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# Character Biography

## Glaurung

By Oshun

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Glaurung, also called the Father of Dragons,<sup>1</sup> makes his premier appearance in the published *Silmarillion* in the First Age during the early period of the four hundred and some years of the Siege of Angband. In the "Index of Names," Glaurung is said to be

[t]he first of the Dragons of Morgoth, in the Dagor Bragollach, the Nirnaeth Arnoediad, and the Sack of Nargothrond; cast his spell upon Túrin and upon Nienor; slain by Túrin at Cabed-en-Aras. Called also the Great Worm and the Worm of Morgoth.<sup>2</sup>

Not to be confused with scary creatures of contemporary films or even with the dragons of Arthurian legendry and medieval Christian hagiography, Tolkien's dragons are unique. Tolkien takes his dragons and monsters seriously within his legendarium of Arda. He objects in his lecture "*Beowulf*: The Monsters and the Critics" to those who opine that these larger-than-life characters, dating back through times untold, should be limited only to tales for children or considered an immature subject for literature. He asserts that in *Beowulf* the monsters are required to be quite the opposite of those in nonsense stories.

I would suggest, then, that the monsters are not an inexplicable blunder of taste; they are essential, fundamental to the underlying ideas of the poem [*Beowulf*], which give it its lofty tone and high seriousness.<sup>3</sup>

It follows then that Tolkien himself intended to create a set of formidable monsters, fitting like the dragon in *Beowulf* the "lofty tone and high seriousness"<sup>4</sup> of his history of the heroic deeds of the Elves and Men recorded in *The Silmarillion*. Not the least of these sentient and rational beasts are the Balrogs, for example, who club Fingon into the ground and who are key to the destruction of the city of Gondolin. With or without wings, there are few more frightening monsters in myth and legend. But one may state with some considerable degree of confidence that no monster within the legions of Morgoth's minions in *The Silmarillion* has more gravity and subtlety than Glaurung. Particularly in the story of Glaurung's encounters with Nienor and Túrin, one sees how Glaurung goes well beyond a scary cartoon creature or the fierce beast of most fantasy novels. He is highly intelligent, articulate, masterfully manipulative, and psychologically subtle.

Glaurung is not Tolkien's only dragon but he is the first. He is developed as a character with not simply dragonish attributes (for example, he breathes fire but does not fly, and he grows slowly and only with the passage of time reaches full size and full strength in his armor), but he also is given a personality. In the context of the great story of the heroic First Age detailed in *The Silmarillion*, he is a vital participant in that history. He does not simply roast his victims alive or prevail by brute strength—although he does both of those things as well—but he strategizes and confounds, misdirects and defeats using wit and knowledge of human nature.

## Fingon Meets the First Firedrake

When Glaurung is introduced early in the First Age, his initial appearance takes on the character of foreshadowing. During the period which follows the victory of the Noldor in the *Dagor Aglareb*, or the Glorious Battle, the third of the battles of the Wars of Beleriand, there is no great widespread engagement with Morgoth involving vast forces. On behalf of his father Fingolfin, High King of the Noldor, and himself, as the lord of Dor-lómin, Fingon the Valiant constantly patrols the extensive lands under their control and protection.<sup>5</sup>

Meanwhile, Morgoth has perceived with the exiles' victory in the Glorious Battle "that the Orcs unaided were no match for the Noldor; and he sought in his heart for new counsel."<sup>6</sup> The Black Vala's new strategy is to turn to other forces more formidable than the Orcs in order to threaten the Noldorin hold in northern Beleriand.

Again after a hundred years Glaurung, the first of the Urulóki, the fire-drakes of the North, issued from Angband's gates by night. He was yet young and scarce half-grown, for long and slow is the life of the dragons, but the Elves fled before him to Ered Wethrin and Dorthonion in dismay; and he defiled the fields of Ard-galen. Then Fingon prince of Hithlum rode against him with archers on horseback, and hemmed him round with a ring of swift riders; and Glaurung could not endure their darts, being not yet come to his full armoury, and he fled back to Angband, and came not forth again for many years.<sup>7</sup>

The immature dragon is as yet unable to withstand a mere company of skilled horse archers. The implication in the following passage is that Fingon and his military force are unaware of the fledgling nature of this beast.

Fingon won great praise, and the Noldor rejoiced; for few foresaw the full meaning and threat of this new thing. But Morgoth was ill-pleased that Glaurung had disclosed himself oversoon; and after his defeat there was the Long Peace of wellnigh two hundred years.<sup>8</sup>

The word *firedrake* in English, used to indicate a fire-breathing dragon, dates back to Old English *fýrdraca*, composed of *fýr* fire plus *draca* dragon (*draca* from Latin *draco*). In Middle English it becomes *fyrdrake*.<sup>9</sup> In his article, "The firedrake in *Beowulf*," Alan Brown notes significantly that

. . . it sometimes comes as a surprise to moderns to learn that what Goldsmith<sup>1</sup> calls the "large feature" of fiery breath so closely associated with the dragon of European tradition can be traced back no further than to early Insular tradition, notably the old English *Beowulf*.

<sup>1</sup> Margaret E. Goldsmith, noted Anglo-Saxon studies scholar, best known for her *Mode and Meaning of "Beowulf"*, Athlone Press (1970)<sup>10</sup>

The concept of the dragon itself, whether fire-breathing or not, with or without wings, is a near universal one. Medieval scholar Joyce Tally Lionarons in her book *The Medieval Dragon: The Nature of the Beast in Germanic Literature* notes that

In 1919, in a remarkable book entitled *The Evolution of the Dragon*, the mythographer G. Elliott Smith asserted that 'the dragon has been identified with all of the gods and all of the demons of every religion.'<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> G. Elliott Smith, *The Evolution of the Dragon* (Manchester At the University Press, 1919), p. 77. <sup>11</sup>

She implies that "all gods" and "all demons" and "every religion" is an obvious exaggeration. Perhaps, however, it is an understandable one given the widespread existence across centuries, even millennia, of dragons in myths and legends from Western Europe, throughout the Middle-east, extending to China, Japan, and Korea (just to name a few locations and peoples who have ascribed to dragon lore). Tolkien, nevertheless, appears to have rooted this particular dragon closer to home. While uniquely Tolkien's own creation, Glaurung bears resemblances in function at the very least to the dragon in *Beowulf*.

### Glaurung and the Fourth Battle

At the end of over four hundred years of the restless peace, Morgoth breaks the relative quiescence of the Siege of Angband with a major unexpected attack which is called the *Dagor Bragollach* or the Battle of Sudden Flame. The published *Silmarillion* begins this tale with these poignant and poetic lines:

There came a time of winter, when night was dark and without moon; and the wide plain of Ard-galen stretched dim beneath the cold stars, from the hill-forts of the Noldor to the feet of Thangorodrim. The watchfires burned low, and the guards were few; on the plain few were waking in the camps of the horsemen of Hithlum.<sup>12</sup>

The Noldor are taken by surprise when great rivers of flame rush across the plains, apparently caused by a combination of volcanic activity, Balrogs, and the breath of Glaurung, who is described as the leader of the forces of Morgoth. The Mountains of Iron belch forth poisonous fumes, deadly and stinking. The verdant plains of Ard-galen are turned into a charred wasteland covered in ash, renamed in the aftermath Anfauglith (Gaspings Dust in Sindarin<sup>13</sup>) descriptive of the barren desolation of the once grassy plain.<sup>14</sup>

In the front of that fire came Glaurung the golden, father of dragons, in his full might; and in his train were Balrogs, and behind them came the black armies of the Orcs in multitudes such as the Noldor had never before seen or imagined. And they assaulted the fortresses of the Noldor, and broke the leaguer about Angband, and slew wherever they found them the Noldor and their allies, Grey-elves and Men.<sup>15</sup>

The breaking of the siege is devastating for the Noldor and all of their allies against Morgoth. In one sweeping offensive, the Fëanorians are scattered. Communications are broken among Grey Elves, Men, and the Noldor. Finrod loses his brothers Aegnor and Angrod, along with more than half of his territory, geographically the largest of the realms ruled by the princes of the Noldor. Finally Fingolfin, "filled with wrath and despair,"<sup>16</sup> meets his death when he confronts Morgoth in single combat. Glaurung's nemesis from his youth, Fingon becomes High King of a Noldor badly shaken and weakened, one might even say near shattered. Over four hundred years of building and extending their influence and defense have ended in flames under the captaincy of Glaurung.<sup>17</sup>

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## Glaurung's Final Revenge against Fingon -- Unnumbered Tears

In the aftermath of the Battle of Sudden Flame, all hope, however, is not yet vanquished for the Noldor and their allies. The unexpected success of the quest for a Silmaril by Beren and Lúthien brings new energy to the fight against Morgoth.

Maedhros son of Fëanor lifted up his heart, perceiving that Morgoth was not unassailable; for the deeds of Beren and Lúthien were sung in many songs throughout Beleriand.<sup>18</sup>

The reader next meets Glaurung at the *Nirnaeth Arnoediad*, the Battle of Unnumbered Tears, arguably the most exceptional in its epic scale and its heart-shattering tragedy of any of the battles of Middle-earth. (The War of Wrath is larger in scope, but the valorous Noldorin exiles and their gritty allies steal the thunder from their tardy Amanyarin rescuers by their demonstration of sheer determination and raw heroism with lesser resources and against far greater odds.)

In light of what Maedhros and Fingon perceive as a tangible opportunity to at last bring down Morgoth, they are able to pull together an enormous alliance of Elves and Men from throughout Beleriand, including the Men and Elves of Hithlum, the doughty Dwarves of Belegost, the newly arrived Men called the Easterlings, Círdan's Elves from the Falas, and others from Ossiriand.<sup>19</sup>

Due to the deeds of Curufin and Celegorm, who have managed to alienate the cooperation of Nargothrond, which sends but a small contingent, and Doriath, which is represented by the intrepid Mablung and Beleg alone, the numbers are smaller than they might have been. Unknown to the larger allied force, however, Turgon in Gondolin secretly prepares to arrive with a well-armed force of ten thousand. Even without the full forces of Nargothrond and the significant numbers of Doriathan warriors, the free peoples of Middle-earth well could have triumphed in that battle if treachery had not lurked within the camp of Maedhros' Easterling allies.<sup>20</sup>

Instead Morgoth is informed of the battle plan and is able to draw out and engage Fingon's troops before Maedhros, delayed by traitors, at long last arrives.<sup>21</sup>

Fingon put on his white helm and sounded his trumpets, and all the host of Hithlum leapt forth from the hills in sudden onslaught. The light of the drawing of the swords of the Noldor was like a fire in a field of reeds; and so fell and swift was their onset that almost the designs of Morgoth went astray.<sup>22</sup>

When Maedhros finally reaches and fights his way across the field of combat in a futile attempt to join forces with Fingon, the two wings of the allied forces are forced farther apart by none other than Glaurung the mighty fire-drake.

There came wolves, and wolfriders, and there came Balrogs, and dragons, and Glaurung father of dragons. The strength and terror of the Great Worm were now great indeed, and Elves and Men withered before him; and he came between the hosts of Maedhros and Fingon and swept them apart.<sup>23</sup>

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Valiant Fingon successfully defends himself against Gothmog, until a second Balrog comes at him from behind and whips a thong of steel around his body, allowing Gothmog to cleave his helmet with his mighty axe.<sup>24</sup>

Thus fell the King of the Noldor; and they beat him into the dust with their maces, and his banner, blue and silver, they trod into the mire of his blood.<sup>25</sup>

Meanwhile, the Easterling turncoats expose their treachery by attacking the rearguard of the armies of the sons of Fëanor. The victory now belongs to Morgoth. But the battle is not over yet for Glaurung.

The Dwarves of Belegost stand firm on the field of battle, the last among those of the eastern wing. It is said that they are able to withstand dragon fire where Elves and Men cannot. They also wear "great masks in battle hideous to look upon."<sup>26</sup> With their masks and renowned courage, they stand fast before the dragons when all others flee.

And but for them Glaurung and his brood would have withered all that was left of the Noldor. But the Naugrim made a circle about him when he assailed them, and even his mighty armour was not full proof against the blows of their great axes; and when in his rage Glaurung turned and struck down Azaghâl, Lord of Belegost, and crawled over him, with his last stroke Azaghâl drove a knife into his belly, and so wounded him that he fled the field, and the beasts of Angband in dismay followed after him.<sup>27</sup>

## The Fall of Nargothrond and the Death of Glaurung

### Túrin and Nargothrond

Glaurung limps off the field of battle at the Nirnaeth Arnoediad, injured but not mortally. He will return in all of his malevolence. The magnificent Elf lords of the Noldor, with their breathtaking courage, posed little threat to him. The hardy Naugrim of Belegost, of equal valor and tougher hides, threatened him but could not destroy him. Glaurung's end is soon to come, but from another quarter entirely.

The outcome of Glaurung's story, if one were to write it as a stand-alone assuming no knowledge, for example, of either *The Silmarillion* or *The Children of Húrin*, would require a complete summation of the life of Túrin—a full book in its own right. Túrin is the son and heir to Húrin Thalion, head the House of Hador and Lord of Dor-lómin, himself a hero and survivor of the Battle of Unnumbered Tears. Unfortunately, he is captured and taken back to Angband. There Morgoth pronounces a doom upon Húrin and his wife and children. Túrin is left fatherless and with a curse upon him of which he knows nothing. Fantasy essayist and blogger Bryan Murphy says of the life of Túrin, that

. . . it is the most northern story in the book: heroic and studded with mighty deeds and feats of arms, but bleak, tragic, and ultimately fruitless. This is Tolkien in his darkest hour.

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Tolkien obviously had a soft spot for the passionate race of men, the Ragnarok spirit, and of the hot-blooded Húrin and Túrin in particular. These two great warriors very closely resemble the great figures and heroes of northern myth with which Tolkien felt an obvious kinship. We cannot help but sympathize with their unyielding spirit, even when it leads them terribly astray.<sup>28</sup>

This makes perfect sense if one takes under consideration his work on the monsters in *Beowulf*, as well the some of the other northern mythology which influenced the construction of his work. Tolkien acknowledged, for example, in his 1955 letter to W.H. Auden, that the tale of Kullervo from the Finnish *Kalevala* was one of his earliest inspirations for the *Silmarillion*: add a dragon to Kullervo's story, and the result bears a strong resemblance to the tale of Túrin.<sup>29</sup> In his presentation of the character of Glaurung, one catches a glimpse of Tolkien, not simply the first among storytellers in the fantasy mode, but as a medievalist and Anglo-Saxon scholar. Noted Tolkien scholar Verlyn Flieger writes of Tolkien's attitude toward *Beowulf* and Germanic literature hovering between a pagan past and a Christian future.

Despite his praise of the poem's quality of pagan stoicism, Tolkien reads the *Beowulf* poet as a Christian writing about a pagan past, a not-too-distant past that still held his imagination. "The shadow of its despair, if only as a mood, as an intense emotion of regret, is still there" (MC 23<sup>30</sup>). That Tolkien is in sympathy with this despair is clear, but it is just as clear that for him this in no way contradicts Christianity. "For the monsters do not depart, whether the gods go or come. A Christian was (and is) still like his forefathers a mortal hemmed in a hostile world" (MC 22).<sup>31</sup>

Alas, poor Túrin! One is hard-pressed to think of a better description for him than that of "a mortal hemmed in a hostile world." Fingon the Valiant and beleaguered Maedhros are not mortal but are entrapped by their fate and doom, and in the latter case an unbreakable oath, yet the heights of their valor and determination cannot be overcome by ordinary villains. They and the other epic heroes and anti-heroes of *The Silmarillion* require "a foe more evil than any human."<sup>32</sup>

To return to the tale of the doomed/stoic Túrin and the demise of Glaurung, Túrin was separated from his mother from an early age, and his younger sister Nienor he had never seen. Taken to Doriath by his mother, he is raised by Thingol, with every possible educational advantage and creature comfort of the hidden Elven realm. But still his doom determines that the reader follows him from one tragic misadventure to another (for the embellished details of those, one really must read *The Children of Húrin*). As a very young man still, he finds himself at Nargothrond. Now Túrin had been befriended and brought to Nargothrond by an escaped thrall of Morgoth, Gwindor, a lord of Nargothrond before he was captured. Another truly tragic figure, Gwindor is as sensible and decent a man as Túrin is hot-headed and prideful.

Now Orodreth the King of Nargothrond is not one of the wise among Elvenkind as Finrod was.

. . . Túrin advanced greatly in the favour of Orodreth, and he became the chief counsellor of the King, who submitted all things to his advice. In that time the Elves of Nargothrond forsook their secrecy, and great store of weapons were made; and by the counsel of Túrin the Noldor built a mighty bridge over the Narog from the Doors of Felagund for the swifter passage of their arms . . .<sup>33</sup>

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Before he left the hidden fortress, Gwindor was beloved by Finduilas. The broken and maimed thrall she sees in Gwindor is not the handsome Elf-lord she once loved. Her love turns to pity, "for he was no longer forward in arms, and his strength was small; and the pain of his maimed left arm was often upon him."<sup>34</sup> For this reader this is one of the most painful passages in the story. Finduilas has eyes for only Túrin, as

tall, dark-haired and pale-skinned, with grey eyes, and his face more beautiful than any other among mortal men, in the Elder Days. His speech and bearing were those of the ancient kingdom of Doriath, and even among the Elves he might be taken at first meeting for one from the great houses of the Noldor.<sup>35</sup>

One somehow expects more and better from the princess of Nargothrond, but then there is the fact that she has fallen under the shadow of Túrin's doom. So, Finduilas loves Túrin, as oblivious to this fact as Gwindor is miserably aware of his loss of status with both Finduilas and the king. Túrin finally notices that Gwindor is not as friendly as he once had been and approaches him. At that point, Gwindor tells him,

'Nonetheless your deeds and your counsels have changed my home and my kin. Your shadow lies upon them. Why should I be glad, who have lost all to you?' Túrin did not understand these words, and did but guess that Gwindor begrudged him his place in the heart and counsels of the King.<sup>36</sup>

Misery abounds for our hero and his loved ones. The tales of Túrin are tough reading at times for the modern reader, who struggles with concepts of fate and doom. Still within the story of the doomed children of Húrin, Tolkien remains ambiguous over how much of Túrin's misfortune comes from the doom cast upon him by Morgoth and how much from pride and poor judgment. Meanwhile, off in the wilderness somewhere between Doriath and Nargothrond, Túrin's mother Morwen and his sister Nienor seek to be united with him.

### **Enter the Dragon**

Finally, five years after Túrin reaches Nargothrond, he finally gets his wish to meet the enemy face-to-face but not before they receive a message via Círdan from none other than Ulmo himself of a "great peril that draws near to Nargothrond."<sup>37</sup> Ever prideful and bellicose, Túrin argues against tearing down the bridge they have constructed across the Narog and withdrawing into the safety of the fortress.

Not long thereafter,

Morgoth loosed upon the people of Narog the great host that he had long prepared; and Glaurung the Father of Dragons passed over Anfauglith, and came thence into the north vales of Sirion and there did great evil. Under the shadows of Ered Wethrin, leading a great army of Orcs in his train, he defiled the Eithel Ivrin, and thence he passed into the realm of Nargothrond, burning the Talath Dirnen, the Guarded Plain, between Narog and Teiglin.<sup>38</sup>

Túrin leads a force of thousands out of Nargothrond across that mighty bridge, large and strong enough to hold a dragon.

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Then the warriors of Nargothrond went forth, and tall and terrible on that day looked Túrin, and the heart of the host was uplifted as he rode on the right hand of Orodreth. But greater far was the host of Morgoth than any scouts had told, and none but Túrin defended by his dwarf-mask could withstand the approach of Glaurung.<sup>39</sup>

On the field of Tumhalad that day, the host of Nargothrond is routed at terrible cost, Orodreth is slain, and Gwindor with his dying word urges Túrin to return to Nargothrond and try to save Finduilas, saying, "she alone stands between you and your doom. If you fail her, it shall not fail to find you."<sup>40</sup> Of course Túrin does not reach Nargothrond in time. Glaurung has beaten him and, via Túrin's bridge, crossed over into the fortress and entered within.

And even as Túrin came up the ghastly sack of Nargothrond was well-nigh achieved. The Orcs had slain or driven off all that remained in arms, and they were even then ransacking the great halls and chambers, plundering and destroying; but those of the women and maidens that were not burned or slain they had herded on the terrace before the doors, as slaves to be taken to Angband.<sup>41</sup>

Glaurung greets Túrin, saying, "Hail, son of Húrin. Well met!"<sup>42</sup> Túrin does not turn away but faces the beast with his sword at the ready, and "Glaurung withheld his blast, and opened wide his serpent-eyes and gazed upon Túrin."<sup>43</sup> This is a perfect textual moment as the tragic hero faces the insurmountable malevolent force without wavering. Túrin may expect to stand up to the fire and brute force of the dragon or die trying, but Glaurung has much more in store for him.

He freezes Túrin like a block of stone with his terrible dragon spell and then tortures him with words.

'Evil have been all your ways, son of Húrin,' said he. 'Thankless fosterling, outlaw, slayer of your friend, thief of love, usurper of Nargothrond, captain foolhardy, and deserter of your kin. As thralls your mother and your sister live in Dor-lómin, in misery and want. You are arrayed as a prince, but they go in rags. For you they yearn, but you care not for that. Glad may your father be to learn that he has such a son: as learn he shall.' And Túrin being under the spell of Glaurung hearkened to his words, and he saw himself as in a mirror misshapen by malice, and he loathed what he saw.<sup>44</sup>

While still under the spell, Túrin is forced to watch as Finduilas is led away into captivity in Angband along with the other women, who call out to him in desperation. When she is gone, Glaurung releases the spell and Túrin leaps at him, but Glaurung is not finished with his mind games.

'If you wish to be slain, I will slay you gladly. But small help will that be to Morwen and Nienor. No heed did you give to the cries of the Elf-woman. Will you deny also the bond of your blood?' But Túrin drawing back his sword stabbed at his eyes; and Glaurung coiling back swiftly towered above him, and said: 'Nay! At least you are valiant. Beyond all whom I have met. And they lie who say that we of our part do not honour the valour of foes. See now! I offer you freedom. Go to your kin, if you can. Get you gone! And if Elf or Man be left to make tale of these days, then surely in scorn they will name you, if you spurn this gift.'<sup>45</sup>

Túrin is said to be still cloudy-headed from the dragon spell and takes Glaurung at his word and rushes off. The dragon calls after him.



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'Haste you now, son of Húrin, to Dor-lómin! Or perhaps the Orcs shall come before you, once again. And if you tarry for Finduilas, then never shall you see Morwen or Nienor again; and they will curse you.'<sup>46</sup>

And yet again, Glaurung is far from finished with the children of Húrin. Túrin sets off in search of his mother and sister, with the cries of Finduilas in his ears and the image of his family in his head, killed, enthralled, or worse.

Glaurung encounters Nienor in the wilderness and speaks to her, asking her what she seeks.

And constrained to answer she said: 'I do but seek one Túrin that dwelt here a while. But he is dead, maybe.'

'I know not,' said Glaurung. 'He was left here to defend the women and weaklings; but when I came he deserted them and fled. A boaster but a craven, it seems. Why seek you such a one?'

'You lie,' said Nienor. 'The children of Húrin at least are not craven. We fear you not.' Then Glaurung laughed, for so was Húrin's daughter revealed to his malice. 'Then you are fools, both you and your brother,' said he. 'And your boast shall be made vain. For I am Glaurung!'<sup>47</sup>

He erases her memory entirely and leaves her helpless. Túrin eventually finds her and, not knowing that she is his sister, they fall in love and marry. She is well into her pregnancy with her first child when they hear that Glaurung approaches. Túrin, obviously, must seek him out and slay him.

Glaurung continues to grow in strength and evil, harassing and murdering from his lair in Nargothrond. At last, Túrin encounters him to deliver the death blow.

Then Turambar drew the Black Sword of Beleg and stabbed upwards with all the might of his arm, and of his hate, and the deadly blade, long and greedy, went into the belly even to its hilts. Then Glaurung, feeling his death-pang, gave forth a scream, whereat all the woods were shaken, and the watchers at Nen Girith were aghast. Turambar reeled as from a blow, and slipped down, and his sword was torn from his grasp, and clave to the belly of the Dragon. For Glaurung in a great spasm bent up all his shuddering bulk and hurled it over the ravine, and there upon the further shore he writhed, screaming, lashing and coiling himself in his agony, until he had broken a great space all about him, and lay there at last in a smoke and a ruin, and was still.<sup>48</sup>

Nienor seeks her brother/husband and finds Túrin unconscious next to the dying dragon. Glaurung looks upon her and, with his glance, her memories come rushing back. The dragon has one last blow to deliver. He speaks to Nienor with his dying breath.

'Hail, Nienor, daughter of Húrin. We meet again ere we end. I give you joy that you have found your brother at last. And now you shall know him: a stabber in the dark, treacherous to foes, faithless to friends, and a curse unto his kin, Túrin son of Húrin! But the worst of all his deeds you shall feel in yourself.'<sup>49</sup>

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She realizes with horror that her beloved husband is indeed her lost brother, and the child she carries is his. She throws herself into the gorge of Cabed-en-Aras. When Túrin finally awakes, he learns of Nienor's identity and her fate and kills himself on his sword black sword Gurthang with which he had killed the dragon.<sup>50</sup>

This is no children's tale of dragon slayers and fell beasts and good triumphing over evil. Glaurung the fictional monster under discussion here may even be one of the craftiest and most subtle of Tolkien's villains. His weapons are not those of any ordinary dragon, not merely his size or his ability to breathe fire. Even his so-called dragonspell is of the highest form of magic which requires psychological subtlety, the capacity to look into the hearts and minds of his victims and use them against themselves and one another. He uses language and refined manipulation. The tale itself is more than mildly reminiscent of Tolkien's own discussion of monsters in literature.

Beowulf's dragon, if one wishes really to criticize, is not to be blamed for being a dragon, but rather for not being dragon enough, plain pure fairy-story dragon. There are in the poem some vivid touches of the kind . . . in which this dragon is a real worm, with a bestial life and thought of his own, but the conception, none the less, approaches *draconitas* rather than *draco*: a personification of malice, greed, destruction (the evil side of heroic life), and of the indiscriminating cruelty of fortune that distinguishes not good or bad (the evil aspect of all life). . . . The large symbolism is near the surface, but it does not break through, nor become allegory. Something more significant than a standard hero, a man faced with a foe more evil than any human . . .<sup>51</sup>

The language above summarizes better than the word of anyone else ever could both the role of Túrin as the tragic northern model of a doomed hero and Glaurung as his fitting monster, the "foe more evil than any human."

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And, thank you, Elleth, for copy-checking my citation from *Monsters and Critics* against the published version edited by Christopher Tolkien, which I had copied from an ancient PDF of a even more ancient transcript of the original presentation.

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4. *The Silmarillion*, "Of the Return of the Noldor."
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6. Ibid.
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## About the Author

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