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# Character Biography

## Fingolfin

By Oshun

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### During the Time of the Trees

The life story of Fingolfin is one of those central to the fierce and tragic tale of the fall of the Noldor. His courageous death is second only in its suicidal desperation to perhaps that of his older brother Fëanor. Fingolfin is born during the Time of the Trees in Valinor, the second son of Finwë, half-brother of Fëanor and brother of Finarfin. Fingolfin's children --Fingon, Turgon and Aredhel --each play a major role in their own right in the events of the First Age, as does his granddaughter Idril. A third son of Fingolfin, Arakáno (Argon), appears only in Tolkien's genealogies and is not mentioned in any narrative tale (1). There are no details relating to the wife of Fingolfin in any of the versions of *The Silmarillion*. Tolkien writes in *The Shibboleth of Fëanor* that "Fingolfin's wife Anairë refused to leave Aman, largely because of her friendship with Eärwen wife of Arafinwë (though she was a Ñoldo and not one of the Teleri)" (2).

As the elder of Finwë's sons by his second wife Indis of the Vanyar, Fingolfin is half Noldorin and half Vanyarin by blood. Because of Indis's stated choice to join with the people of the Noldor in loyalty to Finwë (3), one could argue that Fingolfin strongly identifies with the Noldor. Unlike his brother Finarfin, Fingolfin physically resembles the Noldor as well. In *The Shibboleth of Fëanor*, Tolkien states that "Fingolfin was his father's son, tall, dark, and proud, as were most of the Ñoldor" (4).

Nolofinwë is Fingolfin's father name in Quenya.

As with Fëanor, Finwë later added prefixes to their name: the elder he called Ñolofinwë, and the younger Arafinwë. Ñolo was the stem of words referring to wisdom, and Ara, a prefixed form of the stem Ara- 'noble'. (5)

The earliest reference to the sons of Finwë in *The Silmarillion* states categorically but without giving examples that

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. Finarfin was the fairest, and the most wise of heart . . . . (6)

In his characterization of Fingolfin Tolkien presents readers with an elf whose personality is comprised of two distinct and nearly contradictory aspects. He describes Fingolfin as wise and yet filled with the same pride, arrogance and ambition that he assigns to the Noldorin people as an ethnic generalization and to his older brother Fëanor in particular. The dissimilarities between the two eldest sons of Finwë are central to the development of the story of the Noldor in Valinor, acting as a primary cause of the discord of the Noldor both with the Valar and within the House of Finwë until their departure from Aman and the all but inevitable breaking free of the majority of the Noldor from the shielding guidance of the Valar. Whereas Fëanor believes

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himself to be the greatest of the Noldor, wisest in the aspects of both *ñolmë* and *kurwë*, Tolkien differs with his assessment.

He [Fëanor] thought himself not only the greatest master of *Kurwë* (which was true) but also of *Ñolmë* (which was not true, save in matters of language), and certainly the noblest of the children of Finwë (which might have proved true, if he had not become the proudest and most arrogant). (7)

In the accounts of the House of Finwë at the height of the golden age of Noldorin accomplishments in Valinor, one may read from the textual evidence that Fingolfin stays close to his father, the king of the Noldor, and probably serves him as a diplomat or statesman. One can imagine him making himself indispensable within that setting, which would give him a rationalization for his confidence in presenting himself as a more viable candidate to assume the kingship of the Noldor--a people characterized by their pride in their accomplishments and learning-- than his older brother, despite Fëanor's acceptance by not only his compatriots but even the Valar as the greatest of the Noldor. Meanwhile, Fëanor, Finwë's heir and most favored son, pays little attention to the governance of his people during that same pre-exile period, caught up as he is in the pursuit of science and creation.

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. (8)

The above reference makes clear that Fingolfin cannot be viewed as humble elf any more than his brother Fëanor can be. He challenges each attempt on the part of Fëanor to claim a leadership role among the Noldor. Nothing in the texts indicates that either Fëanor or Fingolfin harbor any illusion of sincerity in the supposedly rehabilitated Melkor when his fellow Valar restore him to freedom, although Tolkien makes it clear that Fëanor more thoroughly detested Melkor (9).

Fingolfin, like Fëanor and many others among the Noldor, hear and are affected by the rumors circulated by Melkor while not knowing their source. In his attempt to foment strife and confusion among the overconfident Noldor, Melkor knows exactly which buttons to push within the different factions among them. He realizes that Fëanor has little love for Finwë's sons by Indis and that he additionally mistrusts the objectives and wisdom of Valar.

. . . 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. (10)

On the other hand, Melkor also understands that Fëanor's arrogance toward and dismissal of the sons of Indis might rankle with Fingolfin in particular.

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!' (11)

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The intensity of Fëanor's reactions to what he views as Fingolfin's underhanded political machinations, whether accurately interpreted or exaggerated, disturbs Fingolfin to the extent that he immediately seeks to take measures to address Fëanor's hostility, unfortunately not in a way that ameliorates the conflict, but rather fans it into full flame.

Then there was great unrest in Tirion, and Finwë was troubled; and he summoned all his lords to council. But Fingolfin hastened to his halls and stood before him, saying: 'King and father, wilt thou not restrain the pride of our brother, Curufinwë, who is called the Spirit of Fire, all too truly? By what right does he speak for all our people, as if he were King? Thou it was who long ago spoke before the Quendi, bidding them accept the summons of the Valar to Aman. Thou it was that led the Noldor upon the long road through the perils of Middle-earth to the light of Eldamar. If thou dost not now repent of it, two sons at least thou hast to honour thy words.' (12)

Fëanor arrives at exactly that moment to overhear Fingolfin present his harsh assessment of him to their father, followed by Fingolfin's attempts to ingratiate himself and their younger brother Finarfin to Finwë. Not surprisingly, Fëanor reacted.

'So it is, even as I guessed,' he said. 'My half-brother would be before me with my father, in this as in all other matters.' Then turning upon Fingolfin he drew his sword, crying: 'Get thee gone, and take thy due place!' (13)

When Fingolfin attempts to leave Finwë's audience chamber, albeit without acknowledging Fëanor at all, Fëanor follows after him and stops him in the doorway, a visually dramatic scene, and holds a sword against Fingolfin's chest saying,

'See, half-brother!' he said. 'This is sharper than thy tongue. Try but once more to usurp my place and the love of my father, and maybe it will rid the Noldor of one who seeks to be the master of thralls.' (14)

The term "master of thralls" refers to Fëanor's opinion that Fingolfin seeks to ingratiate himself not only to their father, but also to what he considers to be the meddling, paternalistic Valar. One cannot know how events might have played out if the Valar had left the Noldor to resolve their own internal differences. Might Fingolfin have attempted shortly thereafter to speak with Fëanor and even apologize and try to make peace with his older brother? Subsequent accounts of Fingolfin's remarks in the aftermath of the ruling against Fëanor make the likelihood of that scenario appear strong. Perhaps Finwë could have brokered a resolution of the distrust between the two brothers. Given that both sons of Finwë are the victims of lies and foul play, an open discussion of what they had heard, even taking into account their injured pride, might have cut through Melkor's subterranean plots and lies. It could have been entirely possible that Melkor would have merely continued with a slightly altered form of manipulation of the Noldor, vulnerable in their own self-importance. Why the Valar so precipitously turn to clamping down upon Fëanor, when the author of all the troubles is Melkor is never clarified. Finwë as the king of the Noldor is not likely to have taken well the Valar's subversion of his right to govern his people. It is difficult to believe that Finwë abandons Tirion, his wife, and his throne, simply because Fëanor is said to be his favorite son.

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During the hearing at the gates of Valmar relating to Fëanor's threat against Fingolfin before Mandos in the Ring of Doom, Melkor's role in fomenting the discord is revealed. Nevertheless, despite the exposure of the deliberate provocations, the Valar do not absolve Fëanor. He is banished from Valinor for a period of twelve years, not by an inquiry before his peers among his own people or even by his father and king, but by the Valar who override the authority of Finwë. Fingolfin is quick to assert that he is ready to extend a hand of friendship to Fëanor even amidst the climate of the rush to judgment against his brother by the Valar.

Then Fingolfin said: 'I will release my brother.' But Fëanor spoke no word in answer, standing silent before the Valar. Then he turned and left the council, and departed from Valmar. (15)

One's attention is drawn to the fact that in the aftermath of Fëanor's banishment from Valinor and Finwë's (temporary at least) abdication of his kingship effectively gained Fingolfin the political power among his people that Fëanor had accused him of coveting. It must have seemed to some that the lies instigated by Melkor had come to pass. One might also wonder whether Fingolfin drew any satisfaction from his assumption of the kingship or how he reacted to his father's self-exile.

Near the end of Fëanor's twelve-year exile, the Valar summon him to appear before them. Unrepentant, Fëanor comes alone, bringing neither his father, any of his sons, nor any of his other followers from Formenos with him. Fingolfin greets him graciously and in an apparent spirit of reconciliation.

Fingolfin held forth his hand, saying: 'As I promised, I do now. I release thee, and remember no grievance.'

Then Fëanor took his hand in silence; but Fingolfin said: 'Half-brother in blood, full brother in heart will I be. Thou shalt lead and I will follow. May no new grief divide us.'

'I hear thee,' said Fëanor. 'So be it.' But they did not know the meaning that their words would bear. (16)

Either Fingolfin is indeed sincere in his desire to resolve the differences within the Noldor and among the entire House of Finwë, or he is a consummate diplomat. That Fingolfin's diplomatic tone with his brother has elements both of altruism and ambition is not at all out of the question given other choices that he makes in that same period and still later events, under entirely altered circumstances in Middle-earth. It is also interesting to examine the phrase which Fingolfin utters, "Thou shalt lead and I will follow" which is implied by the narrative to have a binding quality that is only somewhat less imperative than that of a solemnly sworn oath.

At the very hour of this exchange between Fëanor and Fingolfin, Melkor destroys the Two Trees. Valinor is cast into darkness. The Valar beseech Fëanor to turn over the Silmarili as a possible source of recreating the lost light. He refuses, trying to explain that breaking down his greatest artifact, which contains so much of himself, will kill him. When the news of Finwë's death and the theft of the Silmarili by Melkor reaches Tirion, the Noldor are left a bereft but wronged and angry people, champing at the bit to be shown a way to redress those wrongs. The Valar and the Vanyar are presented as grieving and ineffectual before this notoriously

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effective and driven people. Fëanor may have been forced into madness by his grief and loss, but he is neither rendered passive or weak, nor is Fingolfin.

Fëanor argues strongly and charismatically that they should leave the gilded cage of the Valar and revenge the death of Finwë. Fingolfin is deeply disturbed by the swearing of the blasphemous oath to regain the Silmarili by Fëanor. "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" (17).

In the end, when it becomes clear that all but a tenth of the Noldor intend to depart from Aman, Fingolfin joins in Fëanor's trek to Middle-earth, leading the largest host of the Noldor. This is the first time that we see Fingon in the role of second-in-command to his father within the House of Fingolfin. It is Fingon who leads the vanguard of those loyal to Fingolfin. They arrive shortly behind the ranks of Fëanor's followers at Alqualondë and finding their battle for the ships already engaged and their fellow Noldor falling, they leap into the fray, participating in the First Kinslaying.

The name Fingolfin itself speaks to the ambition of Finwë's second son.

Fingolfin had prefixed the name Finwë to Nolo-finwë 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 that it was no doubt one of the reasons for his treachery in abandoning Fingolfin and the stealing away with all the ships. (18)

After Alqualondë, Fingolfin does not consider turning back. Not even the dire words of the Prophecy of the North, also called the Doom of the Noldor, cause Fingolfin and the majority of his followers to reconsider their decision to proceed to Middle-earth.

'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.

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'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.' (19)

With great difficulty and loss of life, the surviving Noldor finally reach the frozen waste and open sea filled with ice floes which separates the farthest end of Aman from the main land mass of Middle-earth. The divisions among the disparate faction within the Noldor again become evident.

But they began to suffer anguish from the cold, and the clinging mists through which no gleam of star could pierce; and many repented of the road and began to murmur, especially those that followed Fingolfin, cursing Fëanor, and naming him as the cause of all the woes of the Eldar. (20)

With an insufficient number of the Telerin ships remaining to carry all of the exiles across the straits in one trip, "none were willing to abide upon the western coast while others were ferried first: already the fear of treachery was awake among the Noldor" (21). Fëanor, aware of the rumbling against him by the followers of Fingolfin, slips away in the night with those closest to him and leaves the others behind. When Maedhros asked his father to return to ferry them across, Fëanor refuses, saying

What I have left behind I count now no loss; needless baggage on the road it has proved. Let those that cursed my name, curse me still, and whine their way back to the cages of the Valar! (22)

Fëanor clearly does not understand the true mettle of Fingolfin.

Then Fingolfin seeing that Fëanor had left him to perish in Araman or return in shame to Valinor was filled with bitterness; but he desired now as never before to come by some way to Middle-earth, and meet Fëanor again. And he and his host wandered long in misery, but their valour and endurance grew with hardship; for they were a mighty people, the elder children undying of Elu Ilúvatar, but new-come from the Blessed Realm, and not yet weary with the weariness of Earth. The fire of their hearts was young  
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Few of the deeds of the Noldor thereafter surpassed that desperate crossing in hardihood or woe. . . . and it was with a lessened host that Fingolfin set foot at last upon the Outer Lands. Small love for Fëanor or his sons had those that marched at last behind him, and blew their trumpets in Middle-earth at the first rising of the Moon. (23)

This was not to be last of Fingolfin's bold and daring feats of leadership. His triumphant arrival in the northernmost part of Beleriand needs to be quoted directly for the stirring heroic tone of the description:

. . . as the host of Fingolfin marched into Mithrim the Sun rose flaming in the West; and Fingolfin unfurled his blue and silver banners, and blew his horns, and flowers sprang beneath his marching feet, and the ages of the stars were ended. At the uprising of the great light the servants of Morgoth fled into Angband, and Fingolfin passed unopposed through the fastness of Dor Daedeloth while his foes hid beneath the earth. Then the Elves smote upon the gates of Angband, and the challenge of their trumpets shook the towers of Thangorodrim . . .

### **Fingolfin Rules as High King of the Noldor**

The First Age of Arda officially begins with the rising of the sun and Fingolfin's arrival in Beleriand. When Fingolfin led his host to the towers of Thangorodrim, his challenge was not answered by Morgoth. Unlike Fëanor, out of control in his frenzied desire for revenge, Fingolfin is dominated by other concerns and withdraws from Angband.

But Fingolfin, being of other temper than Fëanor, and wary of the wiles of Morgoth, withdrew from Dor Daedeloth and turned back towards Mithrim, for he had heard tidings that there he should find the sons of Fëanor, and he desired also to have the shield of the Mountains of Shadow while his people rested and grew strong; for he had seen the strength of Angband, and thought not that it would fall to the sound of trumpets only.

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Therefore coming at length to Hithlum he made his first camp and dwelling by the northern shores of Lake Mithrim. (24)

There Fingolfin learns of the death of Fëanor and the capture of Maedhros. No mention is made in the texts of any discussion between Fingolfin and Fingon about Fingon's decision to take upon himself the almost impossible quest to free Maedhros. The assumption can be made that Fingon believed that his father would have forbidden him to undertake the venture, and thus Fingolfin's elder son goes alone without informing anyone. The unexpected success of Fingon enables him to pursue his plan to reunify the Noldor. Fingon's daring gamble indeed mitigates the most extreme of the divisions among the Noldor. Maedhros abdicates the kingship over the Noldor in favor of Fingolfin.

By this deed Fingon won great renown, and all the Noldor praised him; and the hatred between the houses of Fingolfin and Fëanor was assuaged. For Maedhros begged forgiveness for the desertion in Araman; and he waived his claim to kingship over all the Noldor, saying to Fingolfin: 'If there lay no grievance between us, lord, still the kingship would rightly come to you, the eldest here of the house of Finwë, and not the least wise.' (25)

Despite whatever flaws one might see in the character of Fingolfin or the constraint of the terrible oath upon Maedhros, one cannot but admire the good judgment and leadership capabilities of both demonstrated by Maedhros's abdication. Maedhros is wise enough to realize that a continuing dispute over succession would endanger the future of their people and probably also understands that his sworn oath would place the governance of the Noldor second to any opportunity he might have to regain the Silmarili. However, if Fingolfin had not already secured the confidence of the majority of the Noldor, including the grudging recognition of his best qualities by most of those in camp of the Fëanorians, some of the sons of Fëanor excepted, Maedhros could not have offered him the kingship with any hope the act would lead to relative peace. The doom of the Noldor, of course, in time will override their considerable efforts to that end.

In the next short period, Fingolfin and Fingon are almost always mentioned jointly in the text relating to their attempts to make a life for their people and build a defensive barrier against the hordes of Morgoth. Interestingly, Fingolfin's second son Turgon, the future lord of the hidden city of Gondolin, is not mentioned in that context. Fingolfin relies heavily upon Fingon's military ventures; Turgon nurtures other plans.

Almost immediately the mingling of the Noldor and Sindar begins in the north. Fingolfin continues with his aspiration to secure those lands and restore the diminished strength of his people. In the twentieth year after their arrival in Beleriand, Fingolfin organizes a convocation at the pools of Ivrin.

The joy of that feast was long remembered in later days of sorrow; and it was called Mereth Aderthad, the Feast of Reuniting. Thither came many of the chieftains and people of Fingolfin and Finrod; and of the sons of Fëanor Maedhros and Maglor, with warriors of the eastern March; and there came also great numbers of the Grey-elves, wanderers of the woods of Beleriand and folk of the Havens, with Círdan their lord. There came even Green-elves from Ossiriand, the Land of Seven Rivers, far off under the walls of the Blue Mountains; but out of Doriath there came but two messengers,

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Mablung and Daeron, bearing greetings from the King.

At Mereth Aderthad many counsels were taken in good will, and oaths were sworn of league and friendship; and it is told that at this feast the tongue of the Grey-elves was most spoken even by the Noldor, for they learned swiftly the speech of Beleriand, whereas the Sindar were slow to master the tongue of Valinor. The hearts of the Noldor were high and full of hope, and to many among them it seemed that the words of Fëanor had been Justified, bidding them seek freedom and fair kingdoms in Middle-earth; and indeed there followed after long years of peace, while their swords fenced Beleriand from the ruin of Morgoth, and his power was shut behind his gates. In those days there was joy beneath the new Sun and Moon, and all the land was glad; but still the Shadow brooded in the north. (26)

The optimism of the Noldor at the Mereth Aderthad is heart-wrenching for the reader who has already read *The Lord of the Rings* and understands that Tolkien's history of the Elves is that of the inevitable doom of the proud but valiant Noldor, peppered lightly with a few and partial victories, and so poignantly described in the words of Galadriel in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, ". . . 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" (27). Earlier in the same text, we have a similar comment,

In Elrond's tale to the Council in Rivendell there is a wistful echo and reminder of this wasting strife: "I have seen three ages in the West of the world, and many defeats and many fruitless victories" (*The Fellowship of the Ring*). (28)

Fingolfin's joy, even at the time, must have been moderated by the fact that Thingol of Doriath refuses to attend and sends only the most minimal representation.

. . . King Thingol welcomed not with a full heart the coming of so many princes in might out of the West, eager for new realms; and he would not open his kingdom, nor remove its girdle of enchantment, for wise with the wisdom of Melian he trusted not that the restraint of Morgoth would endure. (29)

A few short years, by the reckoning of the Eldar, into this period of peace and construction for the Noldor, Morgoth decides to test their battle readiness. He sends forth orcs against their defenses accompanied by a show of earthquakes, fire and flames (30). The forces of Maedhros and Fingolfin meet his assault prepared. This results in a victory for the Noldor in the Third Battle of Beleriand, called Dagor Aglareb or the Glorious Battle (31).

A victory it was, and yet a warning; and the princes took heed of it, and thereafter drew closer their leaguer, and strengthened and ordered their watch, setting the Siege of Angband. which lasted well nigh four hundred years of the Sun. (32)

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Fingolfin boasted that save by treason among themselves Morgoth could never again burst from the leaguer of the Eldar, nor come upon them at unawares. Yet the Noldor



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could not capture Angband, nor could they regain the Silmarils; and war never wholly ceased in all that time of the Siege . . . (33)

Again, Tolkien foreshadows tragedy in his phasing of Fingolfin's overconfident optimism. The defense of the north of Beleriand, as well as its settlement and exploitation, was parceled out among the sons of Fingolfin, Fëanor and Finarfin.

Fingolfin and Fingon his son held Hithlum, and the most part of Fingolfin's folk dwelt in Mithrim about the shores of the great lake; to Fingon was assigned Dor-lómin, that lay to the west of the Mountains of Mithrim. But their chief fortress was at Eithel Sirion in the east of Ered Wethrin, whence they kept watch upon Ard-galen; and their cavalry rode upon that plain even to the shadow of Thangorodrim . . . (34)

One should understand that although some of these lands were sparsely populated, the Sindar dwelt throughout all of Beleriand at the coming of the Noldor. It is possible that the initial settlement of the Noldor was accepted by the Sindar for defensive reasons. It is likely as the years passed that economic benefits and sharing of other resources reinforced the mixing of those peoples throughout that area. The designation of kingdoms by the Noldor, from relatively unpopulated fiefdoms to truly geographically expansive ones like that held by Finrod, makes Fingolfin the first true High King of the Noldor (35) and the one who rules longest until Gil-galad, whose reign comprises the period after the War of Wrath and the destruction of Morgoth's supremacy in Middle-earth.

Fingolfin was held overlord of all the Noldor, and Fingon after him, though their own realm was but the northern land of Hithlum; yet their people were the most hardy and valiant, most feared by the Orcs and most hated by Morgoth. (36)

During the relative peace of the years of the Siege of Angband, Fingolfin rules over the numerous kingdoms of the Noldor spread across a geographically extended area, for all practical intent the largest part of Beleriand, comprising all but the coastal area under the control of Círdan and the sequestered peoples in Thingol's protected realm of Doriath. Maedhros's remarks about Thingol's rather spurious claim that all of Beleriand belonged to him, are not far off the mark.

Maedhros laughed, saying: '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.' (37)

Meanwhile, Morgoth continues to spy upon the Noldor, while building new and better means with which to successfully attack them. During this time, the military engagements led by Fingon, serving as what amounts to Fingolfin's defensive arm, his bravest and greatest captain, predominate among the counter-offensives against any of the minor assaults by Morgoth's forces against the Noldor or their allies during the period of the Siege of Angband. In most locations, the armed presence and military outposts of the Finwëan cousins serve as deterrents. Finally, when Morgoth is ready to make his next serious move in year 455 of the First Age it is sudden, terrifying and many-sided.

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Morgoth sent forth great rivers of flame that ran down swifter than Balrogs from Thangorodrim, and poured over all the plain; and the Mountains of Iron belched forth fires of many poisonous hues, and the fume of them stank upon the air, and was deadly. Thus Ard-galen perished, and fire devoured its grasses; and it became a burned and desolate waste, full of a choking dust, barren and lifeless. Thereafter its name was changed, and it was called Anfauglith, the Gasping Dust. Many charred bones had there their roofless grave; for many of the Noldor perished in that burning, who were caught by the running flame and could not fly to the hills. The heights of Dorthonion and Ered Wethrin held back the fiery torrents, but their woods upon the slopes that looked towards Angband were all kindled, and the smoke wrought confusion among the defenders. Thus began the fourth of the great battles, Dagor Bragollach, the Battle of Sudden Flame. (38)

Morgoth's tactics are brutal, straightforward, and all but finally conclusive. He uses balrogs, dragons and numerous equally hideous minions. The terror of the fire storms and erupting volcanoes divide his opponents physically, creating enormous tactical advantages for Morgoth's hosts. His principal aims are to drive the sons of Fëanor from much of their lands and scatter their forces, which he does with devastating efficiency. He conquers enormous sections of Finrod's kingdom. Fingolfin and Fingon are cut off in Hithlum from their strongest allies. Orcs once again roam without hindrance throughout wide areas of the north. Morgoth does not accomplish all of this, however, without severe losses to his own forces and is compelled to call back his hordes in order to regroup.

Fingolfin is, not surprisingly, devastated. He has gone from successfully administering a large part of Middle-earth under the control of the indomitable and quarrelsome princes of the Noldor, whose ambitions and competence are only exceeded by their egos, to surveying those same kingdoms uprooted, physically destroyed, and/or rendered uninhabitable. His success at his notable tasks in a period where one must remain ever battle-ready must have made him self-assured. His response to the terrible losses of life inflicted upon the Noldor and their entire defensive alliance and the horrific destruction of their lands drove him into a fit of suicidal rage.

Then Fingolfin beheld (as it seemed to him) the utter ruin of the Noldor, and the defeat beyond redress of all their houses; and filled with wrath and despair he mounted upon Rochallor his great horse and rode forth alone, and none might restrain him. He passed over Dor-nu-Fauglith like a wind amid the dust, and all that beheld his onset fled in amaze, thinking that Oromë himself was come: for a great madness of rage was upon him, so that his eyes shone like the eyes of the Valar. 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. (39)

The sheer hubris and ferocity of his solitary assault upon the Gates of Angband, demanding single combat with Morgoth, actually causes the Dark Lord himself to feel fear.

That was the last time in those wars that he passed the doors of his stronghold, and it is said that he took not the challenge willingly; for though his might was greatest of all things in this world, alone of the Valar he knew fear. But he could not now deny the challenge before the face of his captains; for the rocks rang with the shrill music of Fingolfin's horn, and his voice came keen and clear down into the depths of Angband; and Fingolfin named Morgoth craven, and lord of slaves. (40)

Fingolfin inflicts permanent injuries upon Morgoth: "he wounded Morgoth with seven wounds, and seven times Morgoth gave a cry of anguish, whereat the hosts of Angband fell upon their faces in dismay, and the cries echoed in the Northlands" (41). Finally, when Fingolfin is exhausted and no longer able to rise, Morgoth steps on his neck and holds him in place. Even then Fingolfin is able to land one last blow and wounds Morgoth in the foot, so that after that the Vala must walk with a limp.

Thus died Fingolfin, High King of the Noldor, most proud and valiant of the Elven-kings of old. The Orcs made no boast of that duel at the gate; neither do the Elves sing of it, for their sorrow is too deep. Yet the tale of it is remembered still, for Thorondor King of Eagles brought the tidings to Gondolin, and to Hithlum afar off. And Morgoth took the body of the Elven-king and broke it, and would cast it to his wolves; but Thorondor came hasting from his eyrie among the peaks of the Crissaegrim, and he stooped upon Morgoth and marred his face. The rushing of the wings of Thorondor was like the noise of the winds of Manwë, and he seized the body in his mighty talons, and soaring suddenly above the darts of the Orcs he bore the King away. And he laid him upon a mountain-top that looked from the north upon the hidden valley of Gondolin; and Turgon coming built a high cairn over his father. No Orc dared ever after to pass over the mount of Fingolfin or draw nigh his tomb, until the doom of Gondolin was come and treachery was born among his kin. Morgoth went ever halt of one foot after that day, and the pain of his wounds could not be healed; and in his face was the scar that Thorondor made. (42)

The death of Fingolfin truly marks the end of the ascendancy of the exiled Noldor in Middle-earth and the beginning of the playing out of the terrible prophecy of the Doom of the Noldor.

### Works Cited

1. In a footnote by Christopher Tolkien in *The Peoples of Middle-earth, The Shibboleth of Fëanor*, he points out that a "pencilled note on the last of the four tables says that he [Arakáno] fell in the fighting at Alqualondë; this was struck out, and my father noted that a preferable story was that he perished in the Ice."
2. *The Peoples of Middle-earth, The Shibboleth of Fëanor*
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. *The Silmarillion*, "Of the Silmarils and the Unrest of the Noldor"
7. *The Peoples of Middle-earth, The Shibboleth of Fëanor*
8. *The Silmarillion*, "Of the Silmarils and the Unrest of the Noldor"
9. *The Silmarillion*, "Of Fëanor and the Unchaining of Melkor"
10. *The Silmarillion*, "Of the Silmarils and the Unrest of the Noldor"
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
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17. *The Silmarillion*, "Of the Flight of the Noldor"
  18. *The Peoples of Middle-earth, The Shibboleth of Fëanor*
  19. *The Silmarillion*, "Of the Flight of the Noldor"
  20. Ibid.
  21. Ibid.
  22. Ibid.
  23. Ibid.
  24. *The Silmarillion*, "Of the Return of the Noldor"
  25. Ibid.
  26. Ibid.
  27. *The Lord of the Rings, The Fellowship of the Ring*, "Lothlórien"
  28. W.A. Senior, "Loss Eternal in J.R.R. Tolkien's Middle-earth." *J.R.R. Tolkien and His Literary Resonances: Views of Middle-Earth*. George Clark and Daniel Timmons, eds. Greenwood Press, Westport, CT, 2000.
  29. *The Silmarillion*, "Of the Return of the Noldor"
  30. Ibid.
  31. The First Battle of Beleriand is the one fought against Morgoth by Thingol's people before the coming of the Noldor to Middle-earth; the second is the "Dagor-nuin-Giliath 'The Battle-under-Stars', the second battle in the Wars of Beleriand, fought in Mithrim after the coming of Fëanor to Middle-earth." *The Silmarillion*, "Index of Names"
  32. *The Silmarillion*, "Of the Return of the Noldor"
  33. Ibid.
  34. *The Silmarillion*, "Of Beleriand and Its Realms"
  35. See the [Character Biography of Turgon](#) on this site for a further discussion of the use of the term High King of the Noldor.
  36. *The Silmarillion*, "Of Beleriand and Its Realms"
  37. Ibid.
  38. *The Silmarillion*, "Of the Ruin of Beleriand and the Fall of Fingolfin"
  39. Ibid.
  40. Ibid.
  41. Ibid.
  42. Ibid.
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### About the Author

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