
Character Biography

Azaghâl

By Oshun

Azaghâl is one of the most impressive leaders among the Dwarven peoples of First Age Beleriand. Known as the Lord of the Dwarves of Belegost, Azaghâl befriended Maedhros and was to become one of his most significant allies in the Union of Maedhros preparing for and participating in the Nirnaeth Arnoediad.¹

The grievous defeat of the Noldor in the Nirnaeth Arnoediad is elaborated in the context of how Maedhros and Fingon built their great alliance and went into that battle with renewed hope that a victory over Morgoth was not an impossible dream but could be made a reality. Had the story of that great battle been based solely upon the foolish overconfidence of its leaders, it would be less heart-wrenching for the reader.

But Tolkien is a consummate storyteller and delivers the tale of this tragic defeat after describing the ability of those two great princes of the Noldor to bring together so many and such sympathetic and courageous allies. Before their betrayal and defeat, Tolkien presents us with a story, against great odds, of their success in mobilizing vast forces. Not least among their steadfast and stalwart comrades-in-arms are Azaghâl and his doughty Dwarves.

Much is written in commentary about the Unnumbered Tears of the disastrous betrayal of the alliance by the spy Ulfang, which resulted in Maedhros' armies' fatal delay in arriving at the agreed upon time to reinforce Fingon's vanguard. The reader is often reminded as well of how the wicked deeds of Celegorm and Curufin in Nargothrond deprived the Noldorin forces of potential allies. But one reads less often of the loyalty at great cost of others, including Azaghâl and the Dwarves of Belegost, who saved the remaining Noldor at the end of the Battle of Unnumbered Tears from total annihilation.

Last of all the eastern force to stand firm were the Dwarves of Belegost, and thus they won renown. For the Naugrim withstood fire more hardily than either Elves or Men, and it was their custom moreover to wear great masks in battle hideous to look upon; and those stood them in good stead against the dragons. And but for them Glaurung and his brood would have withered all that was left of the Noldor. But the Naugrim made a circle about him when he assailed them, and even his mighty armour was not full proof against the blows of their great axes; and when in his rage Glaurung turned and struck down Azaghâl, Lord of Belegost, and crawled over him, with his last stroke Azaghâl drove a knife into his belly, and so wounded him that he fled the field, and the beasts of Angband in dismay followed after him.²

There are few more stirring pictures in Tolkien's work, particularly none painted in so few words, than the exit of the Dwarves of Belegost from the field of battle carrying their fallen leader. Their allies and enemies alike are frozen in their tracks, mesmerized by the sight and sound of their powerful lament.

Then the Dwarves raised up the body of Azaghâl and bore it away; and with slow steps they walked behind singing a dirge in deep voices, as it were a funeral pomp in their country, and gave no heed more to their foes; and none dared to stay them.³

Another significant mention of Azaghâl in the legendry of Beleriand in the First Age relates to his connection to the famous Dragon-helm of Dor-lómin, often referred to as the Helm of Hador. In the *Unfinished Tales*, we find a description of this artifact.

It had a visor (after the manner of those that the Dwarves used in their forges for the shielding of their eyes), and the face of one that wore it struck fear into the hearts of all beholders, but was itself guarded from dart and fire. Upon its crest was set in defiance a gilded image of the head of Glaurung the dragon; for it had been made soon after he first issued from the gates of Morgoth. Often Hador, and Galdor after him, had borne it in war; and the hearts of the host of Hithlum were uplifted when they saw it towering high amid the battle, and they cried: 'Of more worth is the Dragon of Dor-lómin than the gold-worm of Angband!'⁴

The helm was originally crafted for Azaghâl by the great Dwarven craftsman Telchar. It was famous not only for its unique and terrifying appearance, but also is said to have contained extraordinary elements of Dwarven magic. (One may note in the description of this artifact that not only did the science and technology of the Elves shade into the supernatural, but those of the great Dwarven artisans did as well.)

A power was in it that guarded any who wore it from wound or death, for the sword that hewed it was broken, and the dart that smote it sprang aside. It was wrought by Telchar, the smith of Nogrod, whose works were renowned.⁵

This is the same helm which plays a role in the story of Túrin son of Húrin, who received it as one of the greatest heirlooms of his house. Most readers will be familiar with the Dragon-helm from the abbreviated form of the story of Beleg and Túrin in *The Silmarillion*. The pair become famous for their deeds in patrolling and protecting a beleaguered area of Bar-en-Danwedh, which comes to be referred to as the "The Land of Bow and Helm." (The bow, of course, is Beleg's renowned black bow named Belthroning, and the helm is Túrin's celebrated Dragon-helm of the House of Hador).⁶

It was given by Azaghâl to Maedhros, as guerdon for the saving of his life and treasure, when Azaghâl was waylaid by Orcs upon the Dwarf-road in East Beleriand.⁵ Maedhros afterwards sent it as a gift to Fingon, with whom he often exchanged tokens of friendship, remembering how Fingon had driven Glaurung back to Angband. But in all Hithlum no head and shoulders were found stout enough to bear the dwarf-helm with ease, save those of Hador and his son Galdor. Fingon therefore gave it to Hador, when he received the lordship of Dor-lómin.⁷

Christopher Tolkien points out in a footnote that the story of how Maedhros meets Azaghâl and wins his gratitude and, evidently, his lasting friendship is neither developed nor told in any other part of his father's notes: "5 The Orc-raid into East Beleriand in which Maedhros saved Azaghâl is nowhere else referred to."⁸

It is indeed unfortunate that we cannot read how Maedhros won this mighty guerdon. The word guerdon is interesting in that it had become an archaic term. One would have found it until

recently in Shakespeare, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, or various tales of knights and feats of heroism of centuries past. But today one finds resurgence of its usage in fantasy fiction and games. One would not go far wrong to credit Tolkien for some measure of its current popularity. It denotes a form of reward or recompense asked or given for a valorous deed or service. Not only did Maedhros receive his guerdon for rescuing Azaghâl in the form of the Dragon-helm of Telchar, a valuable piece of work and one imbued with Dwarven magic, but along with it, the loyalty and lasting friendship of this most valorous of the Dwarven lords of the heroic First Age.

Azaghâl lives in Tolkien's legendarium as an unsurpassed hero of the Battle of Unnumbered Tears, a loyal ally, *and* as the first owner of the famous Dragon-helm. The personal traits of Azaghâl are archetypes of those of the Dwarves or Khazâd at their strongest and most noble and imposing.

Since they were to come in the days of the power of Melkor, Aulë made the dwarves strong to endure. Therefore they are stone-hard, stubborn, fast in friendship and in enmity, and they suffer toil and hunger and hurt of body more hardily than all other speaking peoples. . . .⁹

Works Cited

1. *The Silmarillion*, "Index of Names."
 2. *The Silmarillion*, "Of the Fifth Battle: Nirnaeth Arnoediad."
 3. Ibid.
 4. *Unfinished Tales, Narn i Hîn Húrin*.
 5. Ibid.
 6. *The Silmarillion*, "Of Túrin Turambar."
 7. *Unfinished Tales, Narn i Hîn Húrin*.
 8. Ibid.
 9. *The Silmarillion*, "Of Aulë and Yavanna."
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About the Author

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