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## Character Biography

### Tar-Aldarion

By Oshun

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Tar-Aldarion, the sixth King of Númenor, is said to have been born in the year 700 of the Second Age. He claims the Sceptre of Númenor as a direct descendant of the first King of Númenor. Also known as Aldarion the Mariner King, he is given the titles as well of the Great Captain, Lord of the Ships and Havens of Númenor, and Master of the Forests.<sup>1</sup> In the tale of *Aldarion and Erendis*, the first names he receives are Anardil (which is based in Quenya meaning 'devoted to the sun') and its familiar or diminutive form of Anardilya.<sup>2</sup>

Aldarion, for so he is called in all tales, grew swiftly to a man of great stature, strong and vigorous in mind and body, golden-haired as his mother, ready to mirth and generous, but prouder than his father and ever more bent on his own will. From the first he loved the Sea, and his mind was turned to the craft of ship-building. He had little liking for the north country, and spent all the time that his father would grant by the shores of the sea, especially near Rómenna, where was the chief haven of Númenor, the greatest shipyards, and the most skilled shipwrights.<sup>3</sup>

His parents are Tar-Meneldur Elentirimo (the second name meaning 'star-watcher'<sup>4</sup>) and Almarian, daughter of Vëantur (himself a great mariner; see more about him below). The first in a family of three children, Aldarion has two younger sisters, Ailinel and Almiel. The birthplace of Aldarion is the Forostar in the north, which is said to be of the island of Númenor

. . . 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 Elentirimo built a tall tower, from which he could observe the motions of the stars.<sup>5</sup>

The place of Aldarion's birth is where his father built a tower for viewing the night sky; Meneldur, who shows no great interest in the sea, does have a grand passion for studying the stars.

It is Aldarion's maternal grandfather Vëantur, who is to be one of the greatest of the influences upon the development of the character and longings of his grandson. Vëantur is said to have been the first great mariner of Númenor and one, who serves as the Captain of the King's Ships during the reign of Tar-Elendil. In the year 600 of the Second Age (one hundred years before the birth of his famous grandson), Vëantur also commands the first Númenórean ship to return to Middle-earth.<sup>6</sup> Hundreds of years after Elros and his compatriots sail at the behest of the Valar to populate the Land of Gift, Vëantur is the first of their descendants to renew the bond between the Edain of Númenor and the Elves of Middle-earth, to encounter Círdan the great shipbuilder and Gil-galad, High King of the Noldor. Vëantur's tutoring of Aldarion in navigation, his nurturing of him in the lore of distant lands, and entertaining him with the tales of his own voyages instill in his grandson that infamous longing for ships and the sea.

In the tale of *The Mariner's Wife*, Tolkien describes the process by which Aldarion becomes one of the great Sea-kings of Númenor, a precursor to Elendil and also to his darker counterparts who settle in the south of Middle-earth to become the Black Númenóreans. The Númenórean naval adventurers--part benefactors, part conquistadores--in their continuing voyages to Middle-earth have their roots in Aldarion's first trip to those shores and his decision to return time and time again.

Among Tolkien scholars who make reference to the apparent influence upon Tolkien, conscious or unconscious, of the great sailors in the Old English and Nordic tales that he studied, Verlyn Flieger points to the possible influence of one of the oldest intact Anglo-Saxon poems, *The Seafarer*, upon his questing sailors. Flieger speaks of "Tolkien's extended continuation into his own fantasy of the historical tradition of Old English seafaring in general and of the literary tradition of *The Seafarer* in particular."<sup>7</sup> Aldarion is neither the greatest nor the first among the mariners of Númenor, but the narrative of his life takes great pains to present him to the reader as the intellectual and spiritual father of that line of ancient mariners.

Like his ancestor Eärendil, Aldarion finds particular satisfaction in not simply in reaching a destination or accomplishing a set task, but the time spent upon the sea. In *The Silmarillion*, Eärendil is said to owe his love of the sea to his father Tuor.<sup>8</sup> That love is spoken of in terms that one can see reflected also in the descriptions of Aldarion's fascination with the sea. It is said that Eärendil "could not rest, and his voyages about the shores of the Hither Lands eased not his unquiet."<sup>9</sup> Like Eärendil and Tuor long before him, Aldarion never lost his "longing for the wide Sea."<sup>10</sup>

In a study of *The Seafarer*, John C. Pope speaks of at least one interpretation of that encomium to the love of the sea, which claims that it expresses "the mixed emotions of an adventurous seaman who could not but yield to the irresistible fascination for the sea in spite of his knowledge of its perils and hardships."<sup>11</sup> This description sounds incredibly like the sea-longing of both Eärendil and later Aldarion. Verlyn Flieger notes that it is such a "longing that engenders the wanderlust of all of Tolkien's far-traveled characters, of whom there are many."<sup>12</sup>

Aldarion's early interest in the sea is met with a negative reaction on the part of his father Tar-Mendel who, despite his own passion for astronomy, has little patience with his son and heir finding inspiration in the oceans of Arda, fearing it will distract him from the attention he should pay to the governance of the island. His maternal grandfather, however, who has pursued the roles of both mariner and shipbuilder, is an enthusiast for seafaring of the highest order among a people who are to spawn a long line of explorer kings.

Aldarion was much loved by Vëantur his mother's father, and he dwelt often in Vëantur's house on the southern side of the firth of Rómenna. That house had its own quay, to which many small boats were always moored, for Vëantur would never journey by land if he could by water; and there as a child Aldarion learned to row, and later to manage sail. Before he was full grown he could captain a ship of many men, sailing from haven to haven.<sup>13</sup>

Vëantur encourages his bright-eyed, energetic grandson to accompany him on a long trip back whence his people came. He seeks to bring Aldarion to Middle-earth to encounter their heritage and origins left behind, within Elvenkind as well the Secondborn. He wants Aldarion to see the Elven realm governed from Lindon, where he will meet Gil-galad, and for him to hear the tales and be exposed to the skills of the ancient Sinda Círdan the Shipbuilder, who has sailed the

seas between Aman and Middle-earth and was himself the first master shipwright discussed within Tolkien's mythical world.

Against his father's wishes, but with his permission, at the age of twenty-five, Aldarion makes his first and one of his shortest trips (of only two years) which would take him away from the cares of his father and his duties as the heir to the Sceptre of Númenor.

It is said that Aldarion himself wrote records of all his journeys to Middle-earth, and they were long preserved in Rómenna, though all were afterwards lost. Of his first journey little is known, save that he made the friendship of Círdan and Gil-galad, and journeyed far in Lindon and the west of Eriador, and marvelled at all that he saw. He did not return for more than two years, and Meneldur was in great disquiet. It is said that his delay was due to the eagerness he had to learn all that he could of Círdan, both in the making and management of ships, and in the building of walls to withstand the hunger of the sea.<sup>14</sup>

It is impossible not to make a connection between the story of Aldarion and of one of his ancestors and Tolkien's earliest characters, Eärendil (whom Tolkien says he first created around 1916). In a draft letter,<sup>15</sup> Tolkien gives a long and roundabout explanation of the origins of the name Eärendil (fascinating in itself is the fact that Tolkien, in this case uniquely, chooses an Anglo-Saxon name and works backwards to fit it into an Elvish linguistic form). When he settles upon the Elvish name of Eärendil for this important character, it is made up of component parts that combine to mean "lover of the sea."

In weaving together the history of his great sea lovers into a complicated tapestry which tells of their origin in Middle-earth, the foundation of Númenor, and their return to Middle-earth, Tolkien leads the reader, constantly referring back to this theme, right up through the destruction of the One Ring in *The Lord of the Rings*. The story of Tuor, as the father of Eärendil, comes chronologically first in the latest version of the narrative, although written long after he first creates Eärendil.

*Tuor* had been visited by *Ulmo* one of the greatest *Valar*, the lord of seas and waters, and sent by him to Gondolin. The visitation had set in Tuor's heart an insatiable sea-longing, hence the choice of name for his son [the choice he speaks of here is, of course, that of the name *Eärendil* which means sea lover], to whom this longing was transmitted.<sup>16</sup>

A slight digression back onto the subject of blood lines: Aldarion bears not only the weight of an unquenchable sea-longing from his ancestors but inherits their physical beauty as well. Idril and Tuor are both described in *The Silmarillion* as blond and beautiful.<sup>17</sup> In *The Tale of Aldarion and Erendis*, we are told that the difference in appearance between Erendis and Aldarion is due to his precursors being of the Line of Elros, while her ancestry traces back to the descendants of the House of Bëor, who are a shorter, darker people. (One should note that Erendis is also described as one of Tolkien's greatest beauties, among her other strong characteristics.)

Chronologically in the tales of Tolkien's historic seafarers, one encounters the vision of Eärendil the Mariner of mythic proportions sailing the skies, carrying a Silmaril as one of the brightest stars. Then one reads of the period when the émigrés from Middle-earth settle into their new life on Númenor. Nearly six hundred years later, we eventually come across Vëantur, who advances Tolkien's ongoing plot thread of voyagers and seafarers. Then the reader meets his grandson Aldarion, who becomes the first great Sea-King and who both develops the

technology and renews the connections to Middle-earth that will become crucial in the events within the history of Arda up through the Third Age and into the narrative of *The Lord of the Rings*.

In the tale that Tolkien spins of their marriage, one of his most realistic and intimate, the reader learns how the backgrounds of Erendis and Aldarion separate them. The separation is not only on a personal level, but includes cultural and political differences which, much later in the history of Númenor, will divide the island. Erendis actively loathes the sea when she learns that it will ever separate her from her love. She also prefers the rural peace and quiet of the fields and grassy hills of region of Emerië. Her life span will also be significantly shorter than those of the Line of Elros. Aldarion has been trained from birth to look outward. He hails from the area in which one finds the urban center of the Númenórean seat of government and the launching place for the yet-to-come imperialist appetites which will change the future of Middle-earth.

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 *Entullessë* (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; and Aldarion son of Meneldur, whose wife was Vëantur's daughter, formed the Guild of Venturers, in which were joined all the tried mariners of Númenor.<sup>18</sup>

The courageous sea-king Aldarion, with his appetite for discovery and exploration and the desire to develop a shipping industry, finds an outlet even during his land-bound years in his obsession with all things maritime. Much to the frustration of his hard-won spouse, he reaps timber for his shipbuilding schemes by harvesting the virgin forests of Númenor. He also plants trees. (Read biography on this site [Erendis, the Mariner's Wife](#) for more a more thorough account of their extended period of courtship, the difficulty of their marriage, and its disintegration.) Attracted to one another from first meeting, neither Aldarion nor Erendis is in a hurry to marry or relinquish their own independence. Their wooing each of the other lasts decades (only Tolkien with his penchant for long-lived protagonists could force a couple into such lengthy courtships; one is reminded of Aragorn and Arwen). The couple of formidable wills finally do come together.

Aldarion wooed Erendis in earnest, and wherever she went he would go; he neglected the havens and the shipyards and all the concerns of the Guild of Venturers, felling no trees but setting himself to their planting only, and he found more contentment in those days than in any others of his life, though he did not know it until he looked back long after when old age was upon him.<sup>19</sup>

After years of dancing around the question of marriage, Aldarion and Erendis are wed, amidst great rejoicing, and enjoy a short-lived honeymoon.

Two years later Erendis conceived, and in the spring of the year after she bore to Aldarion a daughter. Even from birth the child was fair, and grew ever in beauty: the woman most beautiful, as old tales tell, that ever was born in the line of Elros, save Ar-Zimraphel, the last. When her first naming was due they called her Ancalimë. In heart Erendis was glad, for she thought: 'Surely now Aldarion will desire a son, to be his heir; and he will abide with me long yet.' For in secret she still feared the Sea and its power upon his heart; and though she strove to hide it, and would talk with him of his old

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ventures and of his hopes and designs, she watched jealously if he went to his house-ship or was much with the Venturers.<sup>20</sup>

But, while their child is still young by Númenórean standards, Aldarion begins his voyages to Middle-earth again. Erendis objects but he refuses to be swayed. The rupture which is caused by his denying his wife's pleas to stay with her and their daughter throughout her early childhood is a fatal one for Erendis. She departs to her rural homeland with their daughter and despairs of ever reconciling her loathing for his habit of spending years at sea with his own compulsion to sail. When Aldarion returns, he issues the ultimatum that she must return their daughter to him. This is particularly important to him since he has no other heir. (Having only the one child, Aldarion rewrites the laws of Númenor to allow a woman to rule.) Erendis complies, but her pride prevents her from risking any attempt at reunion and returning to him with their daughter.

If Aldarion ever looked back or made another attempt at reconciliation, we do not know. If one reads what Tolkien wrote earlier in the tale relating to Aldarion's first response to the sea, it seems unlikely. When his father asks of what he has seen, he answers:

'The fair people of the Elves? The green shores? The mountains wreathed in cloud? The regions of mist and shadow beyond guess? I do not know.' He ceased, and Meneldur knew that he had not spoken his full mind. 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.<sup>21</sup>

Aldarion's passion for the sea proves to be a lifelong obsession, a continuing hardship and source of bitterness with first his father and then his wife, who both lack an understanding of his obsession but rather see it as an apparent threat to his capacity as a king and ruler, spouse, and father. This focus upon sea, ships, shipbuilding, and seeking a reconnection with Middle-earth will change history of Arda in good ways as well as bad. While causing great anguish to his father and destroying his marriage, Aldarion's love of ships and the sea contributes to the development of the island of Númenor as the homeland of a seafaring people. In this tradition of the great mariners and explorers, one finds both the roots of Númenor's destruction and, at the same time, the capacity to ensure the ultimate survival of the Line of Elros.

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## Works Cited

1. The most complete account of Aldarion's life and history may be found in *Unfinished Tales, Aldarion and Erendis: The Mariner's Wife*.
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4. *The Unfinished Tales, Description of Númenor*.
5. Ibid.
6. *The Lord of the Rings, The Return of the King*, Appendix B, "The Second Age."

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7. Verlyn Flieger, *A Question of Time: J.R.R. Tolkien's Road to Faerie* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1997).
  8. *The Silmarillion*, "Of Tuor and the Fall of Gondolin."
  9. *The Silmarillion*, "Of the Voyage of Eärendil and the War of Wrath."
  10. Ibid.
  11. John C. Pope, "Second Thoughts on the Interpretation of The Seafarer." *Old English Shorter Poems: Basic Readings*. Ed. Katherine O'Brien O'Keefe. New York: Garland, 1994.
  12. Verlyn Flieger, *A Question of Time: J.R.R. Tolkien's Road to Faerie* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1997).
  13. *The Unfinished Tales, The Mariner's Wife, Aldarion and Erendis*.
  14. Ibid.
  15. *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, 297, drafts for a letter to 'Mr Rang.'
  16. *The Silmarillion*, "Of Tuor and the Fall of Gondolin."
  17. Ibid.
  18. *The Unfinished Tales, A Description of the Island of Númenor*.
  19. *The Unfinished Tales, The Mariner's Wife, Aldarion and Erendis*.
  20. Ibid.
  21. Ibid.

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## About the Author

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