
Character Biography

Eluréd and Elurín

By Oshun

Eluréd and Elurín are famous in Tolkien's legendarium as the little lost princes whose tragic demise is recounted in the story of the assault upon Doriath by the Feanorians and the ruin of Thingol and Melian's magnificent city of Menegroth. *The War of Jewels* reports that, in the year 500 of the First Age, twin sons are born to Dior and Nimloth.¹ One usually does not write a single character biography for two individuals, no matter how closely linked, but, in this case, there is no mention whatsoever in any of Tolkien's writings of either one of them independent of the other.

Their father, usually referred to as Dior Eluchil, is the only offspring of one of Tolkien's most famous mixed marriages, that of Beren and Lúthien. The grandparents of the lost boys on their father's side are Elu Thingol and Melian the Maia. Dior, the first of the legendary *Peredhel*,² in Tolkien's complicated histories, is not actually half-Elven himself, but half-Edain, one-quarter Elven, and one-quarter Maiarin. Nimloth, the mother of the twins, a kinswoman of illustrious Sindarin lineage herself, is fully Elven, which would make Eluréd and Elurín only one-quarter-Edain, but one-eighth Maiarin and fully five-eighths Elven. Nimloth, like so many of Tolkien's characters, has an interesting and somewhat contradictory backstory also.

Nimloth is said to be the niece of Celeborn in accordance with the version that Celeborn is a Sindarin elf, the grandson of Elmo brother of Thingol and Olwë Telerin King in Alqualondë in Aman, as recounted in *Unfinished Tales*⁽⁵⁾ and Appendix B to *The Lord of the Rings*⁽⁶⁾. "Elmo's son was named Galadhon, and his sons were Celeborn and Galathil; Galathil was the father of Nimloth, who wedded Dior Thingol's Heir and was the mother of Elwing"⁽⁷⁾.

(5) *Unfinished Tales, The History of Galadriel and Celeborn and of Amroth King of Lórien*.

(6) *The Lord of the Rings, Return of the King*, Appendix B.

(7) *Unfinished Tales, The History of Galadriel and Celeborn and of Amroth King of Lórien*.³

An earlier set of names is used for the boys in the account of their birth in the index known as *The Tale of the Years*: "500. Elrún and Eldún twin sons of Dior are born."⁴ Christopher Tolkien chooses in his edited version of *The Silmarillion* to use the later names Eluréd and Elurín.⁵

In naming them, their parents choose to point to their connection to the Eldar and specifically to their great grandfather Elu Thingol, the most famous of the leaders of the Sindarin people, the King of Doriath, who liked to fancy himself as the sole Lord of Beleriand. (See [SWG Character Biography of Elu Thingol](#)). The names of both princes refer back to that illustrious patriarch.

Eluréd Elder son of Dior; perished in the attack on Doriath by the sons of Fëanor. The name means the same as Eluchil. [This is heir of Elu.]

Elurín Younger son of Dior; perished with his brother Eluréd. The name means 'Remembrance of Elu (Thingol)'.⁶

As nearly as one can surmise from the text of the published *Silmarillion*, Eluréd and Elurín were born while their parents lived with Beren and Lúthien in Tol Galen in Ossiriand, which is described as "the Green Isle, in the River Adurant, southernmost of the streams that falling from Ered Lindon flowed down to join with Gelion."⁷ Their surviving sister is Elwing, who will become the wife of Eärendil, the son of Idril and Tuor, and the mother of Elrond and Elros.⁸

Lost children comprise a theme in storytelling that almost certainly predates written literature. A particularly compelling model of that plot might involve a mystery surrounding the disappearance of two little princes, who vanish or are kidnapped and are presumed killed, starved to death, or even eaten by wild beasts, under circumstances which would amount to murder or at very least the intent to harm. When one reads this story, one is drawn to consider instances recounted in real history, as well as those in myth and legend.

Recent news of the possible discovery of the bones King Richard III of England in a car park in Leicester has led to a renewal of the discussion of the mystery of the disappearance of that much maligned king's nephews, often referred to as the Princes in the Tower. There has always been an audience, from the time of the Tudors to the present day, for more speculation, accusations, argument, and tales about those children's possible end. Tolkien would have been quite familiar with that ever-fascinating piece of unresolved English history. The parallels are stunning. The claim of the Princes in the Tower to the throne of England was not only a possible obstacle to its appropriation by their uncle Richard III, but a much greater threat to Richard's usurpers of the House of Tudor.⁹

Eluréd and Elurín may have held a claim to the Silmaril, taken at such cost from Morgoth by Beren and Lúthien, and flaunted by their father Dior. Their disappearance, however, did not in any way facilitate its seizure by the sons of Fëanor, who temporarily lose their chance to seize it when young Elwing is whisked away to safety with it in her possession. Similar to prevalent but unproven theories of the demise of the lost sons of Edward IV of England, which claim that Richard killed them or ordered them to be slain, Tolkien states in one of a few apparently abandoned versions that Dior's sons were murdered outright by the Fëanorians.

Eluréd and Elurín, before they came to manhood, were both slain by the sons of Fëanor, in the last and most abominable deed brought about by the curse that the impious oath of Fëanor laid upon them. But Elwing was saved and fled with the Silmaril to the havens of the surviving Eldar at the Mouths of Sirion.¹⁰

The words "in the last and most abominable deed" do not fit with what follows as the story for the quest for the Silmarils continues to unfold. The sons of Fëanor are driven to future kinslayings in Christopher Tolkien's published version of *The Silmarillion*.

Artist and fantasist Terri Windling, who has also written several non-fiction articles exploring archetypal themes of fairy tales and fantasy, examines aspects of the genre of lost children in an article cited below. Although she concentrates mainly in the referenced article upon children who are found again, she remarks aptly that the lost child in folk and fairy tales is

. . . not, however, a mere fantasy cliché; it's a mythic archetype, springing from some of the oldest stories of the world. This archetype includes not only those characters who

are literally orphaned by the death of their parents, but also children who are lost, abandoned, cast out, disinherited by evil step-parents, raised in supernatural captivity, or reared by wild animals.¹¹

The list of stories which may be compared and contrasted with that of Eluréd and Elurín is a long one. In English language poems and ballads, one encounters numerous versions of the tale of the Babes Lost in the Woods. And we are all familiar with the fairytale of Hansel and Gretel. Additionally, most of us were first also in our childhood presented with the legend of Romulus and Remus, the mythical founders of Rome. We heard it told as a legend or myth, while at one time it was treated as history. Those twins are said to have been conceived by a god or demigod, snatched from their mother, and raised by a wolf, only to survive and change history. One cannot beat that for good storytelling.

Among Tolkien's various drafts of the story of Eluréd and Elurín, he also toys momentarily with the idea of their survival, or the hint of it at least.

Nothing certain is known of their fate, but some say that the birds succoured them, and led them to Ossir.¹²

Christopher Tolkien chooses to include in the published *Silmarillion* the version of the lost twins' tale that seemed to him the most coherent and fully developed.

There fell Celegorm by Dior's hand, and there fell Curufin, and dark Caranthir; but Dior was slain also, and Nimloth his wife, and the cruel servants of Celegorm seized his young sons and left them to starve in the forest.¹³

This is also in the draft of the story containing in its continuation the largest number of important narrative elements, explaining how the assault of the Fëanorians upon Doriath to retrieve the Silmaril, failed in more ways than one. Not only did it destroy that fabled marvel of the City of a Thousand Caves, but the bloody battle did not regain the Silmaril for its instigators; rather, it resulted in the deaths of three of Fëanor's sons. Tolkien presents his audience with a loss for all parties and a critical defeat for the Fëanorians in a string of losses in a long drawn-out losing struggle.

Of further significance for a reading audience fascinated by the quest for the Silmarils, it provides a means for holding their interest in the fate of those tragic almost-heroes struggling courageously and futilely under the damnation of the Curse of Mandos. Interest would sharply wane if Tolkien presented them as evil unmitigated. Maedhros and the sons of Fëanor do not kill or cruelly abandon the children, but the deed is done by wicked servants of Celegorm, who, in sorrow and rage at the loss of their leader, leave them to their fate in the forest.

Of this Maedhros indeed repented, and sought for them long in the woods of Doriath; but his search was unavailing, and of the fate of Eluréd and Elurín no tale tells.¹⁴

The conclusion of the tragic tale of the little lost princes of Doriath brings us full circle back into the center of the foremost story of *The Silmarillion*—the continued quest for the Silmarils and Doom of the Noldor. Maedhros is frustrated even in his act of repentance, his desire to rescue and succor those innocents, perhaps doubly inspired by the pain of the related loss of three of his own brothers. Meanwhile the princes' fate remains a mystery, subsumed into the larger tragedy of that long road to defeat predicted when the Noldor set out upon their doomed quest.

The Silmarillion Writers' Guild Reference Library

<http://www.silmarillionwritersguild.org/reference/characterofthemonth/elured-elurin.php>

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Works Cited

1. *The War of the Jewels, The Tale of Years.*
2. *The Silmarillion*, "Index of Names." *Peredhil* is the plural for the Sindarin *Peredhel*, meaning Half-elven.
3. SWG Character Biography of Nimloth of Doriath.
4. *The War of the Jewels, The Tale of Years.*
5. *The Silmarillion*, "Of the Ruin of Doriath."
6. *The Silmarillion*, "Index of Names."
7. *The Silmarillion*, "Of the Ruin of Doriath."
8. Ibid.
9. *The New York Times, Leicester Journal*, September 23, 2012. "Discovery of Skeleton Puts Richard III in Battle Once Again," by John F. Burns.

" . . . those who believe that Richard has been the victim of a campaign of denigration — begun by the Tudor monarchs who succeeded him and deeply entrenched over the centuries in British popular consciousness — hope the renewed attention will spur scholarship that will correct the injustice they say has been done to his reputation. . . .

"The version that has prevailed since his death, initially nurtured by the Tudors to entrench their legitimacy, has cast Richard's 26 months on the throne as one of England's grimmest periods, its excesses captured in his alleged role in the murder in the Tower of London of two young princes — his own nephews — to rid himself of potential rivals."

10. *The Peoples of Middle-earth*, "The Problem of Ros."
11. "The Orphaned Hero in Myth, Folklore, and Fantasy" by Terri Windling, Summer 2007, *The Journal of Mythic Arts: Articles: Myth & Folklore*, <http://www.endicott-studio.com/rdrm/rrOrphans.html>
12. *The War of the Jewels, The Grey Annals.*
13. *The Silmarillion*, "Of the Ruin of Doriath."
14. Ibid.

About the Author

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