
Character Biography

Beleg Cúthalion

By Oshun

Beleg Cúthalion of Doriath is a First Age Sindarin Elf who manifests all of the marvelous characteristics that aficionados of *The Silmarillion* have come to identify with First-Age Elves. Compared to the older, wiser, and more staid representatives of the Eldar featured by Tolkien in his *Lord of the Rings* story cycle, these characters are portrayed as passionate, impetuous, assertive, and strikingly independent in action. As compared to the far larger number of Noldorin Elves, however, Beleg is one of a handful of the Sindar who are developed in such detail in *The Silmarillion*. Beleg is described as one who "obeyed no man." (*The Shaping of Middle-earth*, "The Quenta").

Beleg initially appears in the unfinished manuscript of the poem *The Lay of the Children of Húrin*, which lays out the initial basis for the narrative developed in the *Unfinished Tales*, "Narn i Hîn Húrin," utilized in *The Silmarillion* and making up the most recently published *Children of Húrin*. The early account of the curse upon Húrin and offspring, including Beleg's involvement with Túrin, was written in alliterative verse, a form best known among English readers as that which is used in the Old English epic *Beowulf*. According to Christopher Tolkien's description of his father's notations made on the manuscript of *The Lay of the Children of Húrin*, this poem was begun in 1918. Thus, Beleg is one of the few of Tolkien's earliest characters who survived into later works in a largely recognizable form, having also appeared in the text of the "Early Silmarillion" (submitted by Tolkien to his publishers in 1937), which was printed in *The Lost Road and Other Writings*. Unlike many other major First-Age characters there are few, if any, contradictions or major changes in the story and description of Beleg as it appears in the different sources. (A bibliography is provided below, for those who want to read further.)

Tolkien describes Túrin's first encounter with Beleg:

. . . It was Beleg the hunter,
who farthest fared of his folk abroad
a hunting by hill and hollow valley,
Who care not for concourse and commerce of men.
He was great of growth and goodly limbed,
But light of girth, and lightly on the ground
His footsteps fell as he fared towards them,
All garbed in grey and green and brown—
A son of the wilderness who wist no sire.
The Lay of the Children of Húrin

To translate the entire above passage into contemporary English, and extrapolate only slightly, Tolkien is saying that Beleg is exceptionally tall, thin, and graceful, a hunter attuned to the forest, and arguably should be counted among the unbegotten of the children of Ilúvatar. He dresses in colors that would enable him to blend into his environment. Among his own people,

he was known for having traveled much more broadly than others, and as someone who did not seek to spend his time in unnecessary social intercourse.

One would assume that this would mean that he preferred his solitary travels and involvement in the major battles of his day and an aggressive defense against Morgoth and his minions to spending time in Elu Thingol's court, chatting, flirting, and discussing politics. Among those far-reaching travels, we learn that Beleg, in the company of Mablung, was one of only two Elves connected to Thingol who joined the host of Fingon in the great and tragic Fifth Battle of Beleriand, the Nirnaeth Arnoediad, or Battle of Unnumbered Tears.

The above phrase "son of the wilderness who wist no sire," the archaic verb *wist* means *knew*. In plain English, it would read: "son of the wilderness who knew no sire." The way I understand this passage, written in the context of introducing the reader to Beleg for the first time, it appears to me that Tolkien intends to include Beleg among those Elves who had no parents, that is those who had first awakened at Cuiviénen. The expression "who wist no sire" in reference to Beleg comes up again a few pages later in the text, reinforcing that this is an important piece of information about the character.

I am biting my tongue here and sitting on my hands to prevent myself from going off on a tirade over the choice of style over clarity in the above word selection. I will forgive Tolkien on the basis of his youth at the time when he wrote it and the interesting character he has created here. Further relying on the construction of the phrase alone, "wist no sire" means that he did not have a father. If it were intended to mean he did not know who his father was or had lost his father, it would have been constructed differently grammatically, for example, something along the lines of "wist not his sire."

Christopher Tolkien also accepts this interpretation in his editorial comments within *The Lays of Beleriand*, although he uses a different argument. He relies upon the following self-identification by Beleg: "I am the hunter Beleg of the hidden people; the forest is my father and the fells my home."

Beleg's name is a strong one befitting an epic hero. The word *beleg* is Sindarin-derived meaning "great" or "mighty." In the tradition of heroic storytelling, Beleg's principle weapon has a name and distinct characteristics of its own. His bow, named Belthronding (earlier version Bathronding), was made of black yew wood and only Beleg could wield it. The name Beleg Cúthalion, or Strongbow, relates, of course, to this exceptional longbow. Beleg also possesses an arrow called Dailir. This arrow is described in the *Lay of the Children of Húrin* as "that feather-pinioned snaketongué shaft." It is described as being unfailingly accurate in hitting its target and as always retrievable by its owner.

Beleg was the chief of the march-wardens of Thingol. After the Dagor Bragollach, the Battle of Sudden Flame, Orcs spilled into the forests around where the People of Haleth were living, threatening that region. According to *The Silmarillion*, "Of the Ruin of Beleriand and the Fall of Fingolfin," Beleg "brought great strength of the Sindar armed with axes into Brethil; and issuing from the deeps of the forest Halmir and Beleg took an Orc-legion at unawares and destroyed it. Thereafter the black tide out of the North was stemmed in that region, and the Orcs dared not cross the Teiglin for many years after."

Beleg is first introduced in *The Lay of the Children of Húrin*, when he rescues young Túrin, who has been sent by his mother Morwen to find Thingol. She hopes the Sindarin King will foster and thus safeguard her son within the protected enclave of Doriath. When Beleg finds Túrin and his companions, they wandered for some considerable time, suffering from cold, hunger, and thirst, harassed by Morgoth's minions, unable to find their way through the magical barriers constructed around that land by Melian. Beleg accompanies Túrin to Doriath, where Thingol welcomes the son of Húrin. Thereafter, Beleg takes Túrin under his wing, instructing him in the ways of the forest and the use of arms. While Túrin is still young, he and Beleg become inextricably linked in the minds of Thingol's people gathered around Doriath as the doughtiest and most relentless fighters against the Orcs or any of Morgoth's minions who dared come close to the boundaries of that land.

Only one was there in war greater,
 more high in honor in the hearts of the Elves
 than Túrin son of Húrin, tower of Hithlum,
 even the hunter Beleg of the hidden people
 whose father was the forest and the fells his home;
 to bend his bow Bathronding named,
 that the black yewtree once bore of yore,
 had none the might unmatched in knowledge
 of the woods' secrets and the weary hills.
Lay of the Children of Húrin

Morgoth's curse upon the children of Húrin, however, intervenes to separate these two comrades. Túrin accidentally causes the death of an Elf, Saeros. Since Saeros has harassed Túrin in the past, he believes that he will be considered a murderer and criminal in the eyes of Thingol and flees into the wilderness. When the details of the accident are revealed, Túrin is cleared of any blame for the incident. Beleg asks Thingol to permit him to seek Túrin and tell him that none in Doriath, least of all Thingol, bear him any ill will. Beleg seeks Túrin unsuccessfully for a few years. The two are finally reunited when a group of outlaws led by Túrin, in their captain's absence, capture, bind, and abuse Beleg. Túrin returns and demands they release his friend. Beleg tries to convince Túrin to return to Doriath, but he refuses, asking Beleg to stay with him. "If I stayed beside you, love would lead me, not wisdom," said Beleg. "My heart warns me that we should return to Doriath, elsewhere a shadow lies before" (*The Children of Húrin*, "Túrin among the Outlaws").

For the next period, Beleg does remain with Túrin and together they form a small but potent military force, along with Túrin's* outlaw friends, which causes the territory that they patrol to be called "The Land of Bow and Helm" (the bow referring, obviously, to Beleg and the helm referring to the fact that Túrin uses the famous Dragon-helm of the House of Hador). Beleg now also carries the infamous, sentient sword, Anglachel, said to have been forged by Eöl and given by him to Thingol. When Thingol earlier had offered Beleg the choice of a sword, he picked Anglachel. At that time, Melian had warned him "There is malice in this sword. The dark heart of the smith still dwells in it. It will not love the hand it serves; neither will it abide with you long." Nonetheless, Beleg takes Anglachel (*The Silmarillion*, "Of Túrin Turambar").

The best known fact about Beleg is that he is finally killed by his best friend Túrin. Beleg and Túrin are ambushed by Orcs. Beleg is severely wounded and Túrin is taken captive. Beleg

quickly heals from his wounds and determines that he will locate and rescue Túrin. Finally, Beleg finds Túrin and stealthily drags him away unconscious, under the cover of darkness, from his captors. When Beleg attempts to use Anglachel to cut Túrin's bonds, he accidentally nicks him, which causes Túrin* to awaken. Looking up, Túrin sees a figure looming over him and fears that the Orcs have returned to torture him further. He grapples with Beleg and seizes Anglachel and kills him.

"Thus ended Beleg Strongbow, truest of friends, greatest in skill of all that harboured in the woods of Beleriand in the Elder Days, at the hand of him whom he most loved; and that grief was graven on the face of Túrin and never faded" (*The Silmarillion*, "Of Túrin Turambar").

Bibliography

The Silmarillion

Unfinished Tales, "Narn i Hîn Húrin"

History of Middle-earth: The Lays of Beleriand, "The Lay of the Children of Húrin"

The Children of Húrin

About the Author

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