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# Character Biography

## Finarfin

By Oshun

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Finarfin is the third son of Finwë, the first King of the Noldor. He is given a birthdate of 1230 of the Years of the Trees in Valinor.<sup>1</sup>

*Finarfin* Third son of Finwë, the younger of Fëanor's half-brothers; remained in Aman after the Flight of the Noldor and ruled the remnant of his people in Tirion; father of Finrod, Orodreth, Angrod, Aegnor, and Galadriel.<sup>2</sup>

First, just to make sure everyone is on the same page, there are a lot of confusing references to the name of Finwë's youngest son. In earlier versions of the texts, Finarfin is referred to as "Finrod," which can make the reading difficult at times. The confusion of the names for Finarfin is carried into the first edition of *The Lord of the Rings* as well.

Before the revised edition of *The Lord of the Rings* was published in 1966 my father changed Finrod to Finarfin, while his son Felagund, previously called Inglor Felagund, became Finrod Felagund. Two passages in the Appendices B and F were accordingly emended for the revised edition.<sup>3</sup>

Finarfin is a Sindarin name used by the exiled Noldor in Middle-earth. The name Arafinwë (Quenya, meaning "noble [son of] Finwë") is the name he was known by in Aman. His mother-name was Ingoldo, changed in the texts from the earlier Ingalaurë.<sup>4</sup> *The Shibboleth of Fëanor* further states that

Fingolfin had prefixed the name Finwë to Ñolofinwë before the Exiles reached Middle-earth. This was in pursuance of his claim to be the chieftain of all the Noldor after the death of Finwë, and so enraged Fëanor (33) that it was no doubt one of the reasons for his treachery in abandoning Fingolfin and stealing away with all the ships. The prefixion in the case of Finarfin was made by Finrod only after the death of Fingolfin in single combat with Morgoth.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, Finarfin would have thereafter been referred to in Quenya as Finwë Arafinwë, which according to the exilic naming traditions was translated into Sindarin as the shortened and combined *Finarfin*, the name readers know from *The Silmarillion*. In his essay [It's All in the Family: The Finweans](#), Michael Martinez suggests that the prefix *Finwë* has through this process become essentially a title.

Curiously, the *Shibboleth* says that Finrod himself created the name "Finwe Arafinwe", or "Finarfin," after the death of Fingolfin, at which time the Noldor became divided into separate kingships. Although this statement would seem to contradict *The Silmarillion* (which explicitly mentions the kings of the Noldor prior to Fingolfin's death), Tolkien's intentions are not clear. Still, the use of Finwe's name as a prefix became a royal prerogative.<sup>6</sup>

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## Finarfin's Road to Becoming King of the Noldor in Valinor

As the third son of Finwë, Finarfin would have been raised as a royal prince but with little likelihood that he would ever be expected to rule. After the murder of Finwë and the theft of the Silmarils, Fëanor leaves Aman against the express wishes of the Valar. Although Finarfin begins this journey also, he does eventually turn back.

For many if not most readers, Finarfin may seem the least exciting of Finwë's sons. It's hard to compete with the deeds and reputations of Fëanor or Fingolfin. *The Silmarillion* describes the death of Fëanor, the eldest of Finwë's sons and half-brother of Fingolfin and Finarfin thusly:

Thus ended the mightiest of the Noldor, of whose deeds came both their greatest renown and their most grievous woe.<sup>7</sup>

Fingolfin, Finarfin's older full brother, is remembered for his ability to hold together an alliance of the quarrelsome Noldor, along with others, against Morgoth for over 400 years. There is no more daring act than Fingolfin's single-combat challenge to Morgoth.

Thus he came alone to Angband's gates, and he sounded his horn, and smote once more upon the brazen doors, and challenged Morgoth to come forth to single combat. And Morgoth came.<sup>8</sup>

With this audacious performance by Fingolfin, the reader learns that Fingon the Valiant's daring deeds throughout the First Age reflect that the acorn has not fallen far from the tree.

Neither does Finarfin, from what may be gleaned from the texts, compete with Fëanor in any areas of scholarship or creative genius. He certainly does not appear to share Fëanor's abrasive iconoclastic insistence upon independence from the Valar.

Fëanor was the mightiest in skill of word and of hand, more learned than his brothers; his spirit burned as a flame. Fingolfin was the strongest, the most steadfast, and the most valiant.<sup>9</sup>

Then the text continues immediately to contrast Finarfin with both of his brothers.

Finarfin was the fairest, and the most wise of heart; and afterwards he was a friend of the sons of Olwë, lord of the Teleri, and had to wife Eärwen, the swan-maiden of Alqualondë, Olwë's daughter.<sup>10</sup>

Amongst the three, Fingolfin is to excel as the model of a warrior-king in the wilds of Middle-earth, one who manifests diplomatic and organizational attributes of leadership, as well as those of a military nature. Fingolfin's High Kingship in Middle-earth shares characteristics that were valued in various martial cultures in the ancient history of our world, as well as those of the European Middle Ages and its immediate antecedents. In her book *Masculinity in Tolkien*, Melanie Rost states

There can be found many similarities to the Anglo-Saxon warrior society of *Beowulf* and *The Wanderer* in *The Silmarillion*. Especially in the tale of the Noldor and their rebellion and long fight in Middle-earth, it seems that the men as well are solely defined by their role as warriors. The example of Fëanor especially shows how the

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warriors' ties to kin and lord are of the utmost importance. He is described as "the mightiest in all parts of body and mind," (Tolkien, *Silmarillion* 108) yet he is also the first elf to threaten another with a blade.<sup>11</sup>

However, it would be outlandish to imply that Finarfin has no capacity as a military leader, when at the end of the First Age, he actually does head the forces of Amanyarin Noldor, referred to as the host of the Valar, in the War of Wrath that lasted forty-two years. (However, even in that capacity his role is eclipsed in detail and number of words by the actions first of Eärendil and later the resolution of the problem of Maedhros and Maglor relating to the recovered Silmarils.) The tale of the War of Wrath will be explored in greater detail below. Tolkien takes some pains in his narrative to show that Finarfin has different strengths from these warrior kings of Middle-earth and, throughout his history, pursues markedly different strategies, not to mention with different motivations.

Returning to the background of the three brothers, their issues, and their similarities and differences, we read that in "the Noontide of the Blessed Realm, the fullness of its glory and its bliss, long in tale of years, but in memory too brief"<sup>12</sup> Míriel Serindë gives birth to Finwë's first son Fëanor. He appears at the apex of that period during which, according to noted Tolkien scholar Verlyn Flieger,

. . . participation in the light of the Trees is at its height. With telling choice of words, Tolkien calls this time "the Noontide of the Blessed Realm," the time of brightest light, the highest point between rising and setting.

The top is also the beginning of the descent, and this peak is the moment when the light begins to decline, to turn downward toward the dark.<sup>13</sup>

The sons of Indis, Fingolfin and Finarfin, are born just past that highest point, but into a totally different set of circumstances and assumptions than greeted Fëanor. (The world of the Noldor in Valinor is divided into before and after the death of Míriel Serindë.) Tolkien, who is loath to concede that second marriages are ever a good idea, notes, however, that "the children of Indis were great and glorious, and their children also; and if they had not lived the history of the Eldar would have been diminished."<sup>14</sup> The depiction of Finarfin in *The Shibboleth of Fëanor* declares him to be

. . . of his mother's kind in mind and body, having the golden hair of the Vanyar, their noble and gentle temper, and their love of the Valar. As well as he could he kept aloof from the strife of his brothers and their estrangement from the Valar, and he often sought peace among the Teleri, whose language he learned. He wedded Eärwen, the daughter of King Olwë, and his children were thus the kin of King Elwë Sindikollo (in Sindarin Elu Thingol) of Doriath in Beleriand, for he was the brother of Olwë; and this kinship influenced their decision to join in the Exile, and proved of great importance later in Beleriand.<sup>15</sup>

Tolkien makes the point more than once in slightly different language that the least tarnished among those Noldorin offspring of Indis are Finarfin and his children. First we have the father, who is the single one among the princes of the Noldor to turn his back on the rebellious trek of his self-exiled brethren, return to Valinor to beg forgiveness of the Valar, and take upon himself the governance of the remaining ten percent of his once populous people. And his children include two of the most gifted and glorious of the Noldor, Finrod and Galadriel.

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The sons of Finarfin were Finrod the faithful (who was afterwards named Felagund, Lord of Caves), Orodreth, Angrod, and Aegnor; these four were as close in friendship with the sons of Fingolfin as though they were all brothers. A sister they had, Galadriel, most beautiful of all the house of Finwë; her hair was lit with gold as though it had caught in a mesh the radiance of Laurelin.<sup>16</sup>

But to return to the time of the first waning of the glory days of the Noldor in Valinor, Finwë's remarriage left his mightiest son Fëanor damaged. There are several unfortunate aspects to the outcome of Fëanor's loss of his mother, not the least of which is his unbalanced attitude toward his stepmother and her sons. He never reconciles himself to the remarriage of his father "and he had no great love for Indis, nor for Fingolfin and Finarfin, her sons."<sup>17</sup>

However, as the story is recounted in various versions of the *Silmarillion* texts, Fëanor is not the only one among his kin who is arrogant and intolerant: Fingolfin dives right into that mud-wrestling ring with him.

High princes were Fëanor and Fingolfin, the elder sons of Finwë, honoured by all in Aman; but now they grew proud and jealous each of his rights and his possessions.<sup>18</sup>

Caught amidst the rivalry and bitterness of his two older brothers, Finarfin, conversely, appears to have remained temperate and above the worst of the fray. When Melkor begins to spread lies and foment dissent within the Noldor, Finarfin appears of the three brothers to be least affected by these slanders.

Then Melkor set new lies abroad in Eldamar, and whispers came to Fëanor that Fingolfin and his sons were plotting to usurp the leadership of Finwë and of the elder line of Fëanor, and to supplant them by the leave of the Valar; for the Valar were ill-pleased that the Silmarils lay in Tirion and were not committed to their keeping. But to Fingolfin and Finarfin it was said: 'Beware! Small love has the proud son of Míriel ever had for the children of Indis. Now he has become great, and he has his father in his hand. It will not be long before he drives you forth from Túna!'<sup>19</sup>

Even at the time that Fëanor swears his infamous oath, Finarfin remains calm and counsels the consideration of possible consequences.

. . . many quailed to hear the dread words. For so sworn, good or evil, an oath may not be broken, and it shall pursue oathkeeper and oathbreaker to the world's end. Fingolfin and Turgon his son therefore spoke against Fëanor, and fierce words awoke, so that once again wrath came near to the edge of swords. *But Finarfin spoke softly, as was his wont, and sought to calm the Noldor, persuading them to pause and ponder ere deeds were done that could not be undone*>: and Orodreth, alone of his sons, spoke in like manner. [emphasis added]<sup>20</sup>

Fëanor's powerful rhetoric and promises of lands and independence, however, convince the vast majority to follow him from Valinor and abandon Aman.

. . . and the greater part of the Noldor there assembled he set aflame with the desire of new things and strange countries. Therefore when Finarfin spoke yet again for heed and delay, a great shout went up: 'Nay, let us be gone!'<sup>21</sup>

Still Finarfin warns for prudence and against their haste and is shouted down by his compatriots. Fingolfin, on the other hand, while he bitterly argues against Fëanor's claim to kingship, along with his son Turgon, does not look back, propelled in part by the eagerness of his son Fingon.<sup>22</sup>

Slower and less eagerly came the host of Fingolfin after them. Of those Fingon was the foremost; **but at the rear went Finarfin** and Finrod, and many of the noblest and wisest of the Noldor; and often they looked behind them to see their fair city, until the lamp of the Mindon Eldaliéva was lost in the night. More than any others of the Exiles they carried thence memories of the bliss they had forsaken . . . . [emphasis added]<sup>23</sup>

Several years ago, Dawn Felagund wrote an essay entitled, [The Accidental King: Five Reasons Why Finarfin Deserves More Appreciation](#). Therein she defends Finarfin, citing examples of how she feels he has been underestimated. She notes

. . . my first thought was how little is said about him. How little he does in the book. Truly, many people, I think, will admit that Finarfin is a little boring, especially compared to his older brothers. I've seen him called a wimp and portrayed as a coward; I've even taken advantage of his lack of ambition in some of my own comedy pieces. During the Noldorin rebellion, when his brothers get all of the righteous outrage and sig-line-worthy quotes, it is said of Finarfin that he "spoke softly, as was his wont . . ." <sup>24</sup>

She has hit here an aspect of pivotal importance concerning the role of Finarfin and the difference between him and his brothers—"he spoke softly." Finarfin's choices and his virtues are the antithesis of the strengths of the Noldor as a people and his brothers in particular, which are also their weaknesses. He might even be said to be the Hobbit, in the Tolkienian sense of a simpler, humbler sort of person, within this segment of the tale. Finarfin is the third son, the least willful and prideful, or as Dawn calls him the "Accidental King"—neither expecting nor seeking to fill that position.

His calm humility enables him to reflect while others react and then to follow his conscience. Tolkien writes in a letter stating that a central or primary theme of *The Lord of the Rings* is that it is "a study of the ennoblement (or sanctification) of the humble."<sup>25</sup> One might use that same description to elucidate the nature and role of Finarfin, an incidental king or king by virtue not of ambition or birth but circumstances set into play by others.

In an essay on Finarfin aptly entitled [The Last Prince](#), avanti\_90, an aficionado of Tolkien's works and fanfiction author, posits a fascinating observation about the three sons of Finwë.

There is a favorite fairytale trope that everyone knows. It's been played with by everybody from Scheherazade to Isaac Asimov. It goes like this: Once upon a time there was an aging king who had three sons. The eldest was a great craftsman, praised by all the people for his skill. The second was the strongest, and was admired by everyone for his courage. Both of them were proud of their abilities, perhaps more than justly so, and each vied to outdo the other in everything.<sup>26</sup>

She continues to explain the convergence of the description of Finarfin in *The Silmarillion* with the fairytale trope of the fabled "third son."

Finarfin is very much the archetypal third prince; noble, peaceful and self-effacing by nature, he stays apart from the constant arguments and political intrigues of his brothers.

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He even marries a princess, though of course it's unlikely that either of his brothers wanted her.<sup>27</sup>

She further elucidates that the result of Finarfin's participation in the final outcome of the story of the Noldor in the First Age is not dissimilar from the outcome of the actions of the third son in the denouement of those fables. He wins honor and the throne that his proud contentious brothers have been fighting over.

Also to the point and evocative are the remarks by Terri Windling in her article, [Tolkien and Fairy Stories](#).

He likens fairy-stories to a pot of soup into which mythology, romance, history, hagiography, folk tales, and literary creations have all been tossed together and left to simmer through the centuries. Each storyteller dips into this soup when writing or recounting magical tales — the best of which have slipped right back into the collective pot.<sup>28</sup>

Jason Fisher in a book on Tolkien's sources makes points which seem to support the idea that Tolkien would not have been at all loath to adapt and rewrite such a trope to suit his purposes. It is perhaps more likely that he simply and unselfconsciously dipped into that common caldron of soup mentioned above. He does, however, make conscious choices as well to refer to past sagas or literary conventions.

Tolkien's works are deliberately complex and multi-layered, drawing on many traditions, even interacting with them in a kind of mythic literary conversation. The principal conceit of Tolkien's legendarium is that it stands as a lost prehistoric tradition, of which the many myths and legends we know in our own primary world are meant (fictively, by Tolkien) to be echoes, fragments, and transformations. Tolkien viewed his legendarium as seeding the world's mythologies and their expansive repositories of tales.<sup>29</sup>

And he later explains not only how Tolkien used general themes from myth and legend, but many more specific ones throughout his body of work.

. . . Tolkien frequently took elements from multiple sources and wove them into single episodes, characters, or passages in his work. One example comes, again, from the dragon Smaug, where elements of his characterization and actions reveal sources in both the Old English *Beowulf* and the Old Norse *Fáfnismál*. Such layering of source upon source, with imaginative leaps to connect and transform them, and to reconcile their inconsistencies, is one of the more unique aspects of Tolkien's creative process.<sup>30</sup>

Despite one's having only a few unembellished facts to reply upon, it is clear that Finarfin was intended by Tolkien to be the purer or more virtuous brother in comparison to his flashier and more flawed siblings.

Finarfin follows Fëanor out of Tirion—well to the rear, as was noted above, although not out of any lack of courage. He does not turn back even when the departing Noldor are stopped at the gates to receive a warning from a messenger sent by Manwë.

'Against the folly of Fëanor shall be set my counsel only. Go not forth! For the hour is evil, and your road leads to sorrow that ye do not foresee. No aid will the Valar lend you



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in this quest; but neither will they hinder you; for this ye shall know: as ye came hither freely, freely shall ye depart. But thou Fëanor Finwë's son, by thine oath art exiled. The lies of Melkor thou shalt unlearn in bitterness. Vala he is, thou saist. Then thou hast sworn in vain, for none of the Valar canst thou overcome now or ever within the halls of Eä, not though Eru whom thou namest had made thee thrice greater than thou art.<sup>31</sup>

Finarfin continues to soldier on after this portentous warning and follows with his people all the way to Alqualondë. It is important to note here that Finarfin's connection to Alqualondë and the Teleri is close one.

As well as he could he kept aloof from the strife of his brothers and their estrangement from the Valar, and he often sought peace among the Teleri, whose language he learned.<sup>32</sup>

Not only did he marry the daughter of King Olwë, but he adapted the Telerin language and gave his children Telerin names. After the continued use of Þ over the letter S is made a point of political dispute among the Noldor by Fëanor, Finarfin exceptionally continued the use the Þ, which was used by both the Vanyar and the Teleri.

The change to s had become general among the Noldor long before the birth of Galadriel and no doubt was familiar to her. Her father Finarfin, however, loved the Vanyar (his mother's people) and the Teleri, and in his house Þ was used, Finarfin being moved by Fëanor neither one way or the other but doing as he wished.<sup>33</sup>

Returning to the journey of the Noldor to the sea, we reach a critical point in the history of the flight of the Noldor from Aman. Fëanor decided that that best way to reach Middle-earth was to go to Alqualondë and acquire ships from the Teleri to complete their journey by sea. He asks King Olwë for ships and his assistance, but Olwë refuses.

Then Fëanor grew wrathful, for he still feared delay; and hotly he spoke to Olwë. 'You renounce your friendship, even in the hour of our need,' he said. 'Yet you were glad indeed to receive our aid when you came at last to these shores, fainthearted loiterers, and wellnigh emptyhanded. In huts on the beaches would you be dwelling still, had not the Noldor carved out your haven and toiled upon your walls.'

But Olwë answered: 'We renounce no friendship. But it may be the part of a friend to rebuke a friend's folly.'<sup>34</sup>

Fëanor then decides to take the ships by force. Olwë points out to Fëanor, "these are to us as are the gems of the Noldor: the work of our hearts, whose like we shall not make again."<sup>35</sup> The Teleri, armed with bows, then defend their ships. The followers of Fëanor, initially taken unawares, find themselves being tossed into the water. Many of them are unable to swim. The violence escalates and the Noldor are far better armed. The first of Fingolfin's people begin to arrive and many, including Fingon, jump into the melee.

Thus at last the Teleri were overcome, and a great part of their mariners that dwelt in Alqualondë were wickedly slain. For the Noldor were become fierce and desperate, and the Teleri had less strength, and were armed for the most part but with slender bows.<sup>36</sup>

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The majority of the Noldor survive the kinslaying at Alqualondë, but the way is difficult. Some travel by ship along the coast and others on foot.

. . . the way was long and ever more evil as they went forward. After they had marched for a great while in the unmeasured night, they came at length to the northern confines of the Guarded Realm, upon the borders of the empty waste of Araman which were mountainous and cold. There they beheld suddenly a dark figure standing high upon a rock that looked down upon the shore. Some say that it was Mandos himself, and no lesser herald of Manwë.<sup>37</sup>

There, Manwë's herald addresses the Noldor with the message which comes to be called the Prophecy of the North and the Doom of the Noldor, or sometimes the Curse of Mandos.

"Tears unnumbered ye shall shed; and the Valar will fence Valinor against you, and shut you out, so that not even the echo of your lamentation shall pass over the mountains. On the House of Feanor the wrath of the Valar lieth from the West unto the uttermost East, and upon all that will follow them it shall be laid also. Their Oath shall drive them, and yet betray them, and ever snatch away the very treasures that they have sworn to pursue. To evil end shall all things turn that they begin well; and by treason of kin unto kin, and the fear of treason, shall this come to pass. The Dispossessed shall they be for ever.

"Ye have spilled the blood of your kindred unrighteously and have stained the land of Aman. For blood ye shall render blood, and beyond Aman ye shall dwell in Death's shadow. For though Eru appointed to you to die not in Ea, and no sickness may assail you, yet slain ye may be, and slain ye shall be: by weapon and by torment and by grief; and your houseless spirits shall come then to Mandos. There long shall ye abide and yearn for your bodies, and find little pity though all whom ye have slain should entreat for you. And those that endure in Middle-earth and come not to Mandos shall grow weary of the world as with a great burden, and shall wane, and become as shadows of regret before the younger race that cometh after. The Valar have spoken."<sup>38</sup>

This is the point at which Finarfin decides he will go no further but return to Valinor. (It should be noted that he does not refuse to go on for any lack of courage. He turns back because, lacking the pride and arrogance of his brothers, he is able to reconsider and willing to act upon his principles. He no doubt reads in the words of the herald of the Valar the last opportunity to reconsider. He turns back despite shame and regret and with no guarantee at this point of forgiveness or leniency.)

But in that hour Finarfin forsook the march, and turned back, being filled with grief, and with bitterness against the House of Fëanor, because of his kinship with Olwë of Alqualondë; and many of his people went with him, retracing their steps in sorrow, until they beheld once more the far beam of the Mindon upon Túna still shining in the night, and so came at last to Valinor. There they received the pardon of the Valar, and Finarfin was set to rule the remnant of the Noldor in the Blessed Realm.<sup>39</sup>

Finarfin's activities are not tracked in *The Silmarillion* until the brief mention of his role in the War of Wrath, which ends the First Age.



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### Why Might There Be So Little Detail on Finarfin's Return to Valinor?

One of the complaints of *Silmarillion* readers who have a particular interest in Finarfin is that he is given so little page space. There may be a few different reasons for that. We are not told whether his pardon from the Valar was hard-won or readily given. We do not know if his wife Eärwen was happy to see him or if he had to win her forgiveness. We do not know how he felt about assuming the kingship, which he had never coveted. One can only speculate about what Finarfin and his small group of followers found when they return to Valinor.

Relating to the period of darkness in Valinor between the destruction of the Two Trees and the creation of the Sun and Moon, one might not expect complete consistency between the "fairy" elements and details of physical science in any case. We can no more explain what that was like in a realistic manner than we can explain biologically the survival of plants and animal without photosynthesis during the period of starlight in Middle-earth. Some things Tolkien simply does not explore in detail. In her essay "The Accidental King," Dawn Felagund takes a position, extrapolating from what Tolkien does tell us of the situation Finarfin found upon his return to Valinor.

Therefore, it seems that Finarfin would have been left with almost insurmountable tasks and very little help. While his brothers also faced many of the challenges that he did, they were permitted the right to begin anew in a new land, and they had a much larger host and, therefore, much greater support. Finarfin was left to untangle the ragged threads of a ruined people and a ruined civilization ... and almost entirely on his own.<sup>40</sup>

Well, yes and no—he is not entirely without help. He does still have the sea between his remaining people and dangers of Middle-earth and he also has the Valar at his back. He was forgiven and allowed by the Valar to carry out his new tasks under their protection. The Valar had given a warning to the Noldor when they left Tirion, that no one would stop them. They are told that they are free to go, but upon leaving the gates of their city they are advised, "[n]o aid will the Valar lend you in this quest; but neither will they hinder you."<sup>41</sup> But, in fact, they do pardon Finarfin.

It's hard to imagine Tolkien writing an account of Tirion after the darkening that could present the daily details of the challenges facing the survivors of that catastrophic event. A disaster-relief story is exactly the kind of detail that Tolkien avoids in general in *The Silmarillion*. This is, of course, the nature of the storytelling form Tolkien uses: a history which is pieced together from a combination of written and oral forms recorded later, by different narrators, with different perspectives, often at great distance of time and place. Wayne Hammond notes:

Indeed, Christopher adds, his father had come to see this work as "a compilation, a compendious narrative, made long afterwards from sources of great diversity (poems, and annals, and oral tales) that had survived in a long tradition" (S, 8), in which a certain amount of inconsistency might be allowed, even expected.<sup>42</sup>

It is interesting to speculate what kind of skills would be needed by a king who takes upon the task of reunification and reorganization of a nation that has suffered the depletion of their population by ninety percent—those kind of figures would indicate no family would have been spared—not to mention the loss of their sense of national identity. That is the stuff which is a fertile field for writers of fanfiction and there are some intriguing ones.<sup>43</sup>

Why does Tolkien ignore Finarfin when he returns to Valinor? The one the first things that comes to mind is because the center has shifted. The narrator[s] are no longer focusing upon the doings of the Eldar or even the Valar in Valinor. The real action is now concentrated in Middle-earth. Verlyn Flieger sums it up concisely.

And for good and ill, the Noldor have returned to Middle-earth, bringing with them all the giftedness that makes them great and all the flaws that make them vulnerable, infusing the life of Middle-earth with all their skill and their art and their contention, all their capacity to create and to divide.

For the process must go on. Light, language, and peoples will continue to impinge upon one another, and the results, as can be expected, will be turbulent. Progressive darkening will be lighted by unlooked-for courage, great beauty, enduring loyalty, undying love. Light and dark will come together and separate again and again, both literally and metaphorically, as the Music plays itself out.<sup>44</sup>

One additional aspect of the story of Finarfin which might be noted is that his sensible behavior and his ability to make for himself the right choice without fanfare or drama does not fit well in this tumultuous history. The story is that of *the fall of the Noldor*. Tom Shippey explains that *The Silmarillion* is a story which is epic in scope and always written in a lofty and serious tone.

*The Silmarillion*, very much unlike *The Lord of the Rings*, stays resolutely on the level of 'high mimesis' or above, eschewing humour, detail, fine texture. It is able conversely to appeal to qualities virtually ruled out in even the most ambitious commercial fantasies: stoicism, nonchalance, irony, magniloquence. But here it has not been followed, and probably cannot be.<sup>45</sup>

The emphasis in *The Silmarillion* upon the exiled Noldor and that tone of "high mimesis," leaves little room for a homely resolution to any of these exiles' stories, much less the ones who stopped to think in a measured and sensible manner and decided to return to Valinor. One reads of the high-tragic events—the history that Galadriel describes in *The Lord of the Rings*.

He has dwelt in the West since the days of dawn, and I have dwelt with him years uncounted; for ere the fall of Nargothrond or Gondolin I passed over the mountains, and together through ages of the world we have fought the long defeat.<sup>46</sup>

There is a tongue-in-cheek hashtag used by some *Silmarillion* fans on Tumblr: "the poor sad elves." One would never expect to read how Finarfin walks into his house and is greeted by Eärwen the way Sam is welcomed by Rosie at the end of the narrative of *The Lord of the Rings*.

And he went on, and there was yellow light, and fire within; and the evening meal was ready, and he was expected. And Rose drew him in, and set him in his chair, and put little Elanor upon his lap.

He drew a deep breath. 'Well, I'm back,' he said.<sup>47</sup>

The closest one comes to reading anything that approaches that level of personal resolution for any of the principle characters of the *Quenta Silmarillion* relates to Finrod Felagund, who receives two versions of his release from the halls of Mandos. In one he gets trees and his

father, and in the other, he is reunited with his lady love, but both version still retain the familiar paucity of detail and formal narrative tone.

*The Silmarillion* version is:

They buried the body of Felagund upon the hill-top of his own isle, and it was clean again; and the green grave of Finrod Finarfin's son, fairest of all the princes of the Elves, remained inviolate, until the land was changed and broken, and foundered under destroying seas. But Finrod walks with Finarfin his father beneath the trees in Eldamar.<sup>48</sup>

And, the earlier version:

Thus perished Inglor [Finrod] Felagund son of Finrod [Finarfin], fairest and most beloved of the children of Finwë, and returned never again to Middle-earth. But it is said that released soon from Mandos, he went to Valinor and there dwells with Amárië.<sup>49</sup>

Finally, there is no way for this information to have been communicated, since the connection between Aman and M-e had been all but severed. With the exception of Rumil, Tolkien's loremasters are all born in Middle-earth during the First Age or later. Rumil's writings and teachings all concern the time before the exile and so presumably came *with* the exiles. After that, there was simply no means of communication between the two peoples, so we see the same blank in the history of Aman that they would have seen.

### **The War of Wrath**

The image of the good king in history and in legend, from antiquity into the late Middle Ages and early modern period, has been that of a hyper-masculine defender of his people of impressive martial aspect—not unlike, in fact, Maedhros, Fingolfin, Fingon, or Gil-galad—a legendary champion, clad in his hauberk and helm. Tolkien's kings, including Finarfin, that most reasonable and pacific among them, all physically lift a sword.

But the difference between Finarfin and Fëanor or Fingolfin is the lack of pride and the complete absence of any bloodlust fueled by vengeance. Finarfin does not throw himself in a fit of suicidal rage and a thirst for retribution against unbeatable foes. He only arms himself and leads his hosts into battle against Morgoth in Middle-earth when supported and sanctioned by the Valar. The purpose which compels him is in response to Eärendil's request for help against the Dark Vala who would remake Middle-earth in his own image.

But the host of the Valar prepared for battle; and beneath their white banners marched the Vanyar, the people of Ingwë, and those also of the Noldor who never departed from Valinor, whose leader was Finarfin the son of Finwë. Few of the Teleri were willing to go forth to war, for they remembered the slaying at the Swanhaven, and the rape of their ships; but they hearkened to Elwing, who was the daughter of Dior Eluchíl and come of their own kindred, and they sent mariners enough to sail the ships that bore the host of Valinor east over the sea. Yet they stayed aboard their vessels, and none of them set foot upon the Hither Lands.<sup>50</sup>

Michael Martinez, whose audience takes a particular interest in battles, explains why he believes that the account of the War of Wrath is so curtailed in *The Silmarillion*.

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The legendary character of the conflict would have been diminished by mere mortal words. There would have been moments of great horror, times of widespread suffering and distress. And there would have been great deeds worthy of songs for the ages.<sup>51</sup>

All of that and more might have been part of the tale, but Tolkien chose not to tell that story. It is not impossible that Tolkien found it hard to describe, as Martinez infers above. But Tolkien was not afraid to try to write other tremendous legendary conflicts. He gives a clear detailed account of the Battle of Unnumbered Tears in both *The Silmarillion* and in *The Children of Húrin*. His account of the Battle of the Pelennor Fields in *The Return of the King* contains some of his most haunting and beautiful language.

Martinez sums his position up in another article,

The War of Wrath may be better left unimagined, for the task of filling its years with deeds and heroes and journeys would easily constitute another *Silmarillion*-length text. It became a part of the history of Middle-earth, but its resolution was more a foregone conclusion than a trial for the Noldor.<sup>52</sup>

It seems more likely that the War of Wrath is given short shrift because it is not a central part of the great struggle against Melkor in Middle-earth by the exiled Noldor and their allies among the Elves, Men, and Dwarves of Middle-earth. It is more a *fait accompli*, prompted by the intervention of Eärendil, but accomplished by forces from outside of the ongoing struggles of the exiled Noldor and their followers and allies.

## Conclusion

To return to Dawn Felagund's "Accidental King," her last paragraph summarizes Finarfin's unique traits.

A character of remarkable rationality and level-headedness among a people known for neither, he is an advocate for peace and temperance during a time when such a stance was not only unpopular but--as illustrated by the events at Alqualondë--gravely dangerous. Though he lacked his brothers' ambition, he did not hesitate to take his father's realm at the lowest point in its known history, bringing respect and renown to the race of the Noldor once more.<sup>53</sup>

At a glance it might appear that, with the victory over Melkor with the War of Wrath and the end of the First Age, the histories have moved on beyond Finarfin's role in these. But this is not true at all. The legacy of the Golden House of Finarfin is overshadowed by none. The legacy of the Golden House of Finarfin survives beyond the very last chapters of *The Lord of the Rings* through the stories of his illustrious descendants, including Galadriel, Celebrian, Elladan, Elrohir, Arwen and, finally, the descendants of Aragorn and Arwen.

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## About the Author

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