus for this kind of primer. In terms of events after the Sundering of the Elves, the political landscape of Aman and the evolution of the intra-group politics of the Noldor, particularly after the Exile, is certainly fascinating. There arise multiple Elven kingdoms which provides clear evidence of a multistate bipolar order of the Noldor—and indeed, though not official allies, the Sindar—pitted against Angband, and deep tensions in terms of alliances due to kin-strife and oaths. However, the Second Age is a period that lends itself to political analysis for different but equally interesting reasons, and more applicable to our present zeitgeist because it deals with the uncertainty of power shifts. This Age engages with a newly emergent world order predicated on the fallout of the last one—comparable, in some ways, to the Concert of Europe engendered following the Napoleonic wars, or the Bretton-Woods order established after the Second World War. Several societies are in stages of power transition during the early Second Age—the defeated Angband leaving a power vacuum in the established international order; the Edain given Númenor following the victory of the Host of the Valar; the rise of new belligerents in the shape of resurgent Sauron and the eventual rise of Mordor; and the slow decline (or long defeat) of existing powers such as the elves in Lindon, amid their efforts to integrate and establish in the new order of the world.

Therefore, this primer is intended to describe and evaluate the broad themes of the domestic and international political landscape of early Second Age in Middle-earth, examined through a framework of power and choice. It highlights the role of both structural and sociocultural aspects in how policy is decided and carried out both domestically and internationally, placing a special focus upon Númenor in acknowledgement of its active role as a rising power. Also examined are fellow rising power Mordor, lesser or waning powers such as the Elven kingdoms, and unconventional actors like the Ainur. Superimposing modern international relations theories often applied to contemporary events upon this specific period in Middle-earth, I analyse and explain the key elements of power and choice that drove the events of the Second Age until the war of the Elves and Sauron, a primary flashpoint demonstrating how the post-War of Wrath dynamics of power and choice ultimately manifested in major regional events. To do this, the paper will also address diverse themes of great power politics, foreign policy, technology and weaponry, ideology, and alliance systems. This analysis is not an exercise in the creation of new theories to explain the observed paradigms. Its purpose rests in the evaluation of the politics in the Second Age texts, and the application of real-world theories to do so where necessary. It is my hope that this paper will generate greater discussion on the in-world international relations of Middle-earth, and that the large swathes of content in the *Legendarium* that are beyond the scope of this paper to discuss will also find themselves refracted through the lenses of international relations and political science.

II. Methodology

I have herein attempted a fusion of literary and political analysis, finding the places where Tolkien's fictional characters and their narratives engage in political thought and actions,

especially internationally. To serve as an effective primer, it makes short but qualitative assessments of quotes from key texts in order to determine elements of power and choice in case studies in [Section IV](#). It also aims to apply that to a scale of cause and effect in determining how politics evolves as time goes forward. These qualitative assessments were made by seeking out quotes in the texts that touch on factors sometimes enumerated by Tolkien—for example, identifying the martial capacity of Númenor—and that are sometimes hung upon an existing framework of analysis, such as the use of Weber's sources of legitimacy in analysing fealty to leaders, or in categorising the status and quality of 'power' according to prevailing theories of international relations, including the prevalent power balance (hegemonic, multipolar, or something else).

The main sources cited herein, and the bulk of the content examined, comes from the Appendices of *The Lord of the Rings*, *The Silmarillion*, and *The Unfinished Tales of Númenor and Middle-earth*, which are quoted by chapter and subheadings. Some mention is made to *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*. My approach to canon derives from a soft curatorial approach. Using *The Lord of the Rings* as the primary canon 'anchor', given its publication in Tolkien's lifetime, I have then qualitatively chosen whether or not to assess contradictions among the other texts, like the *Letters* and or *The Unfinished Tales*. The key political circumstances are not significantly affected by textual discrepancies, and thus this method suits the purpose of this paper which is not an exercise concerned with charting textual evolution also.

This paper focuses only on the events from S.A. 1 to around S.A. 1693, when the War of the Elves and Sauron commenced, as these years are integral to establishing a political order for the epoch. [Section III](#) provides a background to the previous power balance during the First Age and the major shifts implied by its collapse following the defeat of Morgoth. [Section IV](#) analyses endogenous and exogenous factors relating to domestic circumstances in distinct actors Númenor and Mordor in detail, as the two major 'bloc' leaders in the Second Age's multi-state bipolar order, receive individual sections. The Elves and the Ainur are treated as units, primarily because of an unfortunate dearth of information on them during the Second Age, but also as a reflection of the shift in an Elven-dominated political, cultural, and economic order. [Section V](#) depicts the confluence of these factors in the international arena, particularly Númenor's involvement in it. It also places significant focus on the letter from Gil-galad to Meneldur presented in *The Unfinished Tales* as an important in-world culmination of the power balance that, in S.A. 1693, allowed the War of the Elves and Sauron to both erupt, evolve, and end as it did.

The texts were examined for specific indicators of power and choice. Power hinges on examples of leadership (including domestic policies and legitimacy), as well as empirical factors such as technological capacity, geography, and trade; and external acts of power such as forming or breaking alliances and implementing imperialist policies. In terms of choice, the indicators are necessarily more sociological in nature, including the use, abuse, presence, or absence of religion and/or any other central ideology; the presence of promises such as the aforementioned alliance systems or the fallout of oath-swearing; ethnocultural diversity; the rather murky territory of cultural zeitgeist; and the use of power to inspire, cajole, or coerce individuals or groups to take action, such as remove themselves from an area, or surrender a weapon, or have internal strife such as civil unrest. They ultimately rest upon key principles of justice and efficacy in terms of fulfilling needs.

Regardless of the system, power always falls into the hands of the elites, whether they are political, intellectual, military, or academic, and the same is true in Tolkien. This influences why

and how choices are made and for whom. It also means that we are only ever privy to the political landscape of Middle-earth through these elites and the points at which their narratives intersect with the broader political sphere. Many groups thus fall through the cracks or have their own political environment viewed solely through the lenses and priorities of an elite, such as the men of the Enedwaith through the Númenóreans, or the Silvan elves of Greenwood the Great through the Sindarin colonisation. This paper must assume a focus on political elites as the main dispensers of power and its indicators, but will make reference to these other groups where possible.

Throughout the discussion I will also on occasion reference some dominant contemporary theories of international relations, primarily neorealism and constructivism with some reference to liberal institutionalism, as useful lenses to understand some of the behaviours discussed.

III. A Post-Melkor World

In order to address power and choice on domestic and international levels, the broader geopolitical landscape of Middle-earth as it transitioned from First Age to Second necessitates outlining, for the existing power structures and sociocultural fault lines—usually the prime drivers of elements of 'choice'—were not drowned along with Beleriand.

The Ages of Middle-earth can be said to arise out of paradigm shifts, or roughly when the ordering of the world and the thinking of people in it changes. Though in our world this is largely precipitated by technological or economic change—such as the detonation of the atomic bombs at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, or the development of the Bretton-Woods system—in Middle-earth, this shift usually entails a devastating event that culminates in the defeat of a great evil, engendering a new balance of power and a changed purpose, outlook, or way of living and/or being for the inhabitants. For the Second Age, this arose out of the massive paradigm shift created by the conclusion of the War of Wrath.

For one thing, a sunken Beleriand entailed migration out of the drowned continent and firmer establishment of settlements of the new western coast of Middle-earth as well as penetration into the interior, particularly Eriador, and further eastward expansion by certain groups such as the Sindar. These population shifts were driven as much by attempts at establishment and accumulation of power (the motives for which will be examined in some detail below), as by the deepening of existing social cleavages, such as lingering discomfort between the Sindar and remaining Noldor in light of earlier enmity largely derived from the kinslayings. New social cleavages would also come to arise, particularly in Númenor and particularly in terms of friendship with the Elves, reverence towards the Valar, and affinity towards the Shadow. These factors of choice are often heavily predicated on culture, beliefs, and what is perceived as just or deserving by each distinct group—meeting its needs and ensuring its strength—and which play into how power is attained and exercised (for example, why the Faithful lose influence in Númenor in the years following the War of the Elves and Sauron, and what power is leveraged against them).

For another thing, the end of the First Age created a power vacuum and created room for the fracturing of existing power structures, following the casting out of Morgoth, the departure of the Host of Valinor, and the creation of Númenor. Indeed, the First Age can be considered to have existed in a multi-state case of bipolarity—on one side, Morgoth and Angband; on the other, the Noldor, the Sindar—who despite lack of active involvement against Morgoth until late in the Age cannot be considered to be nonaligned, given their resentment towards the forces of

darkness—and the Houses of the Edain. Within these groups, it can be posited that there were principles of military and cultural hegemony from the Noldor that carried over in the Second Age. However, these were also in many ways challenged, particularly because of the new power that is Númenor. At this stage, what is important to understand is that Middle-earth is most often prone to multi-state bipolarity, though the main norm setter can vary. In the First Age, it was arguably the Noldor, chiefly the Fëanorians and their host; in the Second Age, as this paper will argue, it is Númenor.

IV. The Network of Actors

i. Númenor

Númenor, though not yet at the zenith of its power, can already be described as on the road to becoming a great power in the international sphere, with both maritime trade and military capacity, as well as strong soft power engendered by the legacy of their contributions during the War of Wrath as per the section "The Númenórean Kings" in Appendix A (Tolkien, 1954), as well as enduring diplomatic relations with the Elves, though as will be seen, this varies in depth of involvement and cordiality in accordance with differing policies of its rulers.

Choices in politics often fall into their justice and their effectiveness, or equally normative and positive. In Númenor, and indeed in Middle-earth, choices are made as much on an authoritative basis as on a 'market based', or empirical manner, equally an exercise of power and a meeting of needs. Regarding the former concept—justice—Númenor has some keen perceptions, in particular as regards the right of kings and the line of Elros. In terms of domestic leadership and legitimacy, it is the monarchy, and those in close relationship to it, that is the single most important actor in determining the decisions taken and power exercised upon Númenor and Middle-earth during the Second Age. They have immense power, regardless of the existence of a Council, and their ability to wield it comes down to legitimacy. Númenor's first king Elros elected to receive the Gift of Men, or death, and his father Eärendil was descended from all three houses of Men, which bestowed upon Elros a right to lead the Dúnedain in their migration westward to the island and then to govern them. In later generations this legitimacy passed to descent from the Line of Elros. What this indicates is the immense focus placed upon traditional authority, as defined by Weber's principles, where descent, especially among Men, serves as a legitimate and robust support for authority in most cases. This is further evidenced in the quote that "[Tar-Elendil, the fourth king]'s elder child was a daughter, Silmarien. Her son was Valandil, first of the lords of Andúnië ... renowned for their friendship with the Eldar. From him were descended Amandil, the last lord, and his son Elendil the Tall" (in "Appendix A: I. The Númenórean Kings", Tolkien, 1954), which emphasises the traditional legitimacy with which, millenia later, Elendil will count among one of his supports in his leadership of the Dúnedain in Middle-earth. It also emphasises another subtler area of importance—the relationship of legitimacy towards the legacy of the Eldar. Legitimacy is tied to the Line of Elros, but is made most robust when linked back to his own dual heritage and the origins of Númenor's society as one germinated in deep friendship with the Eldar and an understanding of their sociocultural paradigm, including their relationship with the Powers. This will prove important in the divide in Númenórean society that follows the War of the Elves and Sauron.

It is also important to note this early period, the succession law. This paper does not enumerate particularities of the succession law, in terms of Ancalimë—or, later, Míriel—especially in light of the contradictions highlighted in *The Unfinished Tales* in the section "The Further Course of the Narrative", particularly between the Appendices in *The Lord of the Rings* and the law as it is

in *The Unfinished Tales*. However, it is necessary and important at this stage to note the change in the law from the 'Old Law'—agnatic primogeniture—to the 'New Law'—absolute primogeniture. It is significant as this law provides additional legal-rational basis for the authority of Númenor's reigning monarch. The law is passed with some advice from the Council, which is noted to be a decision making body in the state with power vested in them by the king, and while we cannot know a breakdown of the individual interests in passing the law and creating provisions for it, know that they, along with Tar-Aldarion who initiated the change, make room for instances in which the heir, if female, could or would be made to step down. In the same section of notes in *The Unfinished Tales* detailing this change in law, it is also noted Tar-Aldarion's additional provisions included that the King's Heir should only wed within the Line of Elros, forfeiting the Heirship otherwise—which is "said" to have risen from his "disastrous" marriage to Erendis, in which "he believed ... lay the root of all their troubles" (Tolkien, 1980). This is significant to note in light of later events in the reigns of the Kings of Númenor, particularly as regards Ar-Pharazôn's coup and marriage to Míriel. Thus, Tar-Aldarion's personal decision engages power and choice that affects large groups of people well through to the end of the Age.

Beyond leadership and legitimacy, Númenor's resources are instrumental to questions of power and choice, and their actions both at home and in the international arena. What Númenor has, and where, impacts choice in a highly materialistic, neorealist manner, as it is important in determining a state's needs and who they are taken for and why, and the use or misuse of them is dependent on and can fuel power. Being an island, Númenor's resources are especially finite. Rómenna, the greatest port, is connected to Armenelos the royal city and imports stone from the north and wood from the west (in "I. A Description of the Island of Númenor", Tolkien, 1980). Its importing of goods and being a point of departure for Middle-earth, implies a dearth of these resources in the area closest to the elites but also the capacity and will to solve this. Tar-Meneldur stated, "What need have we of more silver and gold, unless to use in pride where other things would serve as well? The need of the King's house is for a man who knows and loves this land and people, which he will rule" (in "Aldarion and Erendis: The Mariner's Wife", Tolkien, 1980). While Tar-Meneldur's policies are influenced by his distaste for material wealth, he is not his son. It may well be a contributing factor to the policy of leaders like Aldarion to desire wealth in the material in order to ensure security and growth. It could easily be perceived as offensive neorealism, accruing power to withstand an otherwise anarchic international order.

In a similar vein, we know that while the Edain brought the knowledge of crafts and craftsmen brought to them by the Eldar, they could not bring much, and for a long time most metals were precious metals, which they loved, and jewels were rare, coming as gifts from the Eldar of Eressëa in the days of friendship, but only until "the power of the Kings was spread to the coasts of the East" (in "I. A Description of the Island of Númenor", Tolkien, 1980). Indeed, this scarcity of material wealth that they coveted "for their beauty" and which they loved "first aroused in them cupidity, in later days when they fell under the Shadow and became proud and unjust in their dealings with lesser folk of Middle-earth" (in "I. A Description of the Island of Númenor", Tolkien, 1980). Save for the West, they were resource-scarce for the material items, which they coveted, and held to be precious; this can be traced to what arouses violence against those who do have it in later days. Combined with Númenor's martial and maritime capacity, and the deeper covetousness that came upon them after the War of the Elves and Sauron, this allowed them to profit from imperialism undertaken in the Eredwaith.

This is also a potential contributing factor to the Númenórean propensity to desire wealth in the material, whether that be in beautiful things or span of years granted a material body, as well as their related search to expand and gain new resources in other lands. As is said of Aldarion, he was not hounded by the joy of sailing or adventure, but a heated dream as "... a man long-sighted, and he looked forward to days when people would need more room and greater wealth ... he dreamed of the glory of Númenor and the power of its kings, and he sought for footholds whence they could step to wider dominion. So it was that ere long he turned again from forestry"—his attempt at making the resources on foreign shores sustainable—"to the building of ships" (in "Aldarion and Erendis: The Mariner's Wife", Tolkien, 1980).

Finally, Númenor's martial and trade capacity must be mentioned, due to its genesis in this period and its importance during the War of the Elves and Sauron and, indeed, the Akallabêth. In Númenor's earlier days, as Meneldur said, "Here we were to put away hatred and war" (in "Aldarion and Erendis: The Mariner's Wife", Tolkien, 1980). It is known that weapons like swords were manufactured, but they were rather kept and given as heirlooms, and "for long years few indeed were the weapons of warlike intent that were made in the land" (in "I. A Description of the Island of Númenor", Tolkien, 1980). We also know they took pleasure in hunting and games of skill with a bow, and that this transmuted to a skill in ranged combat. When Númenor would eventually be involved in wars, "it was the bows of the Númenóreans that were most greatly feared," their assault being described as "a great cloud, as a rain turned to serpents, or a black hail tipped with steel ... great cohorts of the King's Archers" who used bows of "hollow steel, with black-feathered arrows" (in "I. A Description of the Island of Númenor", Tolkien, 1980). Thus, even if the martial socialising and forging of war bows was not yet achieved, the skill to shoot and capacity to build weapons existed. It just needed the appropriate scenario, particularly of foreign policy—such as the violence of the Men of Middle-earth, and eventually the war with Sauron—to come into being.

As pertains the ships, the Númenóreans were brought to the Land of Gift by Eldar captains deputed by Círdan, and their own shipwrights learned from the Eldar, until "by their own study and devices they improved their art until they dared to sail ever further into the deep waters" (in "I. A Description of the Island of Númenor", Tolkien, 1980). This shipbuilding capacity was made more robust by Aldarion's investment in swelling the corps of the Venturers, who "grew in numbers and in the esteem of men", creating a precedent for frequent voyages, and engaging in forestry and shipbuilding practices that allowed a fleet to be built. Indeed, "[t]he ships of the Númenóreans became ever larger and of greater draught in those days, until they could make far voyages, carrying many men and great cargos[.]" (in "Aldarion and Erendis: The Mariner's Wife", Tolkien, 1980). This demonstrates not just the empirical aspect of Númenor's burgeoning fleet and sailing capacity, but also the psychological aspect. Through what they had learned from the Eldar and from their own convictions, driven by their elites like Eldarion who beheld a vision to expand and grow in might, the Númenóreans began taking ownership of their own sea-craft, equalling—if not surpassing—the maritime strength the elves once had, especially after weaponising it, and—it can be extrapolated—growing in arrogance in their mastery of the water.

ii. Mordor

We cannot determine much detail regarding Mordor's policy save by secondhand interpretation and its impact on others. We can discern that the primary elite driving its policy is, naturally, Sauron. Sauron's role in Middle-earth is nevertheless unique. Like others who survived the War of Wrath, he too is nursing a First Age political hangover, vying for space in the power vacuum opened up by the casting out of Melkor and the departure of the Host of Valinor. The road from

his early repentance following the War of Wrath to his swift relapse into evil follows a map connecting the main factors of choice—justice and effectiveness—that lead Sauron not only to use what power he already has, but inform how he acquires and then manages new power to meet these needs.

His focus on power and choice is singularly autocratic, and driven by manipulation as much as coercion and outright force. Indeed, Sauron—and by extension, Mordor as his power base—can be said to be reliant on soft power as often as hard power, investing in subterfuge and menace before outright war, with him being described as "crafty, well skilled to gain what he would by subtlety when force might not avail" ("The Akallabêth" in Tolkien, 1977). Yet to fully understand the choices that prompt him to exercise power, understanding his perceptions of justice and efficacy is needed. This requires a little deeper digging. In the 1951 letter to Milton Waldman presented in *The Silmarillion*, Tolkien notes that following the First Age, Sauron repents for his actions at first out of fear, but ultimately does not return to Valinor to face judgement or seek pardon. Instead, he "lingers in Middle-earth ... beginning with fair motives: the reorganising and rehabilitation of the ruin of Middle-earth, 'neglected by the gods'", in pursuit of which he becomes "a re-incarnation of Evil ... lusting for Complete Power ... consumed ever more fiercely with hate (especially of gods and Elves)" (in Letter 131, Tolkien, 1981). The road from repentance to relapse in fact follows a map connecting 'choice' elements of justice and effectiveness that lead Sauron not only to use what power he already has, but the manner in which he acquires and then manages power to meet these elements.

Sauron is known to be a being discontent with a lack of control and of waste, with a will to dominate. The initial needs he seeks for Middle-earth, and for himself as the one to exercise power to meet these needs, are reorganising and rebuilding it as he sees fit, and in rebellion of the gods—the Valar—that he is disillusioned with, and whose justice he has evaded. Bringing the world under his thumb not only satisfies his motives, but brings security to himself and the empire he seeks—or so he hopes—in the building of both influence and strength of arms to withstand assault by stirring elements, like the Elves and gods he so hates. And as hubris or impatience or a lust for control leads him into a relapse of evil and a renewed, darker descent, the manner in which he attains and exercises power changes, too. Essentially, Sauron is a prime case of offensive neorealism, concerned with gaining power to survive an anarchic international system.

Sauron is a different kind of dark lord. When in Eregion, and in the time when Gil-galad and Galadriel became aware of a dark shadow, that was all he was— a shadow, a threat, and a veiled menace. Many of his greatest political actions are not accomplished in military might, but in the subtle exercise of power and the ability to switch from siege to seduction as necessary, to achieve things in the least wasteful and most efficient way possible. In Eregion, this was his ability to change shape and to be sympathetic to the Elves of the Gwaith-i-Mirdain, demonstrating a commonality of needs. As Tolkien said, "He was still fair in that early time, and his motives and those of the Elves seemed to go partly together: the healing of the desolate lands" (in Letter 131, Tolkien, 1981). Yet there was a firm divergence in how to exercise power to fulfill these needs justly. It can be assumed from the evidence and from his presentation across the *Legendarium*, that Sauron was keen upon efficiency in creating a world dominated under his will, where the ends would satisfy justice, not the means, and, perhaps more accurately, justice for him, not as perceived by the Elves.

It is not explicitly stated otherwise and thus may be inferred that in the initial stages, even in Eregion, finding the underbelly of the Elves in their desire to create devices of control—even if

for differing reasons—was not wholly an endeavour of pure malice, for Tolkien also says that at the beginning of the Second Age, Sauron "was not indeed wholly evil, not unless all 'reformers' who want to hurry up with 'reconstruction' and 'reorganization' are wholly evil, even before pride and the lust to exert their will eat them up" (in Letter 135, Tolkien, 1981). He did suggest that "helping one another, they could make Western Middle-earth as beautiful as Valinor", which Tolkien cites as "a veiled attack on the gods, an incitement to try and make a separate independent paradise" (in Letter 135, Tolkien, 1981). It is interesting to note the switch in his 'choice' when Eregion backfires. Following this, the will to subjugate superseded the collaborative aspect, though this is not implying that he had any other intent in Eregion save to attain the power required for domination. What matters is the transmutation triggered by the creation and then hiding of the rings in how he decided to fulfill his needs and what kind of power he was exercising to do so, which would evolve in an ugly fashion through the war and inform his future actions in Númenor. He resorts to coercion through military action, drawing in Númenor thanks to the effect of his soft power on concerning Gil-galad, Aldarion, and to an extent Meneldur in the S.A. 1-1693 period (expanded upon in [Section V](#)), whose own interaction with power and choice had meant an alliance and a building of a haven that resulted in his defeat in the Gwathló. What matters is that slighting the gods and dominating the wills Men to defeat his political and martial enemies took centre stage, to the point that his ultimate scheme of corruption and domination—the Akallabêth—ultimately required the intervention of the Creator for all the damage it did and had the potential to do.

Knowing his far lesser might compared to the 'evil' power vacuum he is filling in Melkor's place, and having other skills and a different modus operandi. Many of Sauron's choices in this age are brought about from motives of control, reconstruction, and slighting the gods, and with a view to maintain and manage the power obtained to exercise these needs in as efficient, least wasteful, and most ordered way possible. Hence, loyalty or subjugation of servants through charisma and implicit power is one route, while manifest power in martial force is the other.

iii. The Elves

The Elves, tackled here as a unit, are subdivided into Lindon, Eregion, and the Greenwood, given the dearth of specific information about them and their policies during this Age.

It may be argued that there was some Noldorin hegemony during the First Age, such as that which emanated from Mithrim or Nargothrond, and so possessing some ability to organise internal social order or external order between other kingdoms. Naturally there were outliers. Especially in the case of Doriath, the kingdom was not much affected by a hegemonic influence until the exogenous shock of the Second Kinslaying, through its isolationist, ethnolinguistically xenophobic policies. In the Second Age, it can be argued that a Noldorin cultural hegemony endured during their settling in and expansion into Middle-earth—but it was no longer militarily and politically unchallenged, in light of the Númenóreans' growth and expansion, and the presence of many Sindar in Lindon and Eriador.

The first main society, Lindon, operated under a monarchy during the Second Age, taking Gil-galad for their High King, which we presume is from traditional authority at the least. This paper will not go into discussion of what role the muddy waters of his parentage might play in this, since it would likely not materially impact his policies, and any option would satisfy legal-rational legitimacy criteria also. What little we know about his policies in this early Second Age period is that he took it upon himself to engage other societies for the benefit of mutual security, and he also remained vigilant in anticipating threats. The idea of efficacy in making political choices is

evident in Gil-galad's reference to his keeping Aldarion in Middle-earth in his service, seeking the "knowledge of Men and their tongues which he alone possesses" (in "Aldarion and Erendis: The Mariner's Wife", Tolkien, 1980). This is also an element of attaining power in the sense that it can ascertain security—knowledge of men and their tongues means greater communication and coordination with the Men of Eriador who have not yet fallen to the Shadow that so concerns Gil-galad, and so bolsters the security of his kingdom as well as the wider region of the Westlands, as he refers to them. This is the first indicator that Gil-galad is a proponent of what could be considered proto-liberal institutionalist ideas—collaboration in the international arena to survive an anarchic order, though in his case, through alliances rather than the international institutions we have today such as the UN or NATO (although some readers may find surprising parallels—unintentional though they may be—between the Last Alliance and this latter example). We also know that even though he was High King of the Noldor, Gil-galad also presided over a mix of both Noldorin and Sindarin Elves in Lindon, at least for much of the immediate post-War of Wrath period, though the migrations out of Lindon cannot be definitively said to have arisen out of any decision of his policy, but rather out of history and the motivations of other actors *within* Lindon's population and elites.

The case of the Sindar, for example, is interesting, for nowhere is the hangover of political fault lines from the First Age more evident. Led by Oropher, many of the Sindar eventually leave the Noldor-dominated West of Middle-earth. We can extrapolate that this is from lingering resentment over the kinslayings and the long-term damage of the ethnolinguistic isolation of Doriath, and less so from any specific policy of Gil-galad's. Rather, these are Oropher's choices in light of his relationship to power over his people and in friction, to his view, with the lingering Noldorin hegemony. Indeed, following Oropher's movements ever north into Greenwood later in the age are in the text linked to "the power and encroachments of the Dwarves of Moria" as well as his resentment of "the intrusions of Celeborn and Galadriel into Lórien" (Appendix B in "The History of Galadriel and Celeborn", Tolkien, 1980). Though little engaged in international affairs after his departure, we do see—as in the case of Doriath under Thingol's rule in the First Age—that Oropher was not an unaligned force, but rather unengaged in the multi-state bipolar order of the Elves and Men against Sauron and those societies under his influence, and he did ultimately re-enter the fight at the end of the Age as part of the War of the Last Alliance.

In finding their place in the ethnic mosaic of a landscape east of the Ered Luin, the Noldor in Eregion also became a force of power and choice. The main actors here are Celeborn and Galadriel, whom we take as a unit, and the Gwaith-i-Mírdain the brotherhood of Elven craftsmen who would go on to create the Rings of Power. The texts discussed in "The History of Galadriel and Celeborn" in *The Unfinished Tales* is an area rife with inconsistencies across the published works, but nevertheless one of the key resources for information of Eriador prior to the War of the Elves and Sauron, and some important insights emerge with few, if any, such contradictions. First, we know that as the kingdom of Eregion was built up, Celeborn and Galadriel's power was also growing, and Galadriel, "assisted ... by her friendship with the Dwarves of Moria, had come into contact with the Nandorin realm of Lorinand on the other side of the Misty Mountains" (in "The History of Celeborn and Galadriel", Tolkien, 1980) Galadriel, like Gil-galad, evidently had a knack for ascertaining points of power and weakness, and taking action to deal with them—migrating east to reinforce the Misty Mountains as a main defense point. This came with the cost of the so-called "Sindarizing" of the Silvan Elves "under the impact of Beleriandic culture" (in "The History of Celeborn and Galadriel", Tolkien, 1980), itself a concept that has problematic implications regarding cultural hegemony and erasure, that are beyond the scope of this essay. Nevertheless, this power of hegemony that Galadriel brought with her allowed her to create a

strategic buffer zone that succeeded in "counteract[ing] the machinations of Sauron", even as "in Lindon Gil-Galad shut out Sauron's emissaries and even Sauron himself" (in "The History of Celeborn and Galadriel", Tolkien, 1980). Her own motivations for taking up residence in Middle-earth notwithstanding—especially in light of the numerous changes over the span of time the tale was written and changed—her policies were ultimately driven by the similar external goal of security, but achieved through accession rather than alliances, as Gil-galad did.

The Gwaith-i-Mírdain are also a key driver of power and choice, though in a desperately tragic way. They were far and away the most open to intercultural collaboration, even with the Dwarves, as best enshrined by the friendship of Celebrimbor—one of Ost-in-Edhil's elites—and Narvi (in "The History of Celeborn and Galadriel", Tolkien, 1980). Their desire to recapture the beauty of the Blessed Realm in devices was what made them susceptible to the influence of Sauron in the guise of Annatar. Their collective decision to trust him to fulfill these personal, perhaps spiritual needs where Galadriel and Gil-galad would not, allowed the cultivation of technology that would cede the Mírdain's power to Sauron and away from Ost-in-Edhil, precipitating events that would lead to its ruin while simultaneously triggering at last the formation of an alliance between the Elves and the Númenóreans following the Sack of Eregion, and in doing so, fully cementing the new power balance of the Second Age.

iv. The Ainur

The considerably lighter hand played by the Ainur at this point in the Second Age deeply impacts how those within the realm perceive the Valar and their policies, such as the Ban, and on the Valar's own decision making processes in the late Second Age, namely electing eventually to "lay down their government" (in "The Akallabêth", Tolkien, 1977) close to its end and forfeit that power back to Ilúvatar. What is most important to understand in this earlier period is the enduring presence of the Valar, in what constructivists would credit as important in forming relations of power in the international system, as it is one of the bases of shared ideas, common with the Eldar, that inform Númenor's interests and identities. The focus here is on the Ainur as perceived by Númenor, as this is primarily the information available to the reader in the Second Age texts.

For example, in a letter from Gil-galad to Tar-Meneldur, the use of the salutation "the Valar keep you" (in "Aldarion and Erendis: The Mariner's Wife", Tolkien, 1980) is indicative of the intercultural power that these entities still have as heralds of blessing and of peace. It is also apparent, as per the above quote, that the Ainur continue to exercise power over the denizens of Middle-earth in a detached manner that is far from monolithic. Meneldur perceives the Ainur as the givers and guardians of peace and prosperity in a way that directly impacts policy perspective and makes it divergent from his son's, as above. The establishment of Númenor was carried out by the Valar, and the Men from which the Númenóreans descended had fought with the Host of Valinor, the deed which won them Númenor in the first place. It is difficult to determine how to describe this—whether it is a relationship with the Divine, or a question of religion, or of the divide between the Valar and vague menace of the Shadow. What can be said is that it was an integral part of Númenor's physical, sociocultural, and psychological landscape, and absolutely must be factored in as a driver of choice and as a thing that exercises power over the Númenóreans because of their acquiescence—until of course, as we know, they relinquish that. The text notes the relationship to the Divine in many places, such as its description of the silence at the Meneltarma, such that "even a stranger ignorant of Númenor or all its history ... would not have dared to speak aloud", or the "great eagles that were held sacred to Manwë", symbols that held power over the people in the form of reverence, rendering

them "never afflicted", and yet challenged when "the days of evil and the hatred of the Valar began" (in "A Description of the Island of Númenor", Tolkien, 1980), having arisen out of factors related to material wealth, as already discussed.

Indeed the acquisition of the material and withholding of the immaterial can be said to be a social cleavage in Númenor based on the response to it by elites and the public. As is said in the Appendices to *The Lord of the Rings*, "Thence the Eldar came to the Edain and enriched them with knowledge and many gifts; but one command had been laid upon the Númenóreans, the 'Ban of the Valar'" (Tolkien, 1954), through which they were forbidden to sail west out of sight of their shores, as the Valar were not at liberty to take from them the Gift of Men. The Ban and its impact on domestic policy is most keenly observed later in the Second Age in relation to the Akallabêth, proving significant as one of the fuels feeding the shadow descended upon Númenor, both prior to and under the influence of Sauron. The relationship to the Divine is also a driver of choice—more in justice than effectiveness—in the individual policy decisions of key individuals. Meneldur, for example, debates with his son when he desires to return to Middle-earth on further voyages and demonstrates constraint placed upon him by his treatment of the Powers. He says, "Do you forget that the Edain dwell here under the grace of the Lords of the West, that Uinen is kind to us, and Ossë is restrained?" and that Aldarion should not presume the grace "will extend to those who risk themselves without need upon the rocks of strange shores or in the lands of men of darkness" (in "Aldarion and Erendis: The Mariner's Wife", Tolkien, 1980). This is significant because his conviction in the Valar is both the givers and guardians of their peace and prosperity impacts his personal perspective on foreign relations with the Men of Enedwaith and, by extension, the Elves of Lindon. A similar sentiment is expressed in his statement, "When the Valar gave to us the Land of Gift they did not make us their vice-regents: we were given the Kingdom of Númenor, not of the world. They are the Lords" (in "Aldarion and Erendis: The Mariner's Wife", Tolkien, 1980).

It's a significant indicator of the perception by some leaders of the hierarchy of the Children of Ilúvatar as ultimately being governed by Valar in the place of god, a concept which is warped by Sauron during his tenure in Númenor to turn the Valar into the ultimate rulers and ultimate fault, the holders of power and withholders of the Númenóreans' choice.

V. International Activities

With foreign policy, my focus here is not on the policies of discrete actors, but on specific instances of interaction between two or more societies, and the impact this has on political events of the Second Age.

i. Númenor and the Men of Middle-earth

Aldarion rightly perceived the changing environment beyond Númenor. He stated upon return of his travels that "the world is changing again. Outside"—note the distance in terminology indicative of the fierce island mentality of Númenor—"nigh on a thousand years have passed since the Lords of the West sent their power against Angband; and those days are forgotten, or wrapped in dim legend among Men of Middle-earth. They are troubled again, and fear haunts them" (in "Aldarion and Erendis: The Mariner's Wife", Tolkien, 1980). I give weight to Númenor's activities on the shores of Middle-earth for two main reasons, and both are intricately linked to the War of the Elves and Sauron and their concept of empire. It is known that Aldarion came to Middle-earth and befriended the Elves, an alliance that would wax and wane but ultimately manifest in the Númenórean landings at the Gwathló as well as set up, though with difficulty,

ports in Middle-earth for both trade and—it is assumed—defence. Further, the timber trade and deforestation angered the men of the region and turned them to the darkness. This area ended up being strategically important in the war. Erendis was perhaps prophetic in her statement that, "The Edain remain mortal men, Aldarion, great though they be: and we cannot dwell in the time that is to come, lest we lost our now for a phantom of our own design" (in "Aldarion and Erendis: The Mariner's Wife", Tolkien, 1980). Indeed, Aldarion's focus on the future, and Númenor's eventual focus on what was to come—that thing being death—was a spectre emboldened by policy decisions that reared its head at the Downfall.

Númenor's relationship with the Men of Middle-earth seems to have had a positive beginning, if burdened somewhat by the bent of the Númenóreans' imperial arrogance. We know there were Men who remained in Middle-earth, in Eriador, on the side of the Elves, who appeared to welcome the Númenóreans. We also know of the Men of the Enedwaith, and this is more significant. It is said the Númenóreans landed "... upon wild shores owned by no man" (in "Aldarion and Erendis: The Mariner's Wife", Tolkien, 1980). This naturally begs the question of ownership and sovereignty. Further segments of the text indicate that there were men in these lands—yet it appears that the narrator, whether representing the views of the Númenóreans or writing from a certain perspective of legitimacy, does not equate occupancy as sovereignty, where we speak of sovereignty in place of land or property rights as we cannot perceive that Númenor and the Enedwaith operate on the same systems of law and justice in this regard. This is reinforced by the statement that "the great Númenórean ships came unarmed among the men of Middle-earth" and "did not bear [their axes and bows] when they sought out the men of the land" (in "Aldarion and Erendis: The Mariner's Wife", Tolkien, 1980), indicating that they must have been aware, through visual information, physical evidence, or sightings, that there were already people living here, though the implication stands that the indigenous population were not acknowledged as having ownership of the land they lived on, merely being "of the land". As we have no account from the perspective of the men of Enedwaith, we cannot discount in-text bias in this regard. We can, at least, draw parallels to the assertions of academics on colonialism like Mahmood Mamdani that "communal autonomy" was very much scrapped by the arrival of the Númenóreans and the transference of power in the region to them. Nevertheless, it seems that in the beginning the approach to this colonialism was gentler, where would have been one of assimilation and an attempt at mutual benefit, with the Númenóreans using the trees for their purposes and teaching the Men skills.

We can, at least, draw parallels to the assertions of academics on colonialism like Mahmood Mamdani that "communal autonomy" was very much scrapped by the arrival of the Númenóreans and the transference of power in the region to them, given the common aspect of colonial psychology that the settlers know better how to reap abundance from the land or harness the resources—the risk here being exploitation and erosion of rights to that land on the part of the indigenous population. At least in Aldarion's case, we know that while exploiting the woods of Tharbad, he made attempts at systematic correction, giving "most heed to the future, planting always where there was felling, and he had new woods set to grow where there was room[.]" (in "Aldarion and Erendis: The Mariner's Wife", Tolkien, 1980). However, even if meant in good faith at the beginning out of a misplaced sense of humanitarianism or their own arrogance, this risks worse exploitation—which, later in the Age, did indeed happen. This was not without precedent on the part of the indigenous population—and the text states the Númenóreans were grieved when "the Shadow crept along the coasts and men whom they had befriended became afraid or hostile, that iron was used against them by those to whom they had revealed it", and the many times Aldarion returned to Vinyalondë to find the haven beset by

"hostile men" and "wholly ruined" (in "Aldarion and Erendis: The Mariner's Wife", Tolkien, 1980). The question lies in what made them hostile. Within the text it is also stated that "Men near the coasts were growing afraid of the Númenóreans, or were become openly hostile; and Aldarion heard rumours of some lord in Middle-earth who hated the men of the ships" (in "Aldarion and Erendis: The Mariner's Wife", Tolkien, 1980)—this lord was previously discussed in the subsection "Mordor". We can infer from this that the fear sprang from the deforestation, even though Aldarion made attempts at systematic correction of it, and perhaps out of a sense of their own power over the land being stripped away, their ability to meet their own needs taken out of their direct control, in essence, their power. The reference to the Shadow cannot be ignored, nor the lord who hated the Númenóreans; for this provides motivation for the Men of the Enedwaith to align with the Shadow, in order to have the power to exact their choices. One may consider this an example of Sauron using the enmity of the Men of the Enedwaith to instigate a small proxy conflict against Aldarion and the Númenóreans to delay their expansion on to the shores of Middle-earth.

ii. The Alliance of Elves and Men

The relationship between the Elves, in particular those of Lindon, and Númenor, cannot be neglected, as it is significant in determining the foreign policy that leads them into direct confrontation with Sauron, forming a grudge more profound than the aforementioned "hatred" that will go on to level Númenor later in the Age. Reference has already been made to the significance of the Eldar in legitimacy; another key element is that of alliance. The Second Age itself ends with the War of the Last Alliance, a final union between the forces of the combined groups of the Eldar and of the survivors of Númenor; the seeds of this alliance sprouted, however, in this period in the first one and a half millennia of the Age. The Elves were there at the foundation of Númenor, helping ferry people over in their ships, and their first king Elros was a *peredhel*. Other than Adûnaic the Númenóreans spoke Elvish and used Quenya as a formal text, for example for codifying laws. The text states that "In the days of Tar-Elendil the first ships of the Númenóreans came back to Middle-earth," which occurred in S.A. 600, about 600 years after the founding of Lindon and 150 before the founding of Eregion. Last, while Númenor was growing with a burgeoning fleet, Tar-Aldarion's foreign policy meant taking knowledge from the Elves and fostering friendship, which he did with two important individuals in the Noldorin and Sindarin elite. On his first journey, the details that do survive are that he "made the friendship of Círdan"—who had also previously befriended his grandfather Vëantur—"and Gil-galad, and journeyed far in Lindon and the west of Eriador, and marvelled at all that he saw," and that he gave some of the fruit of the *malinorni* to Gil-galad, also (in "Aldarion and Erendis: The Mariner's Wife", Tolkien, 1980). So we have friendship cultured between two important individuals in the Noldorin and Sindarin elite, one a king and the other a highly respected shipwright and constructor of havens, having already built two in the course of Middle-earth's history.

The interplay of power here is less disproportionate, and the dynamics more vague, than with Númenor and the men of the Enedwaith. While Númenor was growing with a burgeoning fleet, Tar-Aldarion's choice to meet what he perceived as Númenor's needs for growth, as well as his own sympathies and the sympathies of his kin and heritage, certainly, meant taking knowledge from the Elves and fostering friendship, if not an outright alliance. And indeed, for all Númenor's skill, Tar-Aldarion still faced many problems building a proper foundation in his haven at Vinyalondë, beset by men as it was and gnawed at by the sea whenever he returned. Nevertheless, the fact that he was able to build the havens at all, thanks to the help of the Elves, actually proved a choice on both their parts that would ensure Númenor's successful

intervention during the war to come. Effectively, a choice that allowed both of them to exercise their military power in their interests when the time came, for their individual and mutual benefit.

iii. The Letter from Gil-galad to Meneldur

A whole paper could be written on this letter, delivered to Meneldur by Aldarion and written by Gil-galad, which serves as an excellent case study to encapsulate several of the above elements, particularly the relationship to the Divine, to the Eldar, military capacity, domestic priorities, and foreign policy through alliances. There are no less than five actors involved—Meneldur, Gil-galad, Aldarion, the Men of Middle-earth, and Sauron, though he is here unnamed. This is the genesis of the security alliance—preceded by centuries of cultural and political collaboration—that would come to fruition later, and in many ways this letter cements the new power balance. There are political aspects already in the salutations, namely the identification of Tar-Meneldur as of the line of Eärendil, rather than as "King of Númenor" et cetera, until far later in the letter, which connotes a connection to the old friendship cultivated since the start of the Age as well as the Eldarin cultural hegemony (discussed further below). Gil-galad also highlights and reinforces this by referring to Aldarion as "the greatest Elf-friend that now is among Men" (in "Aldarion and Erendis: The Mariner's Wife", Tolkien, 1980).

In terms of their enemy, it becomes clear that there is another power at play in the still solidifying power balance, in the implicit reference to Sauron by Gil-galad: "A new shadow arises in the East ... a servant of Morgoth is stirring, and evil things wake again. Each year it gains strength, for most Men are ripe to its purpose. Not far off is the 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" (in "Aldarion and Erendis: The Mariner's Wife", Tolkien, 1980). This quote is extraordinary and significant. There is the outright admission of weakness and invitation towards alliance on Gil-galad's part, which flies in the face of conventional realist ideas of power politics. It speaks not only to the long-cultivated friendship between the Edain and Eldar and their common history, but also to Gil-galad's own perspective of state-to-state dealings, one of trust and cooperation rather than the realist-oriented idea of self-help in anarchy.

This is also indicative of Númenor's hard power and ability to exercise it through a great fleet of skilled individuals with martial capacity, and Gil-galad's awareness of this and factoring of it into the principle of effectiveness when making his choice. Gil-galad, after all, is concerned as much with the influence of the shadow as its physical threat. With the inevitable assault, Gil-galad's priorities become clear: "... we should seek to hold the Westlands, where still the Eldar dwell, and Men of your race, whose hearts are not yet darkened. At the least we must defend Eriador about the long rivers west of the mountains that we name Hithaegllir; our chief defence" (in "Aldarion and Erendis: The Mariner's Wife", Tolkien, 1980). However, he notes that in the Calenardhon is where the inroad is destined, and that "enmity creeps along the coast towards it. It could be defended and assault hindered, did we hold some seat of power upon the nearer shore," where he then goes on to highlight the problem at the Gwathló, that " ... [Aldarion] has never had men enough, whereas Círdan has no wrights or masons to spare" (in "Aldarion and Erendis: The Mariner's Wife", Tolkien, 1980). The plea is for a mutual meeting of ends to ensure mutual security—assuming Meneldur's foreign policy aligns with his. Indeed, Gil-galad is astute enough to note this difference in politics and to say that "The King will know his own needs; but if he will listen with favour to the Lord Aldarion, and support him as he may, then hope will be greater in the world", imploring—from the outside—a move in Númenórean foreign policy

towards strengthening the existing power to a point where it could be exercised for, in his argument, mutual benefit, but indeed would meet his own needs as a king and guardian of western Middle-earth against the Shadow. "The memories of the First Age are dim ... Let not the ancient friendship of Eldar and Dúnedain wane," he goes on to say, once again recalling the ancient roots of this very politically oriented alliance (in "Aldarion and Erendis: The Mariner's Wife", Tolkien, 1980).

What he implores is an interventionist move in Númenórean foreign policy to increase security for mutual benefit, so that each party can meet his own needs as a kings and guardians of western Middle-earth against the Shadow. While a constructivist may argue that this shows how common historical and sociocultural aspects inform international norms among these people, I argue that Gil-galad's policy demonstrates a faith in international cooperation more reminiscent of liberal institutionalism, seeking out an alliance system on grounds that mutual trust and cultivation of norms, rather than self-help, will maximise security in the international system for mutual gain.

Having noted Gil-galad's perceptions of power and choice, these being very evenhanded, bent on cooperation, and far from how a neorealist thinker might perceive international politics, we are then shown in this segment on the letter Meneldur's perspective. For his part, he notes the divergence of thought with his son regarding collective decision-making for Númenóreans, coming to a head now after Aldarion has cultivated such friendship and Meneldur, though sympathetic to the Eldar, has a far more inward-looking policy. He notes the divergence of thought with his son, decrying, "Alas! that his pride and my coolness have kept our minds apart for so long" (in "Aldarion and Erendis: The Mariner's Wife", Tolkien, 1980)—in essence, that their divergence of thoughts have led to a divergence of the collective decision-making for Númenóreans, coming to a head now after Aldarion has cultivated such friendship and Meneldur, though sympathetic to the Eldar and the Valar, has a far more inward looking policy.

His dilemma of policy is one of these chief moments of choice and the justice aspect of choice. As the legitimate authority of Númenor, he holds and may exercise incredible power over the collective decisions of how his people deal with a war—a decision that can and will have major ramifications upon Middle-earth. To condense his internal argument, he considers whether to take preemptive measures, "[t]o prepare for war, which is yet only guessed: train craftsmen and tillers in the midst of peace" and "put iron in the hands of greedy captains who will love only conquest", invoking the Divine when he questions "Will they say to Eru: At least your enemies were amongst them?" (in "Aldarion and Erendis: The Mariner's Wife", Tolkien, 1980). Or, alternately, whether they should "fold hands, while friends die unjustly: let men live in blind peace until the ravisher is at the gate[.]", and then questions "Will they say to Eru: At least I spilled no blood?" (in "Aldarion and Erendis: The Mariner's Wife", Tolkien, 1980). His ultimate choice is significant in that he appears to be unable to take personal responsibility for this collective decision, stating that "When either way may lead to evil, of what worth is choice?" and in fact forfeiting his exercise of power to the Powers, stating "Let the Valar rule under Eru!" (in "Aldarion and Erendis: The Mariner's Wife", Tolkien, 1980). But for the material world, and for concrete policy, he turns the question of the just and effective choice to Aldarion, who can then exercise the power that Meneldur finds himself unable to wield, only able to lay before the Valar. Nevertheless, it is a question of policy, as stated in *The Line of Elros: The Kings of Númenor*. Certainly when he resigns the Sceptre to Aldarion he says "that also is a choice, for I know well which road he will take," and he later resolves, as one of his reasons for resigning the Scepter to his son, "...for the better direction of the realm in courses which his son more clearly

understands[.]" (in "Aldarion and Erendis: The Mariner's Wife", Tolkien, 1980). It is a material, political exercise of power managed by a king and an alliance, and guided by an intricate web of choice.

We know that in this time, despite Aldarion's policy, "the Númenóreans did not yet desire more room, and the Venturers remained a small people, admired but little emulated" (in "Aldarion and Erendis: The Mariner's Wife", Tolkien, 1980), and beyond this that "[t]he works that [Aldarion] began at Vinyalondë were never completed; that "Aldarion was too late, or too early," with Númenor's enemy already awake, but the time not yet come for Númenor to "show its power and come into the world" (in "Aldarion and Erendis: The Mariner's Wife", Tolkien, 1980). Furthermore, we know Ancalimë did not pursue this alliance upon taking up the Sceptre, "that after the death of Tar-Aldarion in 1098 Tar-Ancalimë neglected all her father's policies and gave no further aid to Gil-galad in Lindon"(in "Aldarion and Erendis: The Mariner's Wife", Tolkien, 1980), though it was evidently rekindled by the time of Tar-Minastir.

Nevertheless, within the first millennium "the hostility was growing and dark men out of the mountains were thrusting into Eredwaith" (in "Aldarion and Erendis: The Mariner's Wife", Tolkien, 1980) as per Gil-galad's letter, a shadow that would only lengthen as the great events of the age moved towards Eregion and burst into the war. Aldarion, Meneldur, and Gil-galad's response to Mordor, motivated by many intricate and intertwining aspects of power and choice, ultimately gave the alliance, and in particular Númenor, the inroads to establish a new power balance, and "laid the foundation for the achievement of Tar-Minastir long years after, in the first war with Sauron, and but for [Aldarion's] works the fleets of Númenor could not have brought their power in time to the right place—as he foresaw" (in "Aldarion and Erendis: The Mariner's Wife", Tolkien, 1980). Though the time was not yet right to exercise their power, Númenor had already attained it and was poised to do so, motivated by questions of justice and effectiveness and meeting their needs as a people—which would evolve in a negative downward curve as the Age progressed.

VI. Conclusion

Within the first millennium of the Second Age, a series of nations with comparable assets in hard and soft power jostled for power in a world informed but yet very different from the one it came from. The new context of the post-War of Wrath order meant Númenor feeling out its internal identity and strengths in the emerging power balance, Mordor identifying its evolved goals and policies pursuant to these, as well as the Elves finding their footing in a world where their cultural, political, and martial hegemony would now be challenged. Most of these key players engaged in hegemonic practices such as colonisation, cultural hegemony, invasion, and proxy conflicts to display and determine their power, and their participation in such events was motivated by elements of choice domestically. Aldarion, Meneldur, and Gil-galad's internal priorities as well as response to Sauron's political activities, motivated by many intricate and intertwining aspects of power and choice, ultimately informed the genesis and waging of the War of the Elves and Sauron and cemented a new power balance. Though Aldarion was "too late, or too early," with Númenor's enemy already awake yet shadowy; and though Ancalimë did not pursue this alliance upon taking up the Sceptre; it was evidently rekindled by the time of Tar-Minastir, who we can assume was motivated by the same questions of justice and effectiveness and meeting their needs as a people—which would evolve in a negative downward curve as the Age progressed as a direct result of the politics of the first 1693 years.

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About the Author

Sarah is a writer and musician with a background in international relations. Her interest in Tolkien has led her primarily to artistic pursuits, such as singing in The Lord of the Rings Symphony and The Lord of the Rings Live in Concert in Singapore, as well as costuming at events and writing stories. "Power and Choice in the Second Age" is her first academic paper. Her fiction has been published in several amateur zines, and she is currently working on her first novel. In her spare time, she enjoys applying her IR background to her favourite books, films, and TV shows. Originally from Singapore, she is now based in Europe. Sarah can be found on [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), and on her [website](#). She can be contacted at srwestvik@gmail.com.