
Character Biography

Denethor of the Nandor

By Oshun

Once upon a time, there lived a brave Elven King so beloved by his people that, when he died in battle, they vowed to never again take for themselves another king. That would be the fairytale retelling of a simplified version of the story of Denethor of the Nandor.

The tale of Denethor of the Nandor in the edited *Silmarillion* tells of his birth in the Years of the Trees to Lenwë, one of the tribal chieftains of a substantial grouping within the Teleri that sets out upon the trek west from Cuiviënen. Lenwë, however, stops and turns aside with his followers at the sight of the Hithaeglr mountain range. Christopher Tolkien in *The War of the Jewels* speculates that the name *Nandor* came into existence at that point in time and was used to refer to "certain groups of the Teleri [who] gave up the March; and it was especially applied to the large following of Lenwë."¹

Lenwë stops cold in his tracks at the sight of the rugged and majestic peaks of Hithaeglr (also known as the Misty Mountains). For Lenwë, they form a barrier he does not desire to even attempt to surmount, so he turns south, traveling into the lands of the Anduin River valley.

Then one arose in the host of Olwë, which was ever the hindmost on the road; Lenwë he was called. He forsook the westward march, and led away a numerous people, southwards down the great river, and they passed out of the knowledge of their kin until long years were past. Those were the Nandor; and they became a people apart, unlike their kin, save that they loved water, and dwelt most beside falls and running streams. Greater knowledge they had of living things, tree and herb, bird and beast, than all other Elves.²

But as Flieger notes, speaking of the migration of the Calaquendi, "[t]he process, however, is fitful, with stops and starts and changes both gradual and sudden."³ It would be many long years before Denethor is introduced into the narrative as the leader of his father's people. "In after years Denethor, son of Lenwë, turned again west at last, and led a part of that people over the mountains into Beleriand ere the rising of the Moon."⁴

The name Denethor is adapted from Nandorin to fit the Sindarin ear. The names of his father Lenwë and his own are related in both root and meaning:

Lenwë is the form in which his name was remembered in Noldorin histories. His name was probably *Denwego, Nandorin Denweg. His son was the Nandorin chieftain Denethor. These names probably meant 'lithe-and-active' and 'lithe-and lank', from *dene- 'thin and strong, pliant, lithe', and *thara 'tall (or long) and slender'.⁵

Many years would pass before the remaining people of Lenwë's grouping of the fractured Teleri would unite again with their original kinsman, now known as the Sindar, living under the guidance of Thingol and Melian. Verlyn Flieger points out that the westward migration of the

Teleri, which she speaks of as a "fragmentation of peoples, of perceptions and languages," follows "a spasmodic and irregular course."⁶

The Nandor, Green-elves or Laiquendi, who follow the leadership of Denethor, son of Lenwë, are a simple woodland people. (There is no account of what has happened to Lenwë. He is simply never mentioned as an actor in the story again. Many died in those dangerous forests in the days of starlight. Or did he simply stay behind while Denethor led only a branch of his people?) The Nandor have no weapons of steel and find themselves increasingly terrorized by the fell minions of Melkor coming down into that area from the north.

Therefore Denethor, the son of Lenwë, hearing rumour of the might of Thingol and his majesty, and of the peace of his realm, gathered such host of his scattered people as he could, and led them over the mountains into Beleriand. There they were welcomed by Thingol, as kin long lost that return, and they dwelt in Ossiriand, the Land of Seven Rivers.⁷

Safer in close proximity to their ancient brethren, they live quietly and no stories are told of Denethor and his people during those extended years of peace.

In Beleriand still at times rode Oromë the great, passing like a wind over the mountains, and the sound of his horn came down the leagues of the starlight, and the Elves feared him for the splendour of his countenance and the great noise of the onrush of Nahar; but when the Valaróma echoed in the hills, they knew well that all evil things were fled far away.⁸

Unbeknownst to them, however, across the sea "the noontide of Valinor was drawing to its twilight."⁹ Morgoth and Ungoliant destroy the Two Trees, leaving the land of light in darkness, steal the Silmarils, and return to Middle-earth to wreak fear and destruction upon its peoples, first in the far north.

Now the Orcs that multiplied in the darkness of the earth grew strong and fell, and their dark lord filled them with a lust of ruin and death; and they issued from Angband's gates under the clouds that Morgoth sent forth, and passed silently into the highlands of the north. Thence on a sudden a great army came into Beleriand and assailed King Thingol.¹⁰

War had come upon Thingol and much more destructively upon the scattered peoples who dwelt not in Menegroth itself but surrounding the area known as Doriath in the First Age. And Thingol is cut off from Círdan as well. Desperate to deal with the onslaught, he calls upon Denethor's assistance. Denethor is a leader who has brought his people, in great hardship, through peril into safety. He is experienced and has the numbers.

Therefore he [Thingol] called upon Denethor; and the Elves came in force from Region beyond Aros and from Ossiriand, and fought the first battle in the Wars of Beleriand. And the eastern host of the Orcs was taken between the armies of the Eldar, north of the Andram and midway between Aros and Gelion, and there they were utterly defeated, and those that fled north from the great slaughter were waylaid by the axes of the Naugrim that issued from Mount Dolmed: few indeed returned to Angband. But the victory of the Elves was dear-bought. For those of Ossiriand were light-armed, and no

match for the Orcs, who were shod with iron and iron-shielded and bore great spears with broad blades; and Denethor was cut off and surrounded upon the hill of Amon Ereb. There he fell and all his nearest kin about him, before the host of Thingol could come to his aid.¹¹

That first of the five Great Battles of Beleriand, the only one fought without the participation of the Noldor, could be called a mitigated victory or a qualified defeat. It leaves beleaguered peoples, hemmed in on all sides by Melkor's fiends, with very little freedom of movement. The Orc army has been stopped, but at great cost: King Denethor is killed leading his Laiquendi troops. Meanwhile, Thingol and his people are forced to withdraw into the area of Doriath, there to be enclosed and isolated within a magical girdle of protection that Melian then creates. Círdan, meanwhile, is effectively limited to the area of the Havens of the Falas.

Upon Amon Ereb died Denethor, lord of the Nandor that dwelt in Ossiriand, who marched to the aid of Thingol against Morgoth in those days when the Orcs first came down in force, and broke the starlit peace of Beleriand; and upon that hill Maedhros dwelt after the great defeat.^{12,13}

Thingol's lands until that time have been called Eglador, but after the First Battle of Beleriand, they are referred to as Doriath, the guarded kingdom, Land of the Girdle. Only within that magic circle does there exist a watchful peace, until the coming of the Noldor. Outside of it, Morgoth's minions and fell beasts roam at will. Fear reigns throughout the rest of Beleriand. It is a perilous land indeed during those last days of starlight. Círdan's people remain safe only as long as they stay within the walled havens of the Falas.¹⁴

Bitterly though his fall was avenged, when Thingol came upon the rear of the Orcs and slew them in heaps, his people lamented him [Denethor] ever after and took no king again. After the battle some returned to Ossiriand, and their tidings filled the remnant of their people with great fear, so that thereafter they came never forth in open war, but kept themselves by wariness and secrecy; and they were called the Laiquendi, the Green-elves, because of their raiment of the colour of leaves. But many went north and entered the guarded realm of Thingol, and were merged with his people.¹⁵

The grief and shock of the Laiquendi at the death of their valiant King Denethor in this battle is so great that they pledge never again to name a king or take part in any of the wars between the Eldar and Morgoth.

Works Cited

1. *The War of the Jewels, Quendi and Eldar*, "C. The Clan-names, with notes on other names for divisions of the Eldar."
2. *The Silmarillion*, "Of the Coming of the Elves and the Captivity of Melkor."
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.

5. *The War of the Jewels, Quendi and Eldar*, Note 17.
6. Flieger, Verlyn (2002-01-28). *Splintered Light: Tolkien's World*, Revised Edition. Kent State University Press.
7. *The Silmarillion*, "Of the Sindar."
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. *The Silmarillion*, "Of Beleriand and Its Realms."
13. Maedhros knew of what he spoke when he noted, 'A king is he that can hold his own, or else his title is vain. Thingol does but grant us lands where his power does not run. Indeed Doriath alone would be his realm this day, but for the coming of the Noldor. Therefore in Doriath let him reign, and be glad that he has the sons of Finwë for his neighbours, not the Orcs of Morgoth that we found. Elsewhere it shall go as seems good to us.' *The Silmarillion*, "Of the Return of the Noldor."
14. *The Silmarillion*, "Of the Sindar."
15. Ibid.

About the Author

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