Character Biography
Carcharoth

By Robinka

When I wondered how to start this essay in a way that would not sound too obvious, I received a text message on my cell phone. Why, you could ask, I mention it here; what is the purpose? The sound of a message arriving in my phone is a wolf's howl, and when a message arrives, I often catch myself thinking, "Hell, there must be something wrong!" instead of, "I got a message!" Need I mention that such a ringtone sometimes gives unsuspecting people quite a scare? Here is the purpose – a howling wolf is more often that not connotated with bad omen.

Fairy tales, legends, mythologies of various nations, linguistic and religious systems, culture and pop-culture, all of them frequently use a wolf as a symbol. From the Bible to proverbs to Walt Disney movies, the wolf symbolizes among other things: darkness, evil, Satan, fear, chaos, blood-lust, cruelty, war, aggression, hunger, power, and falsehood. Perfect predators, wolves have often been a subject of people's hatred and vengeance due to their actual and implied sins committed against the human race, and have been attacked and brought to the verge of extermination.

Wolf vs. werewolf

J.R.R. Tolkien's The Silmarillion is inhabited by wolves and werewolves that, en masse and alongside other creatures, compose the forces of the Dark Lord. I have to admit that this distinction between wolf and werewolf in Tolkien's legendarium confuses me a little. Perhaps, it is because of the pop-culture image of a werewolf that we as readers and spectators witness in books, movies and other modern products of imagination, while Tolkien's werewolves do not seem man-wolf shapeshifters that change their physical forms during the full moon. As noted in The Grey Annals, they are wolf-shaped creatures:

... the evil creatures came even to Beleriand, over passes in the mountains, or up from the south through the dark forests. Wolves there were, or creatures that walked in wolf-shapes, and other fell beings of shadow.

However, supposedly, they may have housed lesser spirits corrupted by the evil power of Morgoth and thus they seem more powerful than regular wolves, probably more sinister and ruthless. We can deduce that from this line taken from "Of Beren and Lúthien":

... and Sauron brought werewolves, fell beasts inhabited by dreadful spirits that he had imprisoned in their bodies.

Whether we imagine them in more wolfish or more humanoid forms, werewolves remained the servants of Morgoth, and their master was, as said above, no other but Sauron himself.

But at length, after the fall of Fingolfin, Sauron, greatest and most terrible of the servants of Morgoth, who in the Sindarin tongue was named Gorthaur, came against Orodreth,
the warden of the tower upon Tol Sirion. Sauron was become now a sorcerer of dreadful power, master of shadows and of phantoms, foul in wisdom, cruel in strength, misshaping what he touched, twisting what he ruled, lord of werewolves; his dominion was torment. He took Minas Tirith by assault, for a dark cloud of fear fell upon those that defended it; and Orodreth was driven out, and fled to Nargothrond. Then Sauron made it into a watchtower for Morgoth, a stronghold of evil, and a menace; and the fair isle of Tol Sirion became accursed, and it was called Tol-in-Gaurhoth, the Isle of Werewolves. No living creature could pass through that vale that Sauron did not espy from the tower where he sat.\textsuperscript{4}

Into the pits of the tower upon Tol-in-Gauroth Sauron threw Finrod Felagund and Beren along with their companions, and there he sent out a werewolf to kill them one by one. In the below fragment of \textit{The Silmarillion}, the terms wolf and werewolf are used interchangeably, adding to the aforementioned confusion and raising a question as to what exactly killed King Finrod Felagund in the dungeons of Sauron's stronghold in the Isle of Werewolves.

\begin{quote}
But when the \textit{wolf} came for Beren, Felagund put forth all his power, and burst his bonds; and he wrestled with the \textit{werewolf}, and slew it with his hands and teeth; yet he himself was wounded to the death. [Emphasis mine]\textsuperscript{5}
\end{quote}

Finrod proved his great courage, friendship with Beren, and his determination by killing the werewolf with his bare hands and teeth, but the struggle cost him his life. There was, however, a creature that killed werewolves seemingly effortlessly: Huan the Hound of Valinor. The tale of Beren and Lúthien brings us to the scene in which Huan slew the wolves one after another, until Sauron thought it best to send someone more powerful to combat Huan and to kill the noble hound.

\begin{quote}
Then Sauron sent Draugluin, a dread beast, old in evil lord and sire of the werewolves of Angband. His might was great; and the battle of Huan and Draugluin was long and fierce. Yet at length Draugluin escaped, and fleeing back into the tower he died before Sauron's feet; and as he died he told his master: 'Huan is there!' Now Sauron knew well, as did all in that land, the fate that was decreed for the hound of Valinor, and it came into his thought that he himself would accomplish it. Therefore he took upon himself the form of a werewolf, and made himself the mightiest that had yet walked the world; and he came forth to win the passage of the bridge.\textsuperscript{6}
\end{quote}

However, even Sauron in the shape of a great wolf could not defeat Huan. Only the greatest of the great wolves could do it, and the most powerful of them was Carcharoth.

\begin{quote}
The great wolf of Angband that bit off the hand of Beren bearing the Silmaril; slain by Huan in Doriath. The name is translated in the text as 'the Red Maw'. Called also \textit{Anfauglir} (\ldots) translated in the text as 'Jaws of Thirst'.\textsuperscript{7}
\end{quote}

It is worth noting the earlier versions of his name. The great wolf appears in \textit{The Tale of Tinúviel} in \textit{The Book of Lost Tales} and \textit{The Lay of Leithian} in \textit{The Lays of Beleriand}. While the published \textit{Silmarillion} names him Carcharoth, as seen above, which also appears in \textit{The Lay of Leithian}, as cited below, \textit{The Earliest 'Silmarillion'} names him Carcaras the Wolfward,\textsuperscript{8} and \textit{The Quenta} names him Carcharas the Knife-fang, the mightiest of all wolves.\textsuperscript{9} \textit{The Quenta} adds a description and mentions another name of the wolf:
Dire and dreadful was that beast; and songs have also named him **Borosaith**, Everhungry, and **Anfauglir**, Jaws of Thirst. [Emphasis mine]¹¹

*The Tale of Tinúviel* presents a slightly different form, depicting the wolf as follows:

Was it not the great grey wolf Karkaras Knife-fang, father of wolves, who guarded the gates of Angamandi [Angband] in those days and long had done so?¹¹

J.R.R. Tolkien in his letter to Peter Hastings called Carcharoth 'the Wolf-warden of the Gates of Hell'.¹²

The name has evolved, but in each and every form it connotes a wolf with either hunger or thirst (presumably the thirst for blood) or underscores his unnatural power by indicating the sharpness of his fangs and mighty jaw. It goes without question that the great wolf of Angband should be feared, and his name alone should evoke terror.

The idea of Carcharoth being the father of wolves seems to have been changed to favor Draugluin as the ascendant. In that regard, Carcharoth was the greatest, but may have also been the last wolf worth noting by name in the annals of Beleriand.

**Bred with a purpose**

Morgoth's plan was simple: he had to breed a monster wolf able to fulfill Huan's doom. Therefore, he chose a whelp from the pack he had in Angband, a descendant of Draugluin, and began 'training' him into the perfect beast. As such, Carcharoth had no other choice but to become a tool in his master's hands, a predator with one purpose in his life – to overthrow Huan, whom Morgoth hated.

Then Morgoth recalled the doom of Huan, and he chose one from among the whelps of the race of Draugluin; and he fed him with his own hand upon *living flesh*, and put his power upon him. Swiftly the wolf grew, until he could creep into no den, but lay huge and hungry before the feet of Morgoth. There the fire and anguish of hell entered into him, and he became filled with a devouring spirit, tormented, terrible, and strong. Carcharoth, the Red Maw, he is named in the tales of those days, and Anfauglir, the Jaws of Thirst. And Morgoth set him to lie unsleeping before the doors of Angband, lest Huan come. [Emphasis mine]¹³

The published *Silmarillion* seems vague as far as Carcharoth's training goes, pointing only the consumption of 'living flesh', yet *The Lay of Leithian* gives us more details that this included the 'fairest flesh of Elves and Men' permitted to Carcharoth by his dreadful master. There is, however, one tiny contradiction here, as noted below: namely the victims that Carcharoth was allowed to devour were already dead. In his texts, Tolkien pulled no punches as far as violent images were concerned, but this particular question fascinates me in a morbid way: whether Tolkien initially wanted Carcharoth to feed on corpses of Men and Elves, then dropped the idea because the concept of consuming human bodies seemed too horrible. Or did he make his original vision even worse, and its vagueness adds to the general impact? My vote is on the latter, because in this way Carcharoth seems even more horrifying. Besides, one cannot help but wonder whether that was one of the unnumbered ways to torture the prisoners in Angband. Were they thrown at the feet of Morgoth and he let his 'whelp' slay them at will? How many of...
them met such a horrible end since the wolf was ever hungry? That notion alone could make one's mind reel. No matter how terrible this conclusion may seem, I think it was a very possible outcome for many of those slaves kept in the dungeons beyond Thangorodrim.

Then Morgoth of Huan's fate bethought long-rumoured, and in dark he wrought. Fierce hunger-haunted packs he had that in wolvish form and flesh were clad, but demon spirits dire did hold; and ever wild their voices rolled in cave and mountain where they housed and endless snarling echoes roused. From these a whelp he chose and fed with his own hand on bodies dead, on fairest flesh of Elves and Men, till huge he grew and in his den no more could creep, but by the chair of Morgoth's self would lie and glare, nor suffer Balrog, Orc, nor beast to touch him. Many a ghastly feast he held beneath that awful throne, rending flesh and gnawing bone. There deep enchantment on him fell, the anguish and the power of hell; more great and terrible he became with fire-red eyes and jaws aflame,

with breath like vapours of the grave, than any beast of wood or cave, than any beast of earth or hell that ever in any time befell, surpassing all his race and kin, the ghastly tribe of Draugluin.

Him Carcharoth, the Red Maw, name the songs of Elves. Not yet he came disastrous, ravening, from the gates of Angband. There he sleepless waits; where those great portals threatening loom his red eyes smoulder in the gloom, his teeth are bare, his jaws are wide; and none may walk, nor creep, nor glide, nor thrust with power his menace past to enter Morgoth's dungeon vast.

[Emphasis mine]
However, the above citations make me wonder to what extent Carcharoth himself was Morgoth's slave. His master 'put his power upon him' and 'fire and anguish of hell entered into him', as quoted above. These suggest that, as a young wolf, Carcharoth was not a corrupted, tormented spirit, but rather became one at the hands of Morgoth. Because Morgoth could not create, in a similar manner, he earlier wrought the race of Orcs out of the first Quendi, and as stated in *The Silmarillion*: by slow arts of cruelty [they] were corrupted and enslaved. Perhaps, Carcharoth would have remained an animal, had Morgoth not chosen him; perhaps he would have chased wildlife in the forests or plains of Beleriand. We cannot know that for sure, although we can assume that the abuse Carcharoth experienced in Morgoth's care twisted him so that he became something akin to a cyborg: sleepless and ever watchful.

On a side note, I recall that when I was a teenager, one of the most popular urban legends said that if you had a laboratory rat and started to feed it meat, the rat would become aggressive toward everyone and anything within its teeth's range. Was it true, I cannot say, because I have never had such a pet. But, as in every fairy tale, there is always a grain of truth, and perhaps killing and eating human beings of both races influenced Carcharoth forever and corrupted him beyond cure.

**Of Wolf and Man**

As it is said in "Of Beren and Lúthien" in the published *Silmarillion*, which from now on is going to be in my main focus as far as the story of Carcharoth is concerned, the wolf lay sleepless at the gate of Angband due to Morgoth's order and guarded his master's domain in case Huan appeared. There, Beren and Lúthien arrived, both of them in disguise, in their quest to recover one of the Silmarils: Beren 'arrayed now in the hame of Draugluin, and she in the winged fell of Thuringwethil'. However, Carcharoth proved that he was not stupid, having recalled the news of his ascendant's demise in Tol-in-Gaurhoth, and he did not let them pass, only used his sense of smell. There, something was off with those two. In this moment, Lúthien came forth, cast back her disguise and, empowered by 'some power, descended from of old from divine race', she commanded him to sleep. It is possible that her Maiarin blood invoked the power older than Arda itself, so Lúthien, the daughter of Melian, could temporarily overpower Carcharoth.

Together, Beren and Lúthien went into Angband and 'wrought the greatest deed that has been dared by Elves and Men'—they retrieved a Silmaril from Morgoth's crown. However, on their way back they encountered Carcharoth, who had awoken in the meantime. Angered that someone managed to pass by him, Carcharoth stood at the gate and spotted the two before they were aware of him. Then, he attacked them. Lúthien was weak and could not conquer the wolf again, but this time round, Beren took this task upon himself and held the Silmaril in his hand, thrusting it before the eyes of the wolf and scaring him in the process. Carcharoth flinched, though only for a moment.

But Carcharoth looked upon that holy jewel and was not daunted, and the devouring spirit within him awoke to sudden fire; and gaping he took suddenly the hand within his jaws, and he bit it off at the wrist.

Let us stop here for a moment, before we enter the woods of Doriath, and turn from the story of Carcharoth to the Norse mythology.
Wolf as a motif is present in various mythologies, and the Norse mythology draws my attention here in particular because of Fenrir, the monstrous wolf, the son of Loki and the father of the wolves Sköll and Hati Hróðvitnisson. Fenrir was foretold to kill the god Odin during the events of Ragnarök, but would in turn be killed by Odin's son Viðarr. Attested in both the *Prose Edda* and the *Poetic Edda*, Fenrir grew up so fast that the gods started to fear him and decided to restrain him, but Fenrir could break each and every of the fetters they designed for him, until they put the fetter Gleipnir on him. To give the short of it, Fenrir realized it was a trap set for him and then he bit off the right hand of the god Týr at the wrist ('wolf-joint'). Sounds familiar, does it not?

Whether it was a courteous nod or a more unconscious sort of seeking inspiration – and I personally opt for the former – Tolkien is known for drawing a lot from the Norse mythology and remodelling those bits and pieces to fit the shape of his universe.

**Hunted to death**

Picking up when we left the stage at the gates of Angband, where Beren lay in a swoon, nearing death because Carcharoth's fangs were venomous, I have to say that this is another moment when I think of the Norse mythology.

> Then swiftly all his inwards were filled with a flame of anguish, and the Silmaril seared his accursed flesh. Howling he led before them, and the walls of the valley of the Gate echoes with the clamour of his torment. So terrible did he become in his madness that all the creatures of Morgoth that abode in that valley, or were upon any of the roads that led thither, fled far away for he slew all living things that stood in his path, and burst from the North with ruin upon the world. Of all the terrors that came ever into Beleriand ere Angband's fall the madness of Carcharoth was the most dreadful; for the power of the Silmaril was hidden within him.21

Carcharoth's killing spree brings to mind the barely controlled, trance-like fury of the berserkers, especially since they were said to wear the pelt of a wolf while in battle. Carcharoth was blinded by pain that the Silmaril caused in his gut, driven mad by it, and rampaged through Beleriand from the north, killing every being on his way and bringing devastation and terror. For certain, Morgoth should be proud and pleased, because the wolf warden of his gate destroyed the realm as would a sudden fire. Like the boar sent by the goddess Artemis to ravage the region of Calydon, Carcharoth, unstoppable, even by the magic Girdle of Melian, burst into Doriath, driven by fate. The news of the terrible onslaught was brought to King Thingol by his captain, Mablung of the Heavy Hand, whom Thingol had sent out with a mission to Himring. Mablung alone managed to escape the wolf.

> Therefore, since daily Carcharoth drew nearer to Menegroth, they prepared the Hunting of the Wolf; of all pursuits of beasts whereof tales tell the most perilous. To that chase went Huan the Hound of Valinor, and Mablung of the Heavy Hand, and Beleg Strongbow, and Beren Erchamion, and Thingol King of Doriath.22

The greatest of ancient Sindarin heroes, one might say, were those who decided to go hunt Carcharoth. Not only the safety of the realm was on the scales, but also a more personal reason, because Beren wanted to finish his quest, and Thingol may have wanted to avenge his daughter's suffering, as well as aid his son-in-law, looking now at him with a kinder eye. Beleg
and Mablung could not simply ignore such an important task to accomplish, being the captains of Thingol and renowned warriors at that.

The hunters found Carcharoth drinking the water from the Esgalduin to ease the thirst and pain caused by the Silmaril. At first he did not attack them, only lay hidden and waited. The hunters too waited, having set guards all over the place, but Huan felt impatient and he decided to lure Carcharoth out of the bushes. He succeeded, and the wolf attacked Thingol, but Beren strode before the king with a spear. The wolf brought him down and bit him in the chest, wounding him severely. In that moment, Huan leaped to attack.

*The Silmarillion* offers the following description of the battle:

> . . . and no battle of wolf and hound has been like to it, for in the baying of Huan was heard the voice of the horns of Oromë and the wrath of the Valar, but in the howls of Carcharoth was the hate of Morgoth and malice crueler than teeth of steel.  

The symbolic figures that represent good and evil respectively fought to death, and in that hour Huan killed Carcharoth, the mightiest of Morgoth's wolves, and died as well, fulfilling his doom, because he was not impervious to the venom of Carcharoth's fangs.

Mablung retrieved the Silmaril from the wolf's belly and gave it to Beren, who accomplished his quest but was mortally wounded. The evil force was defeated, at least temporarily, but it seemed a Pyrrhic victory. Besides, I daresay Thingol should have left the Silmaril inside Carcharoth's belly and bury it with his carcass altogether. If only he had known.

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Works Cited

6. Ibid. p. 205.
10. Ibid. p. 139.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid. p. 214.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid. p. 218.
23. Ibid. p. 219.

About the Author

A lifelong president of the fanclub of Beleg Cúthalion, Robinka (also known as Binka) has a healthy dose of admiration for the Grey Folk of Doriath, but approaches the Noldor with reverence. She is a proud owner of a T-shirt with the caption: "Beleg lives! I don't care what Túrin says.". Binka lives in Poland with her husband and a rescued dog. Her path in the fandom is rocky, but nothing short of adventurous.