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# Character Biography

## Finrod Felagund

By Oshun

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What is not to love about Finrod Felagund? He is a brilliant, beautiful, golden icon, bigger-than-life, and shaped from the same heroic mold as all of his flame-eyed compatriots, those notorious and charismatic Noldorin Lords of the West. If that were not enough, Finrod is also a great wizard, a friend to Men and Dwarves, and loyal to his allies and closest kinsmen, even when faced with safeguarding their dirtiest secrets. While his virtues are extolled well beyond those of any of his cousins or brothers, Finrod remains just flawed enough to be sexy.

The history of the Noldor in First Age Beleriand as recounted in *The Silmarillion* refers to Finrod Felagund as the youngest of the lords of the House of Finwë who led their people out of Aman. Finrod functions as the head of the House of Finarfin in Middle-earth. A listing early in *The Silmarillion* places him among the four highest in prominence among the Noldorin princes (“the great lords of the Noldor, Fingolfin, Fingon, and Maedhros, and Finrod Felagund”<sup>[1]</sup>). Finrod was born in Aman during the Years of the Trees. He is the eldest of four children of Finwë’s youngest son Finarfin and Eärwen the daughter of Olwë the King of the Teleri at Alqualondë.

The sons of Finarfin were Finrod the faithful (who was afterwards named Felagund, Lord of the 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>(2)</sup>

In the published *Silmarillion*, Orodreth is included among the sons of Finarfin, but later Christopher Tolkien acknowledged that choice to have been an error in judgment on his part and that he ought to have named him as Finrod’s nephew <sup>(3)</sup>.

### Ethnicity and Names

Finrod is one-quarter Vanyarin, through his grandmother Indis; one-quarter Noldorin, from Finwë; and one-half Telerin, from his mother’s side, if we presume that his mother Eärwen is wholly Telerin by blood. Through Eärwen’s father Olwë, Finrod is the great nephew of Elu Thingol, King of the Sindar <sup>(4)</sup> in Middle-earth. The question of ethnicity among the Eldar appears to be measured in terms of cultural self-identification and political affiliation over actual bloodlines. The focus on Finrod Felagund in the tales of the early First Age is as the best loved of the most important princes of the Noldor.

Like many of Tolkien’s major players among the First Age Elven lords, Finrod in particular, has a plethora of names, including those given to him by others under various circumstances, translated or adapted, and changed from those used in earlier versions of Tolkien’s writings. Finrod’s name in Aman was Findaráto. Finrod is the Sindarized form of that name. Unlike the rest of their kinsmen, Finarfin’s sons’ names are based upon the language of the Teleri.

The names Findaráto and Angaráto were Telerin in form (for Finarfin spoke the language of his wife's people); and they proved easy to render into Sindarin in form and sense, because of the close relationship of the Telerin of Aman to the language of their kin, the Sindar of Beleriand, in spite of the great changes that it had undergone in Middle-earth. (Artafindë and Artanga would have been their more natural Quenya forms, . . .) (5)

The second name, Felagund, which is most often used along with Finrod, is an *epessë* (6) given to him by the Dwarves during the construction of Nargothrond.

The name *Felagund* was of Dwarvish origin. Finrod had help of Dwarves in extending the underground fortress of Nargothrond. . . .

*Felagund*: Dwarvish *felek* hew rock, *felak* a tool like a broad-bladed chisel, or small axe-head without haft, for cutting stone; to use this tool. *gunud* equivalent of Eldarin *s-rot*. (7) *gundu* underground hall. *felakgundu*, *felaggundu* 'cave-hewer'. This name was given because of Finrod's skill in lighter stone-carving. He cut many of the adornments of the pillars and walls in Nargothrond. He was proud of the name. (8)

It is fitting that Finrod should be proud of the name *Felagund*, since his skill in working with stone is one of the ways in which he is unique among his peers. Also, to be given this name by secretive and mistrustful Dwarves would be doubly an honor. The Dwarves, although renowned as smiths, are particularly fond of working in stone as well.

The people of Bëor, first of the Men to enter Beleriand from the east, gave Finrod the name of *Nóm*, which in their language means *wisdom* (9). (See section below concerning Finrod's first encounter with Men.) Another *epessë* given Finrod by the Edain mentioned in the *Athrabeth* is that of *Edennil* or *friend of Men* (10).

*The Shibboleth of Fëanor* lists *Ingoldo* as Finrod's mother-name. Mother-names are considered important and significant among the Eldar. Along with the father-name, these names are most likely to be used above all others on a daily basis. Additionally, Tolkien asserts the often prophetic quality of mothers in recognizing personal characteristics which a child will develop is reflected in the mother-name: "For 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" (11).

The form *Ingoldo* may be noted: it is a form of *Ñoldo* with syllabic *ñ*, and being in full and more dignified form is more or less equivalent to 'the *Ñoldo*, one eminent in the kindred'. It was the mother-name of *Arafinwë* [Finarfin], and like the name *Arakáno* 'high chieftain' that *Indis* gave to *Ñolofinwë* [Fingolfin] was held to be 'prophetic'. *Eärwen* gave this name [Ingoldo] to her eldest child *Artafindë* (Finrod), and by it he was usually called by his brothers and sister who esteemed him and loved him. It was never Sindarized (the form would have been *Angolođ*). The name spread from his kin to many others who held him in honour, especially to Men (the *Atani*) of whom he was the greatest friend among the Eldar. (12)

Therefore, one may presume that throughout his life Finrod's most intimate friends, as well as his siblings and cousins, address him as *Ingoldo*.

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It is generally accepted that Finrod had no wife when he left Aman, but left behind a beloved named Amárië. She is mentioned in the published *Silmarillion* in the “Index of Names” as a “Vanyarin Elf, beloved of Finrod Felagund, who remained in Valinor.” (For further details on Amárië, see [SWG Character Biography of Amárië](#).)

There is no mention of children of Finrod in the texts. This, however, has not prevented ongoing discussions relating to the question of ‘who then is Gildor Inglorion?’

‘I am Gildor,’ answered their leader, the Elf who had first hailed him [Frodo]. ‘Gildor Inglorion of the House of Finrod. We are Exiles, and most of our kindred have long ago departed and we too are now only tarrying here a while, ere we return over the Great Sea.’ (13)

The statement that he is of the House of Finrod and uses the name *Inglorion*, i.e., *son of Inglor* (the name Tolkien used for Finrod for decades and the one to be found throughout most of the volumes of *The History of Middle-earth*), might, according to some readers, link him directly to Finrod. The pros and cons of this argument are not dealt in this paper due to lack of space.

### **The Golden House of Finarfin**

Finrod’s most outstanding physical feature is a reflection of his one-quarter Vanyarin heritage: the legendary radiant golden hair of what is sometimes called the Golden House of Finarfin (14).

‘They [the Noldor] were tall, fair of skin and grey-eyed, though their locks were dark, save in the *golden house of Finrod* [later changed to Finarfin].’ Thus these words describing characters of face and hair were actually written of the Noldor only, and not of all the Eldar: indeed the Vanyar had golden hair, and it was from Finarfin’s Vanyarin mother Indis that he, and Finrod Felagund and Galadriel his children, had their golden hair that marked them out among the princes of the Noldor. (15) [Emphasis mine.]

Implicit in the references to golden house of Finarfin are not only the color of Finrod’s father’s hair, but the implied and explicit presence of other characteristics generally assigned to the Vanyar. For example, Finrod’s power as it relates to music and song is an echo of a Vanyarin trait. “The Vanyar he loved best of all the Elves, and of him [Manwë] they received song and poetry; for poetry is the delight of Manwë, and the song of words is his music” (16). Tolkien places the Vanyar as first among in the Elves in Aman and then appears to favor the golden house of Finarfin among the exiled Noldor in Middle-earth.

One can still argue that the noted ambition and restless curiosity trumps Galadriel’s and Finrod’s alleged Vanyarin traits and makes them truly fit more suitably within the ranks of the strong-willed, self-exiled Noldor in Beleriand than with the loyal-to-the-Valar Noldor who stayed in Valinor, much less the dutiful Vanyar of their grandmother. More details on the boldness and individuality that they shared with the Noldor are dealt with below.

### **The Fire of Their Hearts Was Young**

Fanon gives Finrod the reputation of being nearly a saint and almost entirely considers him to be set apart from those affected most directly by the curse of Mandos. This is a simplistic and

incorrect assessment of his role and fate. Finrod is far more complex than his fanon stereotype as the “good Noldo.”

Finrod was like his father in his fair face and golden hair, and also in noble and generous heart, though *he had the high courage of the Noldor and in his youth their eagerness and unrest*; and he had also from his Telerin mother a love of the sea and dreams of far lands that he had never seen. (17) [Emphasis mine.]

This eagerness and sense of unrest combined with an appetite for adventure must have figured among those elements that drew Finrod to abandon Aman and follow Fëanor into Middle-earth. Finrod is not shown as a passive or reluctant participant, but one of the leaders among those rebels and explorers that comprise the body of the Noldor who left Aman for Middle-earth. These characteristics are further spelled out relating to Finrod in another paragraph that speaks of Galadriel, but emphasizes that Finrod shared her keenness.

She was *proud, strong, and self willed*, as were all the descendants of Finwë save Finarfin; and *like her brother Finrod*, of all her kin the nearest to her heart, she *had dreams of far lands and dominions* that might be her own *to order as she would without tutelage*. (18) [Emphasis mine.]

No, it is *not* canon that Finarfin’s children are either dragged kicking and screaming or trudging along reluctantly, when they join their fellow Finweans and the majority of the Noldor in leaving Aman for Middle-earth. One passage in the published *Silmarillion* that might be responsible for this detail of fanon or common misinterpretation is:

. . . 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, and some even of the things that they had made there they took with them: a solace and a burden on the road. (19)

As Galadriel says to Melian when she is questioned about their flight, “we were not driven forth, but came of our own will, and against that of the Valar. And through great peril and in despite of the Valar for this purpose we came: to take vengeance upon Morgoth, and regain what he stole” (20).

Despite any regret they might have felt for what they left behind, they reject the opportunities to turn back and soon after their departure from Aman, with the burning of the ships at Losgar, Finrod and his kinsman call upon every bit of their sense of purpose and drive to go forward.

The fire of their hearts was young, and led by Fingolfin and his sons, and by Finrod and Galadriel, they dared to pass into the bitterest North; and finding no other way they endured at last the terror of the Helcaraxë and the cruel hills of ice. Few of the deeds of the Noldor thereafter surpassed that desperate crossing in hardihood or woe. (21)

Among his less-than-saint-like personal characteristics, Fingon is described as somewhat of a material guy: “Finrod had brought more treasure out of Tuna than any of the other princes” (22). This Noldorin propensity for cherishing their possessions is also reflected in the above reference

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to the things that provided them “solace and a burden on the road” (23). One could smile at the difference of tone that Tolkien uses when referring to the hoarding of treasure by Dwarves versus the desire to preserve precious memories by his beloved Eldar. One might argue that they appear equally addicted to bling (24).

### The Friendship between Finrod and Turgon

Among the grandchildren of Finwë, Finrod is fourth or fifth in age. He is said to have been born the same year as Turgon, (25) the second son of Fingolfin, but there is no notation which of the two cousins is the elder. There are mentions throughout the texts that the eldest son of Finarfin and the second son of Fingolfin remain close. Not only does *The Silmarillion* describe Finrod and his brothers to be “as close in friendship with the sons of Fingolfin as though they were all brothers” (26), but more than once, special note is made of Finrod’s unique relationship to Turgon.

At the time that Fëanor swore his oath in Tirion, “Turgon his [Fingolfin’s] son therefore spoke against Fëanor, and fierce words awoke, so that once again wrath came near to the edge of swords.” The text further notes: “Finrod was with Turgon, his friend” (27). One presumes this means that Finrod takes the side of Turgon in his outspoken opposition to and mistrust of Fëanor in the heated debate that occurs between Fëanor and many of those appalled by his terrible oath before Fëanor convinces the overwhelming majority of the Noldor to abandon Aman and follow him to Middle-earth.

The next account of Finrod’s special relationship to Turgon is the story of the trip they make together to camp alongside the River Sirion, some thirty years after their arrival in Middle-earth. At the time, Turgon is living in Nevrast and Finrod on the island of Tol Sirion. While they are sleeping, Ulmo sends each of them a dream. Each interprets his own dream as a personal message to seek a place of hidden strength and protection for his followers against a coming day of evil when Morgoth will “burst from Angband and overthrow the armies of the North” (28). Interestingly enough, despite their purported closeness, neither tells the other of his dream. They both act upon these dreams, however, which lead Turgon to find the site upon which to build the hidden city of Gondolin and Finrod to begin his excavation and construction of a secure stronghold at Nargothrond.

No further details are provided for the assertion that Finrod and Turgon are remarkably close friends. This is in keeping with the general compositional style of *The Silmarillion*, which is a book full of assertions, but in some cases lacking in extrapolation or fine detail.

### Wisdom among The Elves

In his history of the Eldar, Tolkien uses the expression “the wise” (as in the phrase “It is told among the wise . . .” (29) to refer to those among the Eldar and the Maiar, and later to a lesser extent among the Men of Númenor, who embody a set of exceptional characteristics.

In his descriptive remarks about the characters in the *Athrabeth*, Tolkien writes: “Finrod (son of Finarfin, son of Finwë) was the wisest of the exiled Noldor” (30).

Much is made of the wisdom of the Noldor, and how they surpassed not only Men, but also other Elves.

Only a part is here told of the deeds of those days, and most is said of the Noldor, and the Silmarils, and the mortals that became entangled in their fate. In those days Elves and Men were of like stature and strength of body, but the Elves had greater wisdom, and skill, and beauty; and those who had dwelt in Valinor and looked upon the Powers as much surpassed the Dark Elves in these things as they in turn surpassed the people of mortal race. (31)

He explains that wisdom among the Eldar is not defined in the common modern usage of the term meaning “sagacity, sound judgement” (32).

‘Knowledge’ would be nearer, or ‘Philosophy’ in its older applications which included Science. *Ñolmë* was thus distinct from *Kurwë* ‘technical skill and invention’, though not necessarily practised by distinct persons. The stem appeared in Quenya (in which it was most used) in forms developed from Common Eldarin *ñgol-*, *ñgōlo-*, with or without syllabic *ñ*: as in \**Ñgolodō* > Quenya *Ñoldo* (Telerin *golodo*, Sindarin *goloð*) - the *Ñoldor* had been from the earliest times most eminent in and concerned with this kind of ‘wisdom’; *ñolmë* a department of wisdom (science etc.); *Ingolë* (*ñgōlē*) Science/Philosophy as a whole; *ñolmo* a wise person; *ingólemo* one with very great knowledge, a ‘wizard’. . . The wizards of the Third Age - emissaries from the Valar - were called *Istari* ‘those who know’. (33)

It appears that Finrod is not only among the wisest of the Elven leaders, he is wise in the sense not only of the *ñolmë* and *kurwë*, often ascribed to the Noldor as a people in general, but he is said to epitomize *ingolë*, which seems to encompass both of the previous forms of wisdom and then add something unique, one might even call it Elven magic. Finrod’s wizardry is most spectacularly revealed in his song contest with Sauron where, although he is defeated, he proves himself one-on-one to be a worthy opponent of the Maia.

He not only is referred to as one of the wisest (34) but one who seeks to share that wisdom with others, especially the Edain he encounters: “But Felagund dwelt among them and taught them true knowledge, and they loved him, and took him for their lord, and were ever after loyal to the house of Finarfin” (35). Finrod is notable among the Eldar for his capacity in the “transmission and reception of thought” (36). See below the description of his ability to understand the first Men he encounters.

### **Builder, Explorer and Anthropologist**

During the reign of Fingolfin as High King of the Noldor, Maedhros, Fingolfin, and Fingon held principal responsibility for the front-line of defense against the forces of Angband. Finrod’s realm, however, comprised the largest amount of territory, although a great deal of it was lightly populated: “Finrod held the Pass of Sirion, and upon the isle of Tol Sirion in the midst of the river he built a mighty watch-tower, Minas Tirith” (37.) (Later, when Sauron eventually captures Minas Tirith, it is called Tol-in-Gaurhoth [38].)



Finrod is most famous for his construction of his elaborate underground fortress at Nargothrond, inspired by the style of Thingol's caves at Menegroth.

Then Finrod was filled with wonder at the strength and majesty of Menegroth, its treasures and armouries and its many-pillared halls of stone; and it came into his heart that he would build wide halls behind ever-guarded gates in some deep and secret place beneath the hills. (39)

Additionally, in collaboration with Círdan's Sindar of the Falas, Finrod's Noldor rebuilt the havens of Brithombar and Eglarest: "Behind their great walls they became fair towns and harbours with quays and piers of stone" (40). Finrod also constructed the tower of Barad Nimras on the cape west of Eglarest in order to keep watch over the western sea.

Since Finrod took a particular interest in learning about the peoples of Middle-earth, he must have been exceptionally intrigued with the opportunity to attend the Mereth Aderthad, or Feast of Reuniting, called by Fingolfin, because of the broad collection of Elven communities gathered there: "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 . . ." (41).

It is not surprising, since Tolkien describes Finrod as an Elf of curiosity with an appetite to explore, that he would be the first among the Eldar to encounter the Second-born.

When three hundred years and more were gone since the Noldor came to Beleriand, in the days of the Long Peace, Finrod Felagund lord of Nargothrond journeyed east of Sirion and went hunting with Maglor and Maedhros, sons of Fëanor. (42)

Finrod tires of hunting and decides to go off exploring on his own. He first hears strange noises and then comes upon Men in the forest. In his fascination he does not immediately reveal himself, but hides himself in the trees and observes them. "[L]ove for them stirred in his heart" (43). After the Men have fallen asleep, Finrod goes to sit "beside their dying fire where none kept watch; and he took up a rude harp which Bëor had laid aside, and he played music upon it such as the ears of Men had not heard; for they had as yet no teachers in the art, save only the Dark Elves in the wild lands" (44). The men awaken and listen to Finrod's playing and singing,



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. . . each thought that he was in some fair dream, until he saw that his fellows were awake also beside him; but they did not speak or stir while Felagund still played, because of the beauty of the music and the wonder of the song. Wisdom was in the words of the Elven-king, and the hearts grew wiser that hearkened to him; for the things of which he sang, of the making of Arda, and the bliss of Aman beyond the shadows of the Sea, came as clear visions before their eyes, and his Elvish speech was interpreted in each mind according to its measure. (45)

The incident of Finrod imparting knowledge through song implies two preternatural abilities that Finrod holds, presumably in excess of other high Eldar in general: the ability to elevate the power of music to a form of magic and to communicate directly mind-to-mind with those who do not share a common language with him.

In writing about Finrod, one needs to mention the *Athrabeth Finrod ah Andreth* (46) (translation from Sindarin: "The Debate of Finrod and Andreth"). The *Athrabeth* is a dialogue set during the relative peace of the years of the Siege of Angband. It takes place between Finrod and a mortal Andreth, a wise woman of her people. The entire piece is in keeping with Finrod's intense curiosity about Men, their lore, and their self-perception. Their discussion, which grows argumentative, semi-antagonistic in the beginning, deals with Finrod's and Andreth's perceptions of the differences between the natures and fates of Elves and Men and the question of the mortality of Men versus the semi-immortality of Elves. Each defends his or her understanding and perspective of those questions. Finally, toward the end of the piece, the reason for Andreth's heated interest in the topic is revealed to be largely based upon her love for Finrod's brother Aegnor. Finrod then attempts to explain in a kind manner why Aegnor would have felt that he had to refuse her love, basically stating that he would have understood that Elves and Men are not meant for one another.

Yet, when one reviews the beliefs of Finrod and those of Andreth, one is forced to evaluate the degree to which Tolkien's stated desire to avoid blatantly imposing a Christian legendarium upon his fictional world and his assertion that he did not like allegory or chose to use it in his writing either (47) are jeopardized and/or contradicted by this essay. Christopher Tolkien opines on his father's uncertainty about this segment:

It seems to me therefore that there are problems in the *Athrabeth Finrod ah Andreth* for the interpretation of my father's thought on these matters; but I am unable to resolve them. It is unfortunate that the questionings with which this slip of paper begins are so elliptically expressed, especially the words 'Already it is (if inevitably) too like a parody of Christianity.' Obviously, he was not referring to the legend of the Fall: he was saying clearly that the introduction of such a legend would make 'it' - presumably, the *Athrabeth* - altogether into 'a parody of Christianity'. (48)

Of course, as scholars of Tolkien, we are pleased to have the *Athrabeth* available to us and compelled to read and consider it. My assessment is, however, that to demand the definitive answers to questions which are not handled in the narrative of the story or played out in its action, particularly those which rely more upon belief than provable knowledge, diminishes our ability to enjoy the aspect of "other" that Tolkien sought to convey in the creation of his secondary fantasy world. We cannot agree upon such questions in our real world; why would we presume that there must be one right answer in Tolkien's fantasy world, especially since we are not considering it from the point of view of Eru, but of Elves and only a sub-group of those:



the Eldar? Tolkien in his *Letters*, #211, makes the point that “. . . it must be remembered that mythically these tales are Elf-centered, not anthropocentric.” That passage demonstrates he did not intend to give us the final analysis of the *real* answer to questions concerning the source of the differences between Elves and Men or their final fates.

On the other side of the spectrum, there are others, principally conservative theorists and religious writers, who seek to discover and promote direct and implicit references to Christianity in Tolkien’s work. One of the more respectable scholarly journals dedicated to this line of discourse is *The Chesterton Review* (49). There are also many who consider the *Athrabeth* to be one of the more powerful pieces that Tolkien wrote and adored that it skates on the thin ice of explicitly espousing a Christian or proto-Christian ideology. An example is:

Scholars and experts in all things Tolkien are in general agreement that the most beautiful writing in all of Tolkien’s legendarium is *Ainulindalë: The Music of the Ainur* (50) . . . . There is another short work by Tolkien that, for me, is even more compelling and gripping. . . . The essay is entitled *Athrabeth Finrod Ah Andreth, or The Debate of Finrod and Andreth* . . . . Like *Ainulindalë*, *Athrabeth Finrod Ah Andreth* provides an intimate glimpse into the heart and theological mind of the wizard who was J.R.R. Tolkien. (51)

Another less effusive comment of a similar nature is:

But the Elf and the Woman also speak of the Fall of Men in a time almost forgotten, and of the “Old Hope” (known to some Men though not at that point to the Elves), amounting to a prophecy of the Incarnation, that one day Eru, the Creator, will enter into his own creation, marred as it is by Morgoth, and heal it from within (52). Throughout this important dialogue we see the efforts that Tolkien made to render his mythical history at least consistent with Christian belief. (53)

Tolkien found himself in a bind when he tried to write a coherent theology for the Elves. They embody aspects of the pre-Christian heathen heroes of the sagas that influenced Tolkien’s work. Yet the Elves have additional characteristics that make them more like angels. One constantly hears that in speculative fiction internal consistency is necessary. But, perhaps, one can try too hard in fantasy to make all of these pieces fit perfectly.

### **The Doom of the Noldor Follows Finrod -- Oaths Sworn Lead to Tragedy**

Finrod is in no way exempt from the Doom of the Noldor, despite the fact 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” (54.)

When Finrod and his siblings first visit their great-uncle King Elu Thingol in his protected enclave of Doriath, they are welcomed as kinsmen, despite Thingol and Melian’s mistrust of the Noldor in general and the sons of Fëanor in particular. Finrod shares his hopes and dreams with Thingol, who recommends to him the location for the construction of Nargothrond. When Finrod installs himself in Nargothrond, Galadriel chooses to stay in Doriath and learn from Melian the Maia (by this time, she also has fallen in love with Celeborn).

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Finrod and his family, although welcomed by Thingol as kinsmen, do not speak honestly with Thingol or Melian regarding the deeds of the Noldor. They speak only of the murder of King Finwë and the theft of the Silmarils. They do not reveal the details of the kinslaying at Alqualondë, the theft of the Swan ships of the Teleri, or the oath taken by the sons of Fëanor.

Morgoth takes it upon himself to stir up trouble, much like he did with the vicious lies and rumors he spread to cause dissention among the Noldor in Aman. “[W]hispered tales began to pass among the Sindar” composed of “the evil truth . . . enhanced and poisoned by lies” (55). These stories reached Círdan at the coast, who, being a prudent Elf, reports everything he has heard to Thingol. At the time that Thingol receives the news, Finrod and his brothers are visiting Galadriel in Doriath.

Then Thingol, being greatly moved, spoke in anger to Finrod, saying: 'Ill have you done to me, kinsman, to conceal so great matters from me. For now I have learned of all the evil deeds of the Noldor.' (56)

Finrod's answer is once again less than completely forthcoming. He refuses to be a snitch and betray his cousins:

'What ill have I done you, lord? Or what evil deed have the Noldor done in all your realm to grieve you? Neither against your kinship nor against any of your people have they thought evil or done evil.' (57)

His brother Angrod is still angry at harsh words uttered by Caranthir (in a conference held among the lords of Noldor some time earlier in Mithrim) against the House of Finarfin and its dealings with Thingol. Angrod spills everything. It is at this point that Thingol bans the use of the language of the Noldor throughout Doriath.

Finrod's withholding of information over a period of time, as well as his response to Thingol when confronted with the truth, reveal that Finrod has no second thoughts about where his loyalty lies—not with his mother's people, or the Vanyar of his grandmother Indis, or, as much as he may admire his accomplishments, not with Thingol, but with the exiled Noldor.

Then the sons of Finarfin departed from Menegroth with heavy hearts, perceiving how the words of Mandos would ever be made true, and that none of the Noldor that followed after Fëanor could escape from the shadow that lay upon his house. (58)

There is one further incident recounted in *The Silmarillion* where Finrod foresees his final fate.

Now King Finrod Felagund had no wife, and Galadriel asked him why this should be; but foresight came upon Felagund as she spoke, and he said: 'An oath I too shall swear, and must be free to fulfill it, and go into darkness. Nor shall anything of my realm endure that a son should inherit.' (59)

The Dagor Bragollach, the Battle of Sudden Flame, which ends the vigilant and tenuous calm of the Siege of Angband, marks a crucial juncture in Finrod's time in Middle-earth. His brothers Angrod and Aegnor are slain, along with many others in liege to the House of Finarfin, and a large number of the warriors of the House of Bëor, Finrod's closest allies among the Edain.

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Finrod is separated from his troops, and surely would have been captured or slain, when Barahir the brother of Bregolas the leader of the House of Bëor rescues him.

Thus Felagund escaped, and returned to his deep fortress of Nargothrond; but he swore an oath of abiding friendship and aid in every need to Barahir and all his kin, and in token of his vow he gave to Barahir his ring. Barahir was now by right lord of the house of Bëor, and he returned to Dorthonion; but most of his people fled from their homes and took refuge in the fastness of Hithlum. (60)

Two years after the Dagor Bragollach, Sauron finally overtook Finrod's tower of Minas Tirith upon Tol Sirion. "Then Sauron made it into a watchtower for Morgoth, a stronghold of evil, and a menace; and the fair isle of Tol Sirion became accursed, and it was called Tol-in-Gaurhoth, the Isle of Werewolves." (61)

Defeated and driven from their lands, Celegorm and Curufin flee to Nargothrond: "Thus it came to pass that their people swelled the strength of Nargothrond; but it would have been better, as was after seen, if they had remained in the east among their own kin" (62).

Initially, the folk of Nargothrond welcome Celegorm and Curufin. They bring a significant defensive force along with them, which is to Nargothrond's advantage. They are allies and brothers-in-arms of Finrod's people, and Fëanor's oath temporarily sleeps. Things, however, become complicated when Beren arrives. He shows Finrod the ring of his ancestor Barahir and calls upon Finrod's sworn oath by requesting that Finrod assist him in securing a Silmaril from Morgoth's crown. Although Finrod is not blind to the fact that this is at best a semi-suicidal venture, he stands by his oath (63).

Meanwhile, Celegorm and Curufin are outraged that Beren and Finrod propose to take possession of a Silmaril. Here one sees the unfortunate intersection of two sworn oaths in support of conflicting aims. The Fëanorian brothers determine to prevent the warriors and lords of Nargothrond from following Finrod on this quest. Celegorm takes the role of bad cop, arguing his intent to abide by his oath, restating its terrible conditions, and reiterating the exclusive rights of the sons of Fëanor to possession of a Silmaril, his arguments "as potent as were long before in Tirion the words of his father that first inflamed the Noldor to rebellion" (64). Curufin in turn plays the good cop by appealing to rationality and the responsibility of the lords of Nargothrond not to put their own people in mortal jeopardy by supporting Finrod in this crazy scheme.

In the passages of *The Silmarillion* where Celegorm and Curufin argue against Finrod's proposal to support Beren in his quest, we see the evidence of the magic or power embodied in language that is at the disposal of the Noldor who have come out of Aman, in this case corrupted by the oath of Fëanor, but no less strong. The languages and the images are stunning:

. . . conjuring in the minds of the Elves a vision of war and the ruin of Nargothrond. So great a fear did he [Curufin] 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. (65)

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Their eloquence wins the day and Finrod is abandoned by all but a tiny handful of his lords. He places his crown and the protection of Nargothrond in the hands of Orodreth and leaves with Beren (66).

In one of the more dramatic episodes of *The Silmarillion*, we see Finrod regain control of his wizardry in his renowned song battle against Sauron. Beren and Finrod, along with their companions, are waylaid and brought before Sauron. Finrod, who was unable to triumph over Celegorm and Curufin in Nargothrond, gives Sauron a true challenge. (This might almost lead one to question whether Finrod's heart was really in his attempt to rally all of Nargothrond behind him. Perhaps with his prescience of his own doom, he sought to fulfill his sworn oath, but might have been unconsciously reluctant to lead all of Nargothrond's defenders to the same fate.)

Sauron's attack begins with these verses from *The Lay of Leithian* as quoted in *The Silmarillion*:

He chanted a song of wizardry,  
Of piercing, opening, of treachery,  
Revealing, uncovering, betraying. (67)

Finrod's response is strong:

Backwards and forwards swayed their song.  
Reeling foundering, as ever more strong  
The chanting swelled, Felagund fought,  
And all the magic and might he brought  
Of Elvenesse into his words. (68)

But the Finrod's final weakness is induced by the memory of the blood of kinsmen shed and the dark deeds committed in the flight from Valinor.

Then in the doom gathered; darkness growing  
In Valinor, the red blood flowing  
Beside the Sea, where the Noldor slew  
The Foamriders, and stealing drew  
Their white ships with their white sails  
From lamplit havens. The wind wails,  
The wolf howls. The ravens flee.  
The ice mutters in the mouths of the Sea. (69)

Finrod, like his brethren, his cousins, and the majority of his people, ignored the last warning given by Manwë's herald to turn back and return to Valinor and brought upon himself the Doom of the Noldor. The lesson of the story for Finrod is, for all of his nobility and good works, not even the highest and most beloved of the Elves can figuratively spit in the eye of Valar and come away unscathed. The segment from *The Lay of Leithian* ends with the famous lines:

Thunder rumbles, the fires burn--  
And Finrod fell before the throne. (70)

Up until this point, the Elves and Beren have remained concealed behind disguises, but these fall away, leaving them exposed to Sauron. He still does not know their exact identities or why they have come there. The duel, however, has alerted Sauron to the fact that Finrod is a singularly *powerful* Lord of the West. Sauron's strategy is to pick off Finrod's companions one-by-one, seeking someone who will betray him.

He cast them therefore into a deep pit, dark and silent, and threatened to slay them cruelly, unless one would betray the truth to him. From time to time they saw two eyes kindled in the dark, and a werewolf devoured one of the companions; but none betrayed their lord. (71)

In the end, only Beren and Finrod remain alive. When a werewolf attacks Beren, Finrod in one final exercise of his wizardry breaks free of his bonds and is able to slay the beast, using only his bare hands and teeth. Mortally wounded, his last words to Beren are:

'I go now to my long rest in the timeless halls beyond the seas and the Mountains of Aman. It will be long ere I am seen among the Noldor again; and it may be that we shall not meet a second time in death or life, for the fates of our kindreds are apart. Farewell!' He died then in the dark, in Tol-in-Gaurhoth, whose great tower he himself had built. Thus King Finrod Felagund, fairest and most beloved of the house of Finwë, redeemed his oath; but Beren mourned beside him in despair. (72)

Just a little too late for Finrod, Lúthien shows up to rescue Beren. After struggling, with the aid of Huan, to overcome Sauron, they finally force him to yield. "And immediately he took the form of a vampire, great as a dark cloud across the moon, and he fled, dripping blood from his throat upon the trees . . ." (73). Lúthien then finds Beren grieving over the body of Finrod.

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 (74). But Finrod walks with Finarfin his father beneath the trees in Eldamar. (75)

An alternative version of that ending is:

Thus perished Inglor Felagund son of Finrod, 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. (76)

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1. *The Silmarillion*, "Of Beleriand and Its Realms."
2. *The Silmarillion*, "Of Eldamar and the Princes of the Eldalië."
3. *The Peoples of Middle-earth*, *The Shibboleth of Fëanor*
4. *The Silmarillion*, "Of the Coming of the Elves and the Captivity of Melkor," and "Of Thingol and Melian." Olwë and Elwë (Sindarin: Elu Thingol) were brothers, descended from one of the leaders of the first grouping of Quendi who awakened at Cuiviénen.



When Olwe sailed to Valinor his followers came to be called the Teleri, while those who remained with Thingol in Middle-earth were named the Sindar, or the Grey-elves.

5. *The Peoples of Middle-earth, The Shibboleth of Fëanor*
6. Ibid. “. . . any of the Eldar might acquire an epossë ('after-name'), not necessarily given by their own kin, a nickname - mostly given as a title of admiration or honour.”
7. *The Peoples of Middle-earth, The Shibboleth of Fëanor* [Christopher Tolkien's note: “Elsewhere in these notes the stem rot, s-rot is given the meaning 'delve underground, excavate, tunnel', whence Quenya hrota 'dwelling underground, artificial cave or rockhewn hall', rotto 'a small grot or tunnel'.”]
8. *The Peoples of Middle-earth, The Shibboleth of Fëanor.*
9. *The Silmarillion*, "Of the Coming of Men into the West."
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15. Ibid.
16. *The Silmarillion*, "Of The Beginning of Days."
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19. *The Silmarillion*, "Of the Flight of the Noldor."
20. *The Silmarillion*, "Of the Noldor in Beleriand."
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22. *The Peoples of Middle-earth, The Shibboleth of Fëanor*
23. *The Silmarillion*, "Of the Flight of the Noldor."
24. U.S. slang for shiny, pretty, valuable things, particularly those crafted of precious stones and metal.
25. *Morgoth's Ring, The Annals of Aman.*
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30. *Morgoth's Ring, Athrabeth Finrod Ah Andreth.*
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33. Ibid.
34. *Morgoth's Ring, Athrabeth Finrod Ah Andreth.*
35. *The Silmarillion*, "Of the Coming of Men into the West."
36. *The War of Jewels, Quendi and Eldar.*
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38. *The Silmarillion*, "Of the Ruin of Beleriand and the Fall of Fingolfin."
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41. *The Silmarillion*, "Of the Return of the Noldor."
42. *The Silmarillion*, "Of the Coming of Men into the West."
43. Ibid.
44. Ibid.
45. Ibid.
46. *Morgoth's Ring, Athrabeth Finrod Ah Andreth*

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47. *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, ed. Humphrey Carpenter, #165: "Certainly it [his work in general, not the Athrabeth in particular] has no allegorical intentions, general, particular, or topical, moral, religious, or political."
  48. *Morgoth's Ring, Athrabeth Finrod Ah Andreth*, excerpted from more detailed speculative commentary by Christopher Tolkien on problems and inconsistencies of the particular mythology of the *Athrabeth*.
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  50. The author of this comment does not provide references for the "scholars and experts" who are "in general agreement" with him. This reader might add that I, for one, would choose something else as an example of Tolkien's most beautiful and effective writing.
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  55. *The Silmarillion*, "Of the Noldor in Beleriand."
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  63. *The Silmarillion*, "Of Beren and Lúthien."
  64. Ibid.
  65. Ibid.
  66. Ibid.
  67. Ibid.
  68. Ibid.
  69. Ibid.
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  71. Ibid.
  72. Ibid.
  73. Ibid.
  74. *The Silmarillion*, "Of the Voyage of Eärendil and the War of Wrath." Elves or Men of the Second Age are no longer able to pay homage at Finrod's grave, as it was swept into the sea along with most of Beleriand at the end of War of Wrath.
  75. *The Silmarillion*, "Of Beren and Lúthien."
  76. *War of the Jewels, The Grey Annals*.
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Special thanks to Pandemonium\_213 for the cartoon to accompany this month's biography!  
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