
Character Biography

Bëor

By Oshun

"West, North, and South the children of Men spread and wandered, and their joy was the joy of the morning before the dew is dry, when every leaf is green."¹

The story of Bëor, his House, and his posterity might be said to form the backbone of the general history of the early interactions of Men with the Eldar of Beleriand. Tolkien introduces mortal Men into his created world some three hundred years after the return of the exiled Noldor to Middle-earth.² Bëor is noteworthy for being the first named mortal met by any of the Noldor in Beleriand.

His further claim to fame lies in the long list of his descendants who are born to play important roles in Tolkien's history, extending from that first meeting in the forest between Bëor and his followers with Finrod Felagund through the end of Tolkien's tales of Middle-earth. The role of Bëor's scions features in the significant events throughout the First Age in Beleriand, through the ascendance and fall of Númenor in the Second Age, and finally culminates in Aragorn's reunification of the Kingdoms of Gondor and Arnor in *The Lord of the Rings*.

First Contact

Finrod Felagund stumbles upon the first Men whom he or any of his compatriots have encountered in the deep woods of eastern Beleriand. Tiring of a hunting trip with his cousins Maedhros and Maglor, Felagund takes off into the wilderness in the northern part of Ossiriand on an exploratory trek of his own. Much to his surprise, he finds a tribe of beings--strange and fascinating to him--who, in many ways, resemble the Quendi but, in others, are obviously alien and different. This tribe or grouping of Men comes to be called the Folk of Bëor after their leader. They will be known as the Eldest or First House of the Edain³ (the Secondborn of Ilúvatar--the Elves being referred to as the Firstborn).

Now these were a part of the kindred and following of Bëor the Old, as he was afterwards called, a chieftain among Men. After many lives of wandering out of the East he had led them at last over the Blue Mountains, the first of the race of Men to enter Beleriand; and they sang because they were glad, and believed that they had escaped from all perils and had come at last to a land without fear.⁴

Apparently, Felagund becomes aware of movement and conversation discernible among the sounds of the forest and realizes that he is hearing some unfamiliar type of creatures going about their daily tasks. When he hears singing and music, it instantly inflates his perception of what kind of beings he might have found. Their use of language and the performance of music, however primitive their compositions and instruments might have been, would have elevated them from the merely sentient to the rational and creative in his consciousness.

Long Felagund watched them, and love for them stirred in his heart; but he remained hidden in the trees until they had all fallen asleep. Then he went among the sleeping people, and sat beside their dying fire where none kept watch; and he took up a rude harp which Bëor had laid aside, and he played music upon it such as the ears of Men had not heard; for they had as yet no teachers in the art, save only the Dark Elves in the wild lands.⁵

Felagund awakens them from sleep with a form of magic in the guise of Elven music (a favorite subject of Tolkien-inspired artists).

Now men awoke and listened to Felagund as he harped and sang, and each thought that he was in some fair dream, until he saw that his fellows were awake also beside him; but they did not speak or stir while Felagund still played, because of the beauty of the music and the wonder of the song. Wisdom was in the words of the Elven-king, and the hearts grew wiser that hearkened to him; for the things of which he sang, of the making of Arda, and the bliss of Aman beyond the shadows of the Sea, came as clear visions before their eyes, and his Elvish speech was interpreted in each mind according to its measure.⁶

Always a curious fellow and observant, Felagund questions Bëor about his people and their origins. Verlyn Flieger notes that they are able to "tell him very little, for, unlike Elves, Men have almost no memory of their beginnings or their early history."⁷ Felagund is drawn to these people, recognizing in them a capacity for reaching toward the good, no doubt with the potential of becoming allies with and learning also from the Eldar. Flieger describes an incandescent quality of these Men, one of the most profound ways in which they resemble the Firstborn, as one which causes them to reach for the light. She arrives at this conclusion from the text of *The Silmarillion* itself.

"A darkness lies behind us," says their leader, Bëor, "and we have turned our backs upon it, and we do not desire to return thither even in thought. Westwards our hearts have been turned, and we believe that there we shall find Light" (141). Without having known it, without any sure way to reach it, Men are seeking the light. Drawn toward it by some instinct beyond knowledge (Bëor's statement that their hearts have been turned toward light is revealing), they are in the process of bringing themselves out of darkness. Unlike the Elves, they have not been summoned by some external power but are led by some force within themselves.⁸

The other side of the nature of Men that Tolkien often mentions is that they are more corruptible than Elves. Morgoth, who has already learned of the presence of Men before the Elves encounter them, hopes to use them against the Eldar. The dark Vala comes to realize

. . . that a darkness lay upon the hearts of Men (as the shadow of the Kinslaying and the Doom of Mandos lay upon the Noldor) they perceived clearly even in the people of the Elf-friends whom they first knew. To corrupt or destroy whatsoever arose new and fair was ever the chief desire of Morgoth; and doubtless he had this purpose also in his errand: by fear and lies to make Men the foes of the Eldar, and bring them up out of the east against Beleriand.⁹

As one learns later, Morgoth is to be only partially successful. One remembers the betrayal of the alliance of Maedhros by Ulfang's people during the Nirnaeth Arnoediad (Battle of

Unnumbered Tears).¹⁰ On the other hand, although the House of Bëor suffered much under Morgoth in Beleriand, they remain in large part committed to cooperation with and as allies of the Noldor.

All these were caught in the net of the Doom of the Noldor; and they did great deeds which the Eldar remember still among the histories of the Kings of old. And in those days the strength of Men was added to the power of the Noldor, and their hope was high; and Morgoth was straitly enclosed . . .¹¹

Bëor, which means "vassal" in the language of his people, was not his original name. He was called Balan before he pledged fealty to Felagund and received the name Beor in acknowledgement of his commitment and loyalty to his sworn lord. Even the name he chooses to answer to refers back to his affection and enduring loyalty to Finrod.¹²

It was Bëor who first mentions that their people are not alone, but that to the east of them, others of their distinct characteristics (mortal, aging quickly, prone to infection and disease, while sharing with the Elves their big complex brains and an innate will to pursue the good) are on the move from the east into the forests of west Beleriand. Bëor explained that some of these Men were separated from them in language. These other groupings of Men who finally did arrive in Beleriand were composed of those who would comprise the other houses of the Edain and also find aid and protection and ally themselves with others of the Noldorin lords, including the sons of Fëanor and Fingolfin and Fingon.

'Others of my own kin have crossed the Mountains,' he said, 'and they are wandering not far away; and the Haladin, a people from whom we are sundered in speech, are still in the valleys on the eastern slopes, awaiting tidings before they venture further. There are yet other Men, whose tongue is more like to ours, with whom we have had dealings at times. They were before us on the westward march, but we passed them; for they are a numerous people, and yet keep together and move slowly, being all ruled by one chieftain whom they call Marach.'¹³

These others, together with the House of Bëor, make up the three Houses of the Edain: 1) Bëor's people, 2) the Second House, those known as the Haladin or the House of Haleth, and 3) the House of Marach, later known as the House of Hador.

On behalf of these newly arrived peoples, Felagund petitions Thingol for land where they may settle. The Sindarin king, whose immediate reaction is mistrustful and hostile, forbids them entry into the areas that he controls and assigns them territory to the north, defended and administered by the Houses of Finrod, Maedhros, and Fingolfin.¹⁴

After the other groups of Men have arrived, Felagund continues to hold the people of Bëor in exceptional esteem as much as they continue to revere him: ". . . Felagund dwelt among them and taught them true knowledge, and they loved him, and took him for their lord, and were ever after loyal to the house of Finarfin."¹⁵

But not all of these new Children of Ilúvatar venture as far into Beleriand or form as close of relations with the Eldar. Those who hold back, of course, remain more vulnerable to Morgoth.

Nonetheless the Edain of old learned swiftly of the Eldar all such art and knowledge as they could receive, and their sons increased in wisdom and skill, until they far surpassed

all others of Mankind, who dwelt still east of the mountains and had not seen the Eldar, nor looked upon the faces that had beheld the Light of Valinor.¹⁶

The Bloodline of Bëor's People and Their Fabled Descendants

Also, in the chapter "Of Men" in *The Silmarillion*, Tolkien describes differences of appearance and temperament or inclination among these peoples. While the House of Bëor is said to have resembled physically the Noldor--tall and strong of build, dark-haired and light-eyed--the peoples of the House of Hador are described as more like the Vanyar: blond and tall also. Those who will become Haleth's people are darker still and shorter.

2 In *The Silmarillion* Bëor described the Haladin (afterwards called the People or Folk of Haleth) to Felagund as 'a people from whom we are sundered in speech' (p. 142). It is said also that 'they remained a people apart' (p. 146), and that they were of smaller stature than the men of the House of Bëor; 'they used few words, and did not love great concourse of men; and many among them delighted in solitude, wandering free in the greenwoods while the wonder of the lands of the Eldar was new upon them' (p. 148).¹⁷

The people of the House of Hador, who eventually became closely allied with Fingolfin and Fingon, from time to time operated jointly and in close alliance with those of the House of Bëor, including intermarriages (more on significant ones of those below).

Interesting physical descriptions of the People of Bëor are found in generalizations about the "look" of certain of his Bëor's descendants. Morwen, the mother of Túrin Turambar, is often described as ranking among the most beautiful of women--mortal or immortal--among the cast of characters of *The Silmarillion*.

Húrin wedded Morwen, the daughter of Baragund son of Bregolas of the House of Bëor; and she was thus of close kin to Beren One-hand. Morwen was dark-haired and tall, and for the light of her glance and the beauty of her face men called her Eledhwen, the elven-fair. . . .¹⁸

Another beautiful woman said to reflect the physical type of the People of Bëor is Erendis of Númenor, who is described in the tale of *Erendis: The Mariner's Wife*.

To the feasting in Armenelos came one Beregar from his dwelling in the west of the Isle, and with him came Erendis his daughter. There Almarian the Queen observed her beauty, of a kind seldom seen in Númenor; for Beregar came of the House of Bëor by ancient descent, though not of the royal line of Elros, and Erendis was dark-haired and of slender grace, with the clear grey eyes of her kin.¹⁹

And, finally, one finds a description of a handsome man, of the physical type of his ancestor Bëor: Túrin Turambar.

[H]e was in truth the son of Morwen Eledhwen to look upon: dark-haired and pale-skinned, with grey eyes, and his face more beautiful than any other among mortal Men, in the Elder Days. His speech and bearing were that of the ancient kingdom of Doriath, and even among the Elves he might be taken for one from the great houses of the Noldor; therefore many called him *Adanedhel*, the Elf-Man.²⁰

There is an interesting scene between Finduilas and Túrin in the *Narn i Hîn Húrin* where he tells her she is beautiful and she responds, basically telling him that he resembles a handsome, valiant Elf-lord:

‘But you are kingly,’ said she, ‘even as the lords of the people of Fingolfin; I would I had a brother so valiant. And I do not think that Agarwaen is your true name, nor is it fit for you, Adanedhel. I call you Thurin, the Secret.’ At this Túrin started, but he said: ‘That is not my name; and I am not a king, for our kings are of the Eldar, as I am not.’²¹

The point being that this prime example of a nice-looking Bëorian male recalls for her the stereotypical image of Noldorin nobility.

As mentioned in the beginning of this essay, the descendants of Bëor play major roles in Tolkien's legendarium.²² Some of them are famous and others more obscure, but the line runs from the First Age of Middle-earth through the aftermath of the tale told in *The Lord of the Rings*.

Most readers of *The Silmarillion* are aware of the story of Barahir and Finrod's serpent ring with the green stone. Barahir, Bëor's grandson many times over and the leader of his House, saves the life of Finrod Felagund in battle following the Dagor Bragollach. In gratitude, Finrod presents Barahir with the gift of his ring, swearing "an oath of abiding friendship and aid in every need to Barahir and all his kin."²³ His son Beren shows up in Nargothrond some years later and presents his father's ring to Finrod, in need of help in stealing a Silmaril from Morgoth's crown and requesting that Finrod's oath made upon the ring be fulfilled. The outcome of that story is that, faithful to Barahir as his old friend had been to him, Felagund follows Beren on what seems a suicidal quest. And, indeed, Finrod meets his death fulfilling that oath to the House of Bëor.

After Bëor himself, his descendant whose life will most affect the narrative of Tolkien's of Arda is Beren, who woos and weds Lúthien, daughter of King Thingol of Doriath. Their progeny play an extensive role throughout the remainder of the legendarium.

The son of Boromir was Bregor, whose sons were Bregolas and Barahir; and the sons of Bregolas were Baragund and Belegund. The daughter of Baragund was Morwen, the mother of Túrin, and the daughter of Belegund was Rían, the mother of Tuor. But the son of Barahir was Beren One-hand, who won the love of Lúthien Thingol's daughter, and returned from the Dead; from them came Elwing the wife of Eärendil, and all the Kings of Númenor after.²⁴

Included among those early descendants of the House of Bëor are Elros and Elrond; in between, we find all of the Kings of Númenor and the noble Elf-friends who survive its destruction and establish their kingdoms in Middle-earth, and at the end of the long history we come to the tale of Aragorn and Arwen, both of them descendants of Bëor, friend and vassal of Finrod Felagund and first of the Edain.

Conclusion

Bëor lived out the last years of his life, long for a Man of his generation, at Nargothrond serving his beloved lord Finrod Felagund.

. . . at last Bëor the Old died when he had lived three and ninety years, for four and forty of which he had served King Felagund. And when he lay dead, of no wound or grief, but stricken by age, the Eldar saw for the first time the swift waning of the life of Men, and the death of weariness which they knew not in themselves; and they grieved greatly for the loss of their friends. But Bëor at the last had relinquished his life willingly and passed in peace; and the Eldar wondered much at the strange fate of Men, for in all their lore there was no account of it, and its end was hidden from them.²⁵

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23. *The Silmarillion*, "Of Beren and Lúthien."
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25. *The Silmarillion*, "Of the Coming of Men into the West."

About the Author

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