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# Character Biography

## Tuor

By Oshun

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**Author's Notes:** The Back to Middle-earth Month observances are one of times when *The Lord of the Rings* wing of the fandom and the aficionados of *The Silmarillion* draw together to pay homage to the man who created this world of such formidable complexity and wide-reaching influence. Aware of the overwhelming popularity of *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*, I try in these biographies to call particular attention to the unbreakable link of the tales of *The Silmarillion* to his more often read works. It may seem that I am preaching to the converted in this venue. But there are times, like Back to Middle-earth Month, or when I cover a character who is familiar to most readers of *The Lord of the Rings*, that I hope that highlighting the links to those earlier days of Middle-earth will spark an interest which causes someone new to these tales to pick up *The Silmarillion* and read it.

Respected Tolkien scholar Tom Shippey characterizes this magnificent backstory poignantly in a discussion of Fëanor's refusal to relinquish the Silmarils to the Valar. Shippey notes that when the Valar ask Fëanor to give them these remarkable stones so they may destroy them in order to retrieve remnants of the light of the Trees contained therein, he says,

'For the less even as for the greater there is some deed that he may accomplish but once only; and in that deed his heart shall rest.' (*The Silmarillion*, chapter 9)

Tolkien clearly had more than a certain sympathy with this view. It was something he felt himself (only his Silmaril was *The Silmarillion*).<sup>1</sup>

Professor Shippey continues:

Nevertheless it was the work of his heart, which occupied him for far longer than *The Hobbit* or *The Lord of the Rings*. The better-known works are in a way only offshoots, side-branches, of the immense chronicle/mythology/legendarium which is the 'Silmarillion', and which we have first in the form in which it was published as a connected narrative in 1977 (which I distinguish as *The Silmarillion*), and then in many of the twelve volumes of *The History of Middle-earth* published between 1983 and 1996, all thirteen works (as also the volume of *Unfinished Tales of Númenor and Middle-earth*, from 1980) edited by Tolkien's son and literary executor Christopher.<sup>2</sup>

Finally, it is appropriate to summarize the story of Tuor within this context. Tuor may be less well-known among the larger Tolkien fandom than other *Silmarillion* characters like Elrond, Galadriel, Sauron, or perhaps even Fëanor or Maglor. His role, however, is to provide a crucial link between the tales of the Elder Days and the culmination of the story of the Elves in Middle-earth and the ascendancy of the age of Men which is recounted in *The Lord of the Rings*.

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### Tuor Son of Huor is Raised by Elves

Tuor, the son of Rían of the House of Beor and Huor of the House of Hador, is born after the defeat of the Noldor and their allies in the Nirnaeth Arnoediad (Battle of Unnumbered Tears). His birth is preceded by a pronouncement of his fate from the lips of his father at the end of that great battle. Huor is to lose his life defending the withdrawal of the host of Gondolin from the site. Húrin and Huor convince Turgon to take Gondolin's surviving forces and flee immediately from the battlefield so they might return to Gondolin before they can be followed and the location of the hidden city be revealed. Both Húrin and Huor present urgent pleas to Turgon which hold within them a foresight or prophecy that directly relates to Tuor.

But Turgon answered: 'Not long now can Gondolin be hidden; and being discovered it must fall.'

Then Huor spoke and said: 'Yet if it stands but a little while, then out of your house shall come the hope of Elves and Men. This I say to you, lord, with the eyes of death: though we part here forever, and I shall not look on your white walls again, from you and from me a new star shall arise. Farewell!'<sup>3</sup>

So, even before Tuor is born his fate has been foretold and that of his son Eärendil, who brings new hope that quite literally will carry through to the end of these tales.

Carrying the unborn Tuor, Rían receives word of the outcome of the Battle of Unnumbered Tears but nothing of her husband. Desperate for news of Huor, Rían goes into the wild alone, where she is saved by Grey-elves dwelling in the mountains west of Lake Mithrim. (These Grey-elves are the Sindar of Mithrim.) Under their protection and succor she there gives birth to Tuor.

And Rían said to the Elves: 'Let him be called Tuor, for that name his father chose, ere war came between us. And I beg of you to foster him, and to keep him hidden in your care; for I forebode that great good, for Elves and Men, shall come from him. But I must go in search of Huor, my lord.'<sup>4</sup>

*The Book of Lost Tales, Part One*, gives a possible etymology for the name Tuor:

Tuor is not given in the dictionaries, but it is probably derived (since the name is also written *Tûr*) from the root *TURU* 'be strong' see *Meril-i-Túrinqi*.<sup>5</sup>

The Grey-elves are unable to prevent the distraught Rían from leaving from where they are able to protect her along with her infant son. She flees Hithlum and goes to the Haudh-en-Ndengin (Hill of the Slain), where laying herself down upon it, she dies, leaving her baby behind her. "But the Elves cared for the infant son of Huor, and Tuor grew up among them."<sup>6</sup>

### Tuor Escapes Thralldom and Receives a Charge from Ulmo

The Easterlings who sided with Morgoth in the Nirnaeth Arnoediad had hoped for the reward of rich lands in Beleriand and instead were trapped in bleak Hithlum. In a spirit of hate and resentment they harried the Elves and Men of Hithlum, the survivors of the House of Hador in particular. Orcs prowled with impunity, pushing the remaining Sindar further into the mountains. Tuor's foster father Annael moved his small group into the caves of Androth where they lived "a hard and wary life."<sup>7</sup> By sixteen Tuor has grown strong and skilled in the use of the axe and bow

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of the Sindar. His heart also has awakened to the great losses and grief of his people of the House of Hador.

. . . he wished to go forth and avenge them on the Orcs and Easterlings. But Annael forbade this. 'Far hence, I deem, your doom lies, Tuor son of Huor,' he said. 'And this land shall not be freed from the shadow of Morgoth until Thangorodrim itself be overthrown. Therefore we are resolved at last to forsake it, and to depart into the South; and with us you shall go.'<sup>8</sup>

From Annael, Tuor learns of Turgon and his hidden city and wishes to find it and ask for defense of the people of Hithlum. Annael discourages him and leads them toward what he hopes will be safer lands. Unfortunately their migration is spotted and Tuor, fighting like the valiant boy-man he has become, is captured by the Easterlings and enslaved. Although Tuor, as the heir to the former lords of Hithlum, is singled out for bitter treatment by Lorgan the chief of the Easterlings, he remains watchful and patient until after three years he seizes an opportunity to escape. When he does, he lives as an outlaw, earning the fear of the Easterlings and Orcs by harrying them. But he never forgets the idea of seeking Turgon in Gondolin through the Gates of Noldor described to him by Annael.<sup>9</sup>

Thus it came to pass that on a day in the beginning of the year (twenty and three since the Nirnaeth) Tuor sat by a spring that trickled forth near to the door of the cave where he dwelt; and he looked out westward towards the cloudy sunset. Then suddenly it came into his heart that he would wait no longer, but would arise and go. 'I will leave now the grey land of my kin that are no more,' he cried, 'and I will go in search of my doom! But whither shall I turn? Long have I sought the Gate and found it not.'<sup>10</sup>

He wanders long seeking the way which will lead him to Gates of the Noldor. He finally reaches a rocky cliff and fears he has traveled so far only to reach a proverbial stone wall. Then he meets two Noldorin Elves of the house of Finarfin passing there, Arminas and Gelmir. Introducing himself to them, he gains their trust. Explaining that he has lost his way and travels under the guidance of Ulmo, he gains their assistance.

'So I thought,' said Tuor. 'For I followed a sudden spring of water in the hills, until it joined this treacherous stream. But now I know not whither to turn, for it has gone into darkness.'

'Through darkness one may come to the light,' said Gelmir. 'Yet one will walk under the Sun while one may,' said Tuor.

'But since you are of that people, tell me if you can where lies the Gate of the Noldor. For I have sought it long, ever since Annael my foster-father of the Grey-elves spoke of it to me.'<sup>11</sup>

The words of Gelmir are one instance of several where one encounters the expression of "from darkness into light" in the story of Tuor.

They show him the way and Tuor finally reaches Nevrast. He is said to be the first Man to look upon the Great Sea and experiences for the first time the sea-longing that remains with him throughout his life. He stays there by the sea until he receives a sign from Ulmo and follows seven swans to the south, where he comes upon the ruins of Turgon's great city of Vinyamar. It

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turns out that before abandoning Nevrast, Turgon had been instructed by Ulmo to leave a sword, armor, and shield with device of a white swan on a blue field to be found by a person who will be sent to him as a messenger. Tuor takes up these arms, swearing an oath that he accepts whatever fate that may come with them, and returns to the shore. In a great storm, the Vala Ulmo, the Lord of Waters, at last appears to Tuor and charges him to find the city of Gondolin.<sup>12</sup>

Then Tuor bowed in reverence, for it seemed to him that he beheld a mighty king. A tall crown he wore like silver, from which his long hair fell down as foam glimmering in the dusk; and as he cast back the grey mantle that hung about him like a mist, behold! he was clad in a gleaming coat, close-fitted as the mail of a mighty fish, and in a kirtle of deep green that flashed and flickered with sea-fire as he strode slowly towards the land. In this manner the Dweller of the Deep, whom the Noldor name Ulmo, Lord of Waters, showed himself to Tuor son of Huor of the House of Hador beneath Vinyamar.<sup>13</sup>

Ulmo calls Tuor into his service with words which are perhaps the most important of all those in the tale of Tuor (and yet did not make it into the published *Silmarillion*):

'But behold!' said he, 'in the armour of Fate (as the Children of Earth name it) there is ever a rift, and in the walls of Doom a breach, until the full-making, which ye call the End. So it shall be while I endure, a secret voice that gainsayeth, and a light where darkness was decreed. Therefore, though in the days of this darkness I seem to oppose the will of my brethren, the Lords of the West, that is my part among them, to which I was appointed ere the making of the World. Yet Doom is strong, and the shadow of the Enemy lengthens; and I am diminished, until in Middle-earth I am become now no more than a secret whisper. The waters that run westward wither, and their springs are poisoned, and my power withdraws from the land; for Elves and Men grow blind and deaf to me because of the might of Melkor. And now the Curse of Mandos hastens to its fulfilment, and all the works of the Noldor shall perish, and every hope which they build shall crumble. The last hope alone is left, the hope that they have not looked for and have not prepared. And that hope lieth in thee; for so I have chosen.'<sup>14</sup>

In terms that leave no room for misunderstanding, Ulmo has spoken of the enormous significance of Tuor's fate. This breach in the walls of doom, rift in the armor of fate is one through which Tuor may uniquely pass and in doing so bring new hope to Middle-earth.<sup>15</sup> Ulmo tells Tuor that he must carry a message to Turgon in Gondolin, but he does not give him the words. He only says that he will know what to say when the moment comes. Lastly, Ulmo gives Tuor another powerful aid: a grey cloak which will hide him from his enemies.<sup>16</sup>

The following morning Tuor meets an Elf of Gondolin, Voronwë, who has been rescued from a shipwreck (of one of the ships that had, in fact, been sent into the West by Turgon) and brought to Vinyamar by Ulmo precisely for the purpose of guiding Tuor to a hidden way through the mountains into the city of Gondolin.<sup>17</sup> When "learning of the command laid upon Tuor by the Lord of Waters Voronwë was filled with wonder, and did not refuse him his guidance to the hidden door of Gondolin."<sup>18</sup>

## Tuor in Gondolin

When Tuor and Voronwë reach Gondolin, they are taken as prisoners by the captain of Turgon's guard and are not slain as intruders, as would be the rule, but at the mention of their mission from Ulmo are brought to Ecthelion. He recognizes the significant armor and welcomes them into the city. When Tuor comes before Turgon, in a moment of great drama, he delivers his message from Ulmo.<sup>19</sup>

Then Tuor stood before Turgon son of Fingolfin, High King of the Noldor, and upon the King's right hand there stood Maeglin his sister-son, but upon his left hand sat Idril Celebrindal his daughter; and all that heard the voice of Tuor marvelled, doubting that this were in truth a Man of mortal race, for his words were the words of the Lord of Waters that came to him in that hour. And he gave warning to Turgon that the Curse of Mandos now hastened to its fulfilment, when all the works of the Noldor should perish; and he bade him depart, and abandon the fair and mighty city that he had built, and go down Sirion to the sea.

Then Turgon pondered long the counsel of Ulmo, and there came into his mind the words that were spoken to him in Vinyamar: 'Love not too well the work of thy hands and the devices of thy heart; and remember that the true hope of the Noldor lieth in the West, and cometh from the Sea.'<sup>20</sup>

But overcome by love for the city he has built in the image of Tirion in Valinor and an excess of confidence in his own ability to defend it, Turgon chooses not to heed Ulmo's warning. Maeglin as well, whom Turgon holds in high regard, reinforces his desire not to abandon the city.

Maeglin spoke ever against Tuor in the councils of the King, and his words seemed the more weighty in that they went with Turgon's heart; and at the last he rejected the bidding of Ulmo and refused his counsel.<sup>21</sup>

The only concession Turgon makes, and it is one based more in fear than wisdom, is to block the hidden door into the city.

Therefore in that time the very entrance to the hidden door in the Encircling Mountains was caused to be blocked up; and thereafter none went ever forth from Gondolin on any errand of peace or war, while that city stood. . . . Turgon shut his ear to word of the woes without, and vowed to march never at the side of any son of Fëanor; and his people he forbade ever to pass the leaguer of the hills.<sup>22</sup>

Turgon does, however, accept Tuor into his heart and confidence. Tuor, in turn, gratefully accepts the favor of the king.

And Tuor remained in Gondolin, for its bliss and its beauty and the wisdom of its people held him enthralled; and he became mighty in stature and in mind, and learned deeply of the lore of the exiled Elves. Then the heart of Idril was turned to him, and his to her; and Maeglin's secret hatred grew ever greater, for he desired above all things to possess her, the only heir of the King of Gondolin. But so high did Tuor stand in the favour of the King that when he had dwelt there for seven years Turgon did not refuse him even the hand of his daughter; for though he would not heed the bidding of Ulmo, he perceived that the fate of the Noldor was wound with the one whom Ulmo had sent; and he did not

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forget the words that Huor spoke to him before the host of Gondolin departed from the Battle of Unnumbered Tears.<sup>23</sup>

Tuor and Idril give birth to a son Eärendil Half-elven, the would-be star which was predicted by Huor at the end of the Battle of Unnumbered Tears.

Of surpassing beauty was Eärendil, for a light was in his face as the light of heaven, and he had the beauty and the wisdom of the Eldar and the strength and hardihood of the Men of old; and the Sea spoke ever in his ear and heart, even as with Tuor his father.<sup>24</sup>

During those years of peace and joy, Idril shows remarkable good sense and foresight and causes to be built a secret way out of the city and ensures that jealous Maeglin knows nothing of its existence. When Eärendil is still quite young, Maeglin leaves the city and is taken by Orcs to Angband, and there he betrays the location and way into the city in exchange for the promise of lordship of the city and the hand of Idril.

After a heroic defense by the lords of Gondolin, during which Tuor fights valorously along with others whose deeds are not to be forgotten, the city at last falls. The fullest account of the Siege of Gondolin may be found in *The Book of Lost Tales, Part Two*.

Not before the killing of many Balrogs and Goblins do the defenders of think of retreating. Tuor, falling wounded, is saved from death by Ecthelion; shortly thereafter, the Lord of the Fountain dies delivering a killing blow to Gothmog the chief of Balrogs. Maeglin attempts to capture Idril and kill Eärendil, but Tuor rescues them and throws the benighted Maeglin from the city walls to his death. When the last of the people of Gondolin can no longer withstand the besiegement of Morgoth's far superior military force, Tuor finally organizes, along with Idril, Glorfindel, Legolas of Gondolin, and others, a retreat of survivors, including many women and children, from the city. They flee by way of Idril's secret passage. Glorfindel falls defending the escaping survivors on the path along the cliffs leading away from the city. Finally, several hundreds only of the population of many thousands of Gondolin are led to safety.<sup>25</sup>

Glory dwelt in that city of Gondolin of the Seven Names, and its ruin was the most dread of all the sacks of cities upon the face of Earth. . .

Yet now those exiles of Gondolin dwelt at the mouth of Sirion by the waves of the Great Sea. There they take the name of Lothlim,<sup>26</sup> the people of the flower, for Gondothlim is a name too sore to their hearts; and fair among the Lothlim Eärendel grows in the house of his father, and the great tale of Tuor is come to its waning.<sup>27</sup>

Eventually coming to the mouths of the Sirion, their people join with the company of the survivors of Doriath who hold allegiance to Elwing, Dior's daughter. Much later, Tuor with Idril builds a great ship, and they seek to sail West (more details of that voyage are discussed below). Eärendil marries Elwing of Doriath and they give birth to sons Elrond and Elros.

## Two Cousins

An interesting digression, which is perhaps not a true departure but may be considered central to the main point of the narrative of Tuor (i.e., from darkness into light), is a look at the contrasts and parallels between the two cousins, Tuor and Túrin, sons of Huor and Húrin. Tuor, despite whatever hardships and darkness he must face, seems to ever turn toward the light, while Túrin,

despite all manner of assistance, support, and good intentions, repeatedly finds himself staring darkness in the face.

"[A]nd he [Tuor] was fair of face, and golden-haired after the manner of his father's kin, and he became strong and tall and valiant, and being fostered by the Elves he had lore and skill no less than the princes of the Edain, ere ruin came upon the North."<sup>28</sup>

The first physical description of Tuor is remarkably similar in form and a contrast in detail to the description Tolkien gives of his cousin Túrin, son of Húrin. The two cousins are the sons of brothers of the House of Hador; and the mother of each is of the First House of Men, called the House of Bëor.

He was dark-haired as his mother, and promised to be like her in mood also; for he was not merry, and spoke little, though he learned to speak early and ever seemed older than his years.<sup>29</sup>

Interestingly, the people of the House of Hador are described as being "quick to wrath and laughter, fierce in battle, generous to friend and to foe, swift in resolve, fast in loyalty, joyous in heart."<sup>30</sup> The House of Bëor is given a contrasting set of characteristics: "steadfast in endurance of hardship and sorrow, slow to tears and to laughter; their fortitude needed no hope to sustain it."<sup>31</sup>

Like Túrin, Tuor is turned over to the Elves for his early education and care. Unlike Túrin, who has suffered sorrow, death, and hardship in his most tender years, Tuor, not even remembering his mother, does not endure such challenges until he is a young man fully grown. One senses that Tuor grows up feeling included or close to Elvenkind. There is no sense of the tortured state of always seeming separate and apart that one observes with Túrin, who is fostered by Elves in Doriath later in his childhood and already marred by grief and loss.

Throughout the stories of Túrin and Tuor, one continues to see other examples of contrast of dark and light in relation to the two cousins, both with their crucial fates to fulfill, who are scions of the lords of the greatest of the houses of the children of Men. ("The Men of the Three Houses thrive and multiplied, but greatest among them was the house of Hador Goldenhead, peer of Elven-lords."<sup>32</sup>)

Both Túrin and Tuor lose their fathers at an early age. Both are comparable in beauty, learning, and skills. While Tolkien's stories are set in an imaginary time long past, like most writers, Tolkien reflects not simply the period in which he lived but his own experience of loss and its impact upon his life. Verlyn Flieger implies that Tolkien's loss of his father at an early age could have influenced his desire to tell and re-tell this story.

While the death of his [Tolkien's] mother was a shock and a bereavement, a psychologist might speculate that this much earlier and therefore much less comprehensible loss [of his father] (for in effect Tolkien's father simply disappeared from his life) might have had, though more submerged, an even profounder impact on his life and perhaps on his art as well. Several of his later stories include a relationship between a young man and an older father-figure who disappears suddenly and often without explanation.<sup>33</sup>

Tuor is raised by Grey-elves in modest circumstances, in an insecure Hithlum, under the shadow of Morgoth, never far from the threat of Orc attacks or being overrun by the Easterlings, who have been ceded this area by the Dark Vala following the Battle of Unnumbered Tears. Túrin, on the other hand, is reared as all but a prince, foster son of the Sindarin king of legend, within the lavish setting of Thingol's palatial dwellings, the fantastic Thousand Caves of Menegroth, secure within the Girdle of Melian. As Verlyn Flieger writes,

Men, too, are shown experiencing varying shades of dark and light. Tuor passes through darkness into light; Beren goes from light into dark and back out into light again, or— as Sam Gamgee describes it to Frodo—"past the happiness and into grief and beyond it" (LOTR 696). Húrin cries out "*Aurë entuluva!* Day shall come again!" as he fights his losing battle against the forces of Morgoth (Silm. 195). The tragic life of his son Túrin is a headlong rush into the darkness, hastened by every effort he makes to find the light.<sup>34</sup>

When Tuor and Voronwë pass through the blighted region of the once fair Pools of Ivrin, they catch sight of Túrin.

And as they waited one came through the trees, and they saw that he was a tall Man, armed, clad in black, with a long sword drawn; and they wondered, for the blade of the sword also was black, but the edges shone bright and cold. Woe was graven in his face, and when he beheld the ruin of Ivrin he cried aloud in grief, saying: 'Ivrin, Faelivrin! Gwindor and Beleg! Here once I was healed. But now never shall I drink the draught of peace again.'

Then he went swiftly away towards the North, as one in pursuit, or on an errand of great haste, and they heard him cry *Faelivrin, Finduilas!* until his voice died away in the woods. But they knew not that Nargothrond had fallen, and this was Túrin son of Húrin, the Blacksword. Thus only for a moment, and never again, did the paths of those kinsmen, Túrin and Tuor, draw together.<sup>35</sup>

### **Tuor's Sea Longing: A Legacy to His Descendants**

The most significant role of Tuor in Tolkien's legendarium is to serve as a means of bringing a new hope back to Middle-earth by fulfilling the prophetic words of Huor at the end of the Nirnaeth Arnoediad, when he tells Turgon that he must withdraw and leave because "from you and from me a new star shall arise." Húrin also warns Turgon to save himself and his contingent so the House of Hador may guard his retreating army against any who might follow them and discover the location of Gondolin. Húrin speaks the words of foretelling, "in you lives the last hope of the Eldar." They both refer to the child, Eärendil, whom Huor's unborn son will beget upon Turgon's daughter Idril.<sup>36</sup>

Rían also had foresight regarding the future that would come through her unborn son. When she turned his care over to the Elves of Mithrim, she beseeched them "to foster him, and to keep him hidden in your care; for I forebode that great good, for Elves and Men, shall come from him."<sup>37</sup>

More than a generation later, when Eärendil arrives in Valinor and seeks help from the Valar to rescue the people of Middle-earth from total subjection by Morgoth, he is greeted with words of foreknowledge by Manwë's herald Eönwë:



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'Hail Eärendil, of mariners most renowned, the looked for that cometh at unawares, the longed for that cometh beyond hope! Hail Eärendil, bearer of light before the Sun and Moon! Splendour of the Children of Earth, star in the darkness, jewel in the sunset, radiant in the morning!<sup>38</sup>

Not all of the Ainur greet Eärendil with comparable enthusiasm.

In the biography of Tar-Aldarion on this site, it is noted that Tuor's fascination with sailing and the sea is passed on to the Númenórean descendants of Eärendil through Elros.

Like his ancestor Eärendil, Aldarion finds particular satisfaction not simply in reaching a destination or accomplishing a set task, but in the time spent upon the sea. In *The Silmarillion*, Eärendil is said to owe his love of the sea to his father Tuor. 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." Like Eärendil and Tuor long before him, Aldarion never lost his "longing for the wide Sea." [Internal footnotes omitted. Click on the link above to retrieve those.]<sup>39</sup>

Tuor receives this sea longing from the Lord of the Waters himself, Ulmo.

And Tuor came into Nevrast, and looking upon Belegaer the Great Sea he was enamoured of it, and the sound of it and the longing for it were ever in his heart and ear, and an unquiet was on him that took him at last into the depths of the realms of Ulmo.<sup>40</sup>

In a draft letter, Tolkien references both the name meaning of the name Eärendil (Quenya: "sea-friend") and Tuor's transmission of that love of the sea to him.

*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, to whom this longing was transmitted.<sup>41</sup>

In the last written account of the life of Tuor, we learn that he acts on that longing when takes to sea with Idril, never to be seen again.

Therefore he built a great ship, and he named it Eärrámë, which is Sea-Wing; and with Idril Celebrindal he set sail into the sunset and the West, and came no more into any tale or song.<sup>42</sup>

That last voyage is discussed in greater detail later in this article.

### **Tuor in *Unfinished Tales***

A significant source on the early life and character of Tuor is the version published in 1980 in *Unfinished Tales*. Tolkien stopped work on this version of the story of Tuor and never returned to it. Loose threads of an important nature are left hanging in the very short version edited by Christopher Tolkien in the first published *Silmarillion*. The roots of Tuor's story and a wealth of detail are to be found in their initial form among his earliest writings on his legendarium and are continued and re-written late in his life, well past the publication of *The Lord of the Rings*. The earliest version of that story, originally called *Tuor and the Fall of*

*Gondolin*, which is published in *The Book of Lost Tales*, was probably begun in 1917.<sup>43</sup> The *Unfinished Tales* version was written in 1951 in a very different format and tone from the short version published in *The Silmarillion*. The elevated tenor of much of the language in *The Silmarillion* is often noted by readers and scholars alike. According to Gergely Nagy:

It also justifies the reader who, in the foreword to the *Book of Lost Tales*, part 1, is reported by Christopher Tolkien to have said that *The Silmarillion* was 'like the Old Testament!' (ix). Wicher also remarks that biblical analogies are appropriately applied to *The Silmarillion*: it resembles 'a holy writ rather than a novel' (399).<sup>44</sup>

By comparison, the very long fragment *Of Tuor and His Coming to Gondolin* of *Unfinished Tales* reads in a much more natural and modern style, in form as well as language. It is written strongly in Tuor's point of view and contains a plethora of vivid details. One reads it and wishes that this form of the story had been finished. Verlyn Flieger writes of Tolkien's tendency to leave work unfinished:

This was not unusual; much of Tolkien's work was left unfinished at his death, a proliferation of prose and verse that frequently included several overlapping versions of the same story. Partly this was due to a stubborn perfectionism that prevented him from releasing work he had not polished to his satisfaction, partly from a habit of composition that sometimes kept several efforts going at once. But though he often put aside particular efforts, he never gave up an idea.<sup>45</sup>

And so it is with the story of Tuor that he comes back to rework it time and time again. And yet, still, open questions remain. We have several versions scattered among his works as yet unfinished at his death, one highly personal in its style and near novelistic in its small details. This longest of the Tuor stories (the one published in the *Unfinished Tales*), which is intended to tell the entire story of Tuor and then Idril through the fall of Gondolin, ends when Tuor arrives at Gondolin. The abrupt cutoff of this document leaves the reader to piece together the end of Tuor's story from a series of disparate and contradictory, partial, and much less detailed sources.

### **Tuor, Mortal or Immortal**

The story of Tuor ends in the published *Silmarillion* in a tone elegiac and heroic, for some satisfying and others frustrating. There are those readers who do not find it adequate that the language remains ambiguous. It is first noted that after sailing into the West, he "came no more into any tale or song." And then immediately thereafter it states that in latter days it came to be "sung that Tuor alone of mortal Men was numbered among the elder race."<sup>46</sup> There seems no reason to argue about this point, the ambiguity of which is reinforced in correspondence by Tolkien in 1954 (i.e., the language he chooses appears to indicate that he makes a conscious choice to remain abstruse in the matter of the voyage into the West of Tuor and Idril). Tolkien chooses to remain vague in a direct discussion of the hows and whys of the Valar and those of Eru in relationship to Lúthien's assumption of mortality and Tuor's possible assumption of immortality. In a letter to Peter Hastings (completed, but never sent, containing a handwritten note saying that 'It seemed to be taking myself too importantly,' which can be read to mean that the tone and not the content bothered him), he said:

Túor weds Idril the daughter of Turgon King of Gondolin; and **'it is supposed' (not stated)** [emphasis added] that he as an unique exception receives the Elvish limited 'immortality': an exception either way. Eärendil is Túor's son & father of Elros (First King of Númenor) and Elrond, their mother being Elwing daughter of Dior, son of Beren and Lúthien: so the problem of the Half-elven becomes united in one line. The view is that the Half-elven have a power of (irrevocable) choice, which may be delayed but not permanently, which kin's fate they will share.<sup>47</sup>

The reader may choose to believe that Tuor did not meet the qualifications for immortality and perhaps their ship was lost or he was turned away, or the more romantic among us may wish to believe the minstrels' songs which say that Tuor and Idril live happily together in the West, at least until the end of Arda.

In those days Tuor felt old age creep upon him, and ever a longing for the deeps of the Sea grew stronger in his heart. Therefore he built a great ship, and he named it Eärrámë, which is Sea-Wing; and with Idril Celebrindal he set sail into the sunset and the West, and came no more into any tale or song. But in after days it was sung that Tuor alone of mortal Men was numbered among the elder race, and was joined with the Noldor, whom he loved; and his fate is sundered from the fate of Men.<sup>48</sup>

### The Prophesied Hope to Come from Tuor Is Fulfilled

Returning full circle to the beginning of this biography, it is well to consider the story of Tuor in its broadest ramifications. His fate and the hope he brings, goes well beyond the First Age, beyond the end of the Battles of Beleriand, and beyond his son Eärendil's role in winning over the Valar and the forces of Aman to come to Middle-earth and unseat Morgoth, shutting him "beyond the World in the Void."<sup>49</sup> In a Mythgard Institute seminar on *The Silmarillion*, Professor Corey Olsen opines, in his lecture on the Nirnaeth Arnoediad, that the prophecy of Huor should be understood in the context of the entire scope of Tolkien's history from the First Age through the end of *The Lord of the Rings*.

To paraphrase Dr. Olsen, the star of Eärendil, first foretold by Huor ("from you and from me a new star shall arise"<sup>50</sup>) continues as a central image from these stories of Beleriand and the First Age all the way up to and encompassing the final outcome of *The Lord of the Rings*. The Star of Eärendil, the Silmaril, becomes not only an image of hope but an actual guiding light. This star of hope is linked throughout all of the stories. This hope shining beyond all of the darkness is what Huor sees at that moment facing his death on the battlefield of Unnumbered Tears. Professor Olsen connects Huor's moment of foresight to the incident in *The Return of the King* when Sam fixes his sight upon that star at a point when he might assume that he neared the end of all hope. Yet, this star of hope revives Sam and enables him not only to continue, but to see beyond the immediate darkness.<sup>51</sup> Dr. Olsen then quotes the description of a decisive moment for Sam in *The Return of the King*.

Far above the Ephel Dúath in the West the night-sky was still dim and pale. There, peeping among the cloud-wrack above a dark tor high up in the mountains, Sam saw a white star twinkle for a while. The beauty of it smote his heart, as he looked up out of the forsaken land, and hope returned to him. For like a shaft, clear and cold, the thought pierced him that in the end the Shadow was only a small and passing thing: there was light and high beauty forever beyond its reach. His song in the Tower had been defiance

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rather than hope; for then he was thinking of himself. Now, for a moment, his own fate, and even his master's, ceased to trouble him.<sup>52</sup>

Dr. Flieger also draws the connection from the fulfillment of Tuor's destiny to the journey of Frodo and Sam into Mordor and out again. "The pattern of movement that began with the Exile of the Noldor, that great Elven sweep out of the light, now begins to turn back on itself."<sup>53</sup> There is a narrative thread stretched from the prediction of a return of light at the end of Battle of Unnumbered Tears to the travail of Frodo and Sam in the shadow lands of Mordor. It is the same star (Eärendil son of Tuor wearing the Silmaril on his brow) first foreseen by Huor, created to offer a sign of hope to Middle-earth, which by manifesting itself to Sam offers him courage in the Land of Shadow.

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## About the Author

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