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# Character Biography

## Edrahil of Nargothrond

By Oshun

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(Any paragraphs without a footnote containing summaries of the narrative are based upon the text in *The Silmarillion*, "Of Beren and Lúthien.")

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It is that time of the year again when one is assaulted with a barrage of chilling stories of bats, werewolves, and dark magic, witches and wizardry. *The Silmarillion* is filled with tales of monsters and evil creatures that could disturb one's dreams at night, but there is hardly among those tales one more unsettling and nightmarish than the story of the capture and death of Finrod Felagund and the heroic small company led by the brave Edrahil, who set out together with Beren to steal a Silmaril from the Dark Vala Melkor.

The subject of this month's biography is one of the foremost of those loyal comrades from Nargothrond who accompanied Finrod into the heart of Morgoth's shadowy domain. Edrahil of Nargothrond is an Elf of the First Age, mentioned only once by name in the text of *The Silmarillion* as edited by Christopher Tolkien. His entry in the "Index of Names" provides us with the sparsest of information:

Edrahil Chief of the Elves of Nargothrond who accompanied Finrod and Beren on their quest, and died in the dungeons of Tol-in-Gaurhoth.<sup>1</sup>

We are given no family history or any origin or ethnicity for Edrahil. Certain things can, however, be gleaned from his behavior in the narrative.

### **‘I am Beren son of Barahir, friend of Felagund. Take me to the King!’<sup>2</sup>**

Beren arrives at Nargothrond, with a ring and a request. This event marks the beginning of a short and tragic adventure for Edrahil. His remarks and his actions are to define him as someone close to Finrod Felagund and with authority among those who gather in that hall of Nargothrond that fateful night. If Edrahil is, as he appears, a blooded warrior and trusted councilor of his lord, then he knows that Finrod proposes an all but suicidal mission.

When their king announces he intends to fulfill an oath he owes to Beren son of Barahir son of Bëor, his stated intention divides their people. Curufin and Celegorm have been in residence at Nargothrond for some time along with a large number of their people, rendered homeless when their lands are overrun in the Dagor Bragollach (Battle of Sudden Flame).

Perhaps the demand of Thingol for a Silmaril as a bride price for his daughter awakens the sleeping Oath of Fëanor, which at points in the legendarium seems to take on a will of its own. Thus, it stirs the desires of Curufin and Celegorm to usurp the authority of the king of Nargothrond, despite their having dwelt in the caverns as model citizens up to that point.

Finrod's oath to Barahir might have been given with the intent of one day being called upon to provide troops in a battle or skirmish that would protect the people of the House of Bëor. Nonetheless, the manner in which it must be honored fits within classical model of the inexorable tragic doom or fate beyond the control of a hero (no doubt, the effect of the Doom of the Noldor upon Finrod).

Beren presents Finrod with the ring and his request for help in what must seem to Finrod, at first consideration, an outlandish scheme: walking into Angband and taking a Silmaril from Morgoth. Edrahil doubtlessly watches his king and sees his doomed determination.

This chapter of *The Silmarillion*<sup>3</sup> contains more references to enchantments and magic--dark, light, or neutral--in it than many others. In an unrelated reference to Tolkien's use of magic in his stories, Verlyn Fleiger uses the apt expression, "literality approaches metaphor."<sup>4</sup> This is certainly true when one considers the effects upon the populace of Nargothrond of the arguments of Celegorm and Curufin against Finrod. They almost seem to hold their listeners under an enchantment. Magic or simple horse sense? Or a little of both? The end effect is the same. The fears and practical considerations of Nargothrond as a whole override Finrod's incandescent heroism and his resolve never to be foresworn.

Celegorm protests first against any aid to the venture of Beren to lay claim to a Silmaril. He echoes Fëanor's Oath in Tirion, in similar language, adapted only to better suit the circumstances. The implications are obvious in *The Silmarillion* version, but yet more explicit below in this citation from *The Grey Annals*:

'Know this: thy going is vain; for could ye achieve this quest it would avail nothing. Neither thee nor this Man should we suffer to keep or to give a Silmaril of Fëanor. Against thee would come all the brethren to slay thee rather. And should Thingol gain it, then we would burn Doriath or die in the attempt. For we have sworn our Oath.'<sup>5</sup>

He makes it crystal clear how they and their brothers will be unable to peacefully leave the stone in the hands of Beren. If Beren succeeds there will be a war to retrieve it. If the quest fails, as it likely will, it will end in death for all of them and Finrod will have abandoned his kingship and the city of Nargothrond on a fool's errand. The effect upon Celegorm's listeners is electrifying.

Many other words he spoke, as potent as were long before in Tirion the words of his father that first inflamed the Noldor to rebellion. And after Celegorm Curufin spoke, more softly but with no less power, conjuring in the minds of the Elves a vision of war and the ruin of Nargothrond.

So great a fear did he set in their hearts that never after until the time of Túrin would any Elf of that realm go into open battle; but with stealth and ambush, with wizardry and venomous dart, they pursued all strangers, forgetting the bonds of kinship. Thus they fell from the valour and freedom of the Elves of old, and their land was darkened. And now they murmured that Finarfin's son was not as a Vala to command them, and they turned their faces from him.<sup>6</sup>

Nargothrond thus turns from the light to darkness under the shadow of the awakening of the Oath of Fëanor. Is this dark magic fueled by the Oath or simply a non-heroic response to the

circumstances? There are reasons why Nargothrond might listen to the Fëanorians. The people of Nargothrond have welcomed the Fëanorians into their stone city. The two brothers bring a great force of highly trained and well-armed warriors, as well as skilled craftsmen along with them, not to mention their women and children. They have behaved, until that point, as exemplary guests, shoring up the defenses of the fortress city and ameliorating with their presence the increasing isolation of Nargothrond.

Finrod's proposition must seem unwise and reckless on the surface to the populace of Nargothrond, even without the magical and/or manipulative content of the not-so-veiled threats and predictions of Curufin and Celegorm. But Finrod is intractable. He allows himself to be swept up by fate, bound by honor and the oath that he has sworn to the House of Bëor.

And Felagund seeing that he was forsaken took from his head the silver crown of Nargothrond and cast it at his feet, saying: 'Your oaths of faith to me you may break, but I must hold my bond. Yet if there be any on whom the shadow of our curse has not yet fallen, I should find at least a few to follow me, and should not go hence as a beggar that is thrust from the gates.'<sup>7</sup>

Edrahil, as the chief of those warriors, is the voice of the ten heroes, a tiny splinter of the populace, who seek to honor their sworn allegiance to Finrod. Edrahil speaks not only in *The Silmarillion*, but also, although unnamed, in the earlier version of his tale in *The Lay of Leithian*, from which large segments, according to Christopher Tolkien, are copied nearly word for word into the *Quenta Silmarillion*.<sup>8</sup>

Taking a stand in support of Finrod, along with only the nine other loyalists, Edrahil's actions and words are described thusly:

Hearing these words there swiftly stood  
beside him ten tried warriors good,  
men of his house who had ever fought  
wherever his banners had been brought.  
One stooped and lifted up his crown,  
and said: 'O king, to leave this town  
is now our fate, but not to lose  
thy rightful lordship. Thou shalt choose  
one to be steward in thy stead.'  
Then Felagund upon the head  
of Orodreth set it: 'Brother mine,  
till I return this crown is thine.'  
Then Celegorm no more would stay,  
and Curufin smiled and turned away.<sup>9</sup>

The words of Edrahil are, if anything, even more moving and stronger in their simplicity in *The Silmarillion* prose version--sensible, earnest, and authoritative:

There were ten that stood by him; and the chief of them, who was named Edrahil, stooping lifted the crown and asked that it be given to a steward until Felagund's return. 'For you remain my king, and theirs,' he said, 'whatever betide.'<sup>10</sup>

It is notable, that Finrod, without question or argument, accepts the advice of Edrahil, as though he may be accustomed to his counsel. Preparations are then made for the small party to leave Nargothrond.

### **But None Betrayed Their Lord<sup>11</sup>**

Even the reader who does not know *The Silmarillion* well is filled with dread by this point in the narrative for those ten brave men, the King of Nargothrond, and Beren. Nothing good is likely to follow their leave-taking, which is even more poignant and dramatic in the verses of *The Lay of Leithian*.

Thus twelve alone they ventured forth  
from Nargothrond, and to the North.  
They turned their silent secret way,  
and vanished in the fading day.  
No trumpet sounds, no voice there sings,  
as robed in mail of cunning rings  
now blackened dark with helmets grey  
and somber folks they steal away.<sup>12</sup>

Their farewells to those near and dear to them have no doubt been sad and private. There is no cheering populace to see them off, no martial music to stir their hearts. The mood of those ten faithful warriors must have been angry, yet determined, which offsets, at least temporarily, despondency.

Those ten lords and warriors led by Edrahil have already made their hardest choice: to accompany their lord, whom they revere above others, on this venture. They are convinced at the rightness of their decision to support "King Felagund the fair,"<sup>13</sup> arguably the "the wisest of the exiled Noldor."<sup>14</sup> He may have been brought low by the machinations of his Fëanorian cousins, but they stand by their sworn loyalty to their king.

As chief among them, it is the responsibility of Edrahil to shore up any faltering among their fellowship which may follow the fading of the first hot wave of their outrage. It is also Edrahil's role to give practical counsel to his king. Their quest may seem impossible, but Finrod will give nothing less than his best effort. He has the model of success against impossible odds in his cousin Fingon's rescue of Maedhros.

Edrahil is neither soft nor inexperienced. Although the texts do not say if Edrahil is a Noldorin exile like Finrod, if one assumes he is, which many do, , then he has survived the loss of innocence of their people at Alqualondë, continued on their trek despite the pronouncement of the Doom of Mandos, and crossed the ice of the Helcaraxë. Most recently, he survived the breaking of the Siege of Angband and the loss of the majority of the vast lands of Finrod and along with their closest allies in the Dagor Bragollach. The world has been inexorably closing in upon Finrod Felagund and those committed to him for a while, but neither Felagund nor Edrahil show any signs of despair.

The fellowship of twelve make their way in the direction of Angband. Now comes a great part in the spirit of Halloween and other autumnal celebrations and traditions.

On an evening of autumn Felagund and Beren set out from Nargothrond with their ten companions; and they journeyed beside Narog to his source in the Falls of Ivrin. Beneath the Shadowy Mountains they came upon a company of Orcs, and slew them all in their camp by night; and they took their gear and their weapons.

By the arts of Felagund their own forms and faces were changed into the likeness of Orcs; and thus disguised they came far upon their northward road, and ventured into the western pass, between Ered Wethrin and the highlands of Taur-nu-Fuin.<sup>15</sup>

There is something almost endearing about these fierce and handsome Noldorin warriors, especially the blond and beautiful Finrod Felagund, skulking along in their Orkish masquerade. This again raises the question of magic—of the depth of Felagund's deep arts.

Their disguises might have hidden them from the eyes of Morgoth's minions and lieutenants, but their behavior patterns betray them. They hurry along to an unknown destination, not stopping to report to their supposed superiors. Sauron spots them and takes them captive. And the reader is treated to another piece of Felagund's High Elven magic. The great song battle between Finrod and Sauron, hard fought on both sides, ends with Felagund falling before Sauron's throne. At that moment, Finrod loses control of his magic and the twelve are revealed as Elves.

Behold! they are in their own fair shape,  
fairskinned, brighteyed. No longer gape  
Orclike their mouths; and now they stand  
betrayed into the wizard's hand.  
Thus came they unhappy into woe,  
to dungeons no hope nor glimmer know,  
where chained in chains that eat the flesh  
and woven in webs of strangling mesh  
they lay forgotten, in despair.<sup>16</sup>

In despair perhaps, but Edrahil's adamant courage does not falter. Neither he nor any of his comrades give any indication of their identity or their mission. We are never told if Edrahil was one of the earlier ones to die or even perhaps the last, save Felagund and Beren.

There in the pits of Sauron one by one the twelve companions were slain and devoured by werewolves, until at last only Beren and Felagund remained. But none had betrayed them, and Sauron could not learn the errand upon which they went. He left the Elven-king to the last, for he knew who he was, and deemed that he was the mover in whatever venture was devised. But when the wolf came to Beren, Felagund with his last strength broke his bonds, and wrestled naked-handed with the wolf and slew it, and was slain.<sup>17</sup>

The story of Edrahil is one of epic courage and loyalty, outstanding within the legendarium containing many other examples of personal strength and determination.

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## Addendum on Edrahil's Name

One way of determining interesting or additional information about a character within Tolkien's legendarium is to consider his name. In the case of Edrahil, there are no explicit remarks in the texts relating to the etymology of his name.

Quenya101, energetic Silmarillion language enthusiast and expert, active on several online venues, states that Edrahil ". . . is definitely a Sindarin name. Quenya orthography doesn't allow such consonant cluster as 'dr'."<sup>18</sup>

In the character biography of Edrahil on the Henneth Annûn story site, his name is speculated upon in greater detail:

In the Lay of Leithian (HoMe 3, Lays of Beleriand), none of the ten Elves who set out from Nargothrond with Beren and Felagund to try and recover a Silmaril from Morgoth's crown, are given a name. In the *Quenta Silmarillion* (HoMe 5, *The Lost Road*), one of them does get a name: Enedrion, which could be patronymic (son of Enede/ir?). In the Grey Annals (HoMe 11, *War of the Jewels*), probably in the version written in the 1950's, this name is changed to Edrahil. At first sight this looks Sindarin, but as it doesn't show consonant mutation - in which case it would be Edrachil - it is probably Quenya, or at least partially Quenya like the name Fëanor. That would make Edrahil an exiled Noldo from Valinor.<sup>19</sup>

And, further, upon inquiry, Elleth, a long-time fan with a well-developed interest in Tolkien's work and languages, notes:

There are attempts at interpretations here, which I can neither confirm nor deny, though given Edrahil's role in the story and Tolkien's propensity for aptronymic naming I agree that the second element probably derives from *-hil*; follower. For the first element I'm not entirely sure, but a verb, *edra-* to open exists, and what looks like perhaps either a derivation via semantic shift or a homonym, *edraith* as a noun is attested (and its ending in *-th* makes me think that it's a nominalized verb that in its verbal form I think would also be *edra-*): saving, e.g. in Gandalf's cry against the werewolf attack in *FotR II*, *aur an edraith ammen*, fire be the saving of us, so perhaps *Saving-Follower* or something along those lines would work as interpretation, given his refusal to accept Finrod's abdication and his role in passing the office to Orodreth.

Of course it's also possible that Tolkien adapted the form *Enedrion* in form rather than meaning since that isn't particularly uncommon a *modus operandi* for him either, but my knowledge of Tolkien's text-external evolution of Sindarin doesn't exist, so I can't judge how plausible that idea is. . . .<sup>20</sup>

Elleth's proposed interpretation (the possibility that Tolkien could be thinking of *Saving-Follower* when he constructed the name), is certainly an appealing one, and fits with naming conventions used for other characters, as she notes the use of an aptronym, which is a name chosen especially appropriate to the individual. (The best known of those names based upon personal characteristics is the mother-name or *amilëssë*. Because, Tolkien notes ". . . the mothers of the Eldar were gifted with deep insight into their children's characters and abilities, and many had also the gift of prophetic foresight."<sup>21</sup>

It remains a plausible assumption that Edrahil is, like his king, a Noldorin exile. His courage in standing beside Finrod Felagund to the very end speaks to the character of both. Edrahil is an admirable Elf-knight, who refuses under the direst of circumstances to betray his sworn lord, whom he considers worthy of the ultimate loyalty.

### Author's Note:

The *Silmarillion* aficionados active on Tumblr are at least partially responsible for the existence of this biography. One encounters the name Edrahil in discussions there more often than might be expected for a character, who, although not lacking importance, is mentioned only in one instance in the texts. In addition to those footnoted herein, I would also like to thank the Elvish language specialists on Tumblr for entertaining my request for assistance in attempting to unravel the nature of the name of Edrahil.

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### Works Cited

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6. *The Silmarillion*, "Of Beren and Lúthien."
7. Ibid.
8. *The Lays of Beleriand, The Lay of Leithian*.
9. Ibid.
10. *The Silmarillion*, "Of Beren and Lúthien."
11. Ibid.
12. *The Lays of Beleriand, The Lay of Leithian*, Canto VII.
13. Ibid.
14. Tolkien's introductory notes to the *Morgoth's Ring, Athrabeth Finrod Ah Andreth*.
15. *The Silmarillion*, "Of Beren and Lúthien."
16. *The Lays of Beleriand, The Lay of Leithian*, Canto VII.
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18. Private correspondence from Quenya101, 30 September 2013.
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### About the Author

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