
Character Biography Guilin of Nargothrond

By Oshun

Guilin of Nargothrond appears only six times in the final version of *The Silmarillion* as edited by Christopher Tolkien. Those mentions tell us little to nothing about his background or personal history, except that he has two sons, Gelmir and Gwindor, who play significant roles (which culminate in tragedy for each of them) in the events in Beleriand near the end of the First Age. In fact, Guilin's only appearance in the texts, except by reference, is in *The Lay of the Children of Húrin*, wherein under the earlier name of Fuilin, he welcomes his son Gwindor back home from thralldom in the company of Túrin:

Then Fuilin filled with flowing mead,
dear-hoarded drink dark and potent
a carven cup with curious brim,
by ancient art of olden smiths
fairly fashioned, filled with marvels;
there gleamed and lived in grey silver
the folk of Faerie in the first noontide
of the Blissful Realms¹

He receives no dialogue or other acknowledgement of his physical presence in Nargothrond in the accounts in *The Silmarillion* or *The Children of Húrin*.

The general assumption is that Guilin is a Noldo. As one of the Elves of Nargothrond who looked to Finrod Felagund as their King and Lord, Guilin dwelt in the underground city on the banks of the River Narog. There Finrod, with those who had followed him out of Aman into Middle-earth, built "wide halls behind ever-guarded gates" in that "deep and secret place beneath the hills," which had been recommended to him by his kinsman Thingol King of Doriath.² Guilin's son Gelmir is first identified as a "Lord of Nargothrond,"³ which leads one to believe that his family is most likely to be of the Noldor. The fact that Gwindor is at one point betrothed to Finduilas, the daughter of Orodreth,⁴ further implies that the family of Guilin are of Noldorin nobility. If they had not been, the betrothal might have been considered notable. Guilin is a Sindarin name,⁵ which in no way implies that he is not Noldorin, since the Noldor had started taking Sindarin names by that time. And, as Darth Fingon points out in his *Linguistic Foolery* article Sindarin "is the language Tolkien used almost exclusively for naming characters and places in Middle-earth. The vast majority of the names given in *The Silmarillion* are Sindarin names."⁶

With the breaking of the siege of Angband in the Dagor Bragollach (Battle of Sudden Flame), "the sons of Finarfin bore most heavily the brunt of the assault."⁷ Many of Finrod's people were killed and many captured alive in that assault. Among those taken prisoner was Guilin's son Gelmir.

With the success of Beren and Lúthien in their heist of a Silmaril, Fingon and Maedhros united to confront Morgoth whom they no longer saw as unassailable. Although Orodreth, by then

ruling Nargothrond after the death of Finrod Felagund, was still outraged at the deeds of Celegorm and Curufin and refused to join in the alliance, a small company followed "Gwindor son of Guilin, a very valiant prince" to participate in the "northern war, because he grieved for the loss of Gelmir his brother in the Dagor Bragollach."⁸

On the day upon which Fingon and Maedhros had planned to come together on the field of battle to confront Morgoth's army, Maedhros' forces were held back by the treachery of Uldor the Accursed. Fingon waited, determined not to move forward without the signal that Maedhros had arrived with his forces.

The heartbreaking account of Gelmir's death, and the turn from the hope of victory to the tragedy of defeat in the Battle of Unnumbered Tears, reads thusly in *The Children of Húrin*:

Then the Captain of Morgoth sent out riders with tokens of parley, and they rode up before the very walls of the outworks of the Barad Eithel. With them they brought Gelmir son of Guilin, a lord of Nargothrond, whom they had captured in the Bragollach, and had blinded; and their heralds showed him forth crying: 'We have many more such at home, but you must make haste if you would find them. For we shall deal with them all when we return, even so.' And they hewed off Gelmir's arms and legs, and left him.

By ill chance at that point in the outposts stood Gwindor son of Guilin with many folk of Nargothrond; and indeed he had marched to war with such strength as he could gather because of his grief for the taking of his brother. Now his wrath was like a flame, and he leapt forth upon horse-back, and many riders with him, and they pursued the heralds of Angband and slew them; and all the folk of Nargothrond followed after, and they drove on deep into the ranks of Angband.⁹

In *The Grey Annals*, Gwindor's charge and its outcome are described in moving language:

And behold! the light of the drawing of the swords of the Noldor was like a fire in a field of reeds; and so fell was their onset that almost the designs of Morgoth went astray. . . . Gwindor son of Guilin and the folk of Nargothrond were in the forefront of that battle, and they burst through the outer gates and slew the Orcs [even in the very tunnels of Morgoth >] within the very fortress of Morgoth, and he trembled upon his deep throne, hearing them beat upon his doors.

But at the last Gwindor was taken and his men slain; for none had followed them, and no help came. By other secret doors in the mountains of Thangorodrim Morgoth had let forth his main host that was held in waiting, and Fingon was beaten back with great loss from the walls.¹⁰

The sudden charge by the enraged Gwindor and his forces completely disrupted the strategy of Fingon and Maedhros. The plan going into the battle had been that Maedhros and his massive force would attack from the east and draw Morgoth's army out of Angband. Then Fingon's host would attack from the west and they would crush Morgoth's forces between their two wings. First Maedhros was delayed by treachery, and when he finally arrived, he was attacked by the traitors in his rear.

Meanwhile, Gwindor and his company had, with the frenzy of their determination and outrage, put fear into the heart of Morgoth himself. They burst through the gates and slew the guards on

the steps of Angband itself. Nonetheless, they were overrun and Gwindor's entire company was slain and he was taken captive, where he would languish for the next fourteen years. If that were not disastrous enough, they had placed Fingon in the position of abandoning his overall campaign plan and following Gwindor's wild outburst.

The what-ifs and speculations about alternative outcomes of the Battle of Unnumbered Tears are myriad. The main point is that the state of the vanguard of the Noldor went from hope to devastation with this explosive unplanned beginning of this battle—Morgoth's goading succeeded.

The tie-in of the name of this battle with the words in the curse of Mandos is inescapable. If we are to assume as we do herein that Guilin is a Noldo who did not turn back when they were warned in the lands of Araman north of Valinor, he lives his life under the curse of Mandos.

Although this battle and the Battle of Sudden Flame that preceded it defined and framed Guilin's life, we do not know if he fought in either of them; we may be relatively certain that had he participated in the Unnumbered Tears, it would have been mentioned in the texts. One can only imagine—because we are not told—the horror with which Guilin eventually received the news of the ghastly details of the death of his son Gelmir and the disappearance/captivity of his remaining son Gwindor.

The final heartbreak and disaster which befalls this man and his family happens when Guilin's son Gwindor does escape fourteen years later and encounters Túrin Turambar and brings him to Nargothrond:

'Who are you?' said Túrin.

'A wandering Elf, a thrall escaped, whom Beleg met and comforted,' said Gwindor. 'Yet once I was Gwindor son of Guilin, a lord of Nargothrond, until I went to the Nirnaeth Arnoediad, and was enslaved in Angband.'¹¹

Although altered and aged by his terrible suffering, Gwindor son of Guilin has survived.

At first his own people did not know Gwindor, who went out young and strong, and returned now seeming as one of the aged among mortal Men, because of his torments and his labours; but Finduilas daughter of Orodreth the King knew him and welcomed him, for she had loved him before the Nirnaeth, and so greatly did Gwindor love her beauty that he named her Faelivrin, which is the gleam of the sun on the pools of Ivrin. For Gwindor's sake Túrin was admitted with him into Nargothrond, and he dwelt there in honour.¹²

After settling into Nargothrond, Gwindor still loves Finduilas, Orodreth's daughter, but she has fallen out of love with him. This shattered, aged Elf who returned from thralldom was not the fine-looking, eager man with whom she had pledged her troth in their relative youth. She fell in love with the handsome, mysterious Túrin, who did not share the ardor of her feelings or even sense her longing. Gwindor, however, in the bitterness of his heartbreak did. Finally, Guilin's surviving son is slain in the Battle of Tumhalad with the last of the warriors of Nargothrond:

Gwindor son of Guilin was wounded to the death. But Túrin came to his aid, and all fled before him; and he bore Gwindor out of the rout, and escaping into a wood there laid him

on the grass.

Then Gwindor said to Túrin: 'Let bearing pay for bearing! But ill-fated was mine, and vain is thine; for my body is marred beyond healing, and I must leave Middle-earth. And though I love thee, son of Húrin, yet I rue the day that I took thee from the Orcs. But for thy prowess and thy pride, still I should have love and life, and Nargothrond should yet stand a while. Now if thou love me, leave me! Haste thee to Nargothrond, and save Finduilas.'¹³

So, Guilin plays no active role in the entire narrative which swirls around his existence. He is a symbol of the curse laid upon the Noldor, of the stubborn stand against Morgoth by those same valiant exiles. It seeks to underline the tragic story of the Noldor, which is a violent one of stalwart struggle in battle, and terror, grief, and loss. In the search for any tiny details of the story of Guilin I might have missed, I ran across a compelling citation which points to this central core of *The Silmarillion* in a review: "Had I but world enough and time, I'd tell you about the unluckiest man in the book, Túrin Turumbar, whose life resembles that of Oedipus and other doomed figures" ¹⁴ True enough—as far as it goes—but Guilin and his sons are among a long list of other tragic *Silmarillion* figures who could compete for the title of "unluckiest" in the history of the First Age in Beleriand.

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About the Author

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