
Character Biography Gwindor of Nargothrond

By Lotrfan

Gwindor of Nargothrond is an Elf who is first mentioned in Christopher Tolkien's version of *The Silmarillion* in the chapter recounting the Nirnaeth Arnoediad. He is ill-fated enough to be an eyewitness and an active participant in numerous tragic events in the narrative. Gwindor receives numerous mentions in *The Silmarillion* but is given far more extensive characterization in the more recently published *Children of Húrin*.

Gwindor initially appears in Chapter 20 of *The Silmarillion*, "Of the Fifth Battle: Nirnaeth Arnoediad." He is introduced as a prince of Nargothrond¹ who came to the battle despite the objections of his King, Orodreth. Gwindor's reasons for defying Orodreth become clear in this passage:

Thence came only a small company, following Gwindor son of Guilin, a very valiant prince; and against the will of Orodreth he went to the northern war, because he grieved for the loss of Gelmir his brother in the Dagor Bragollach. They took the badge of the house of Fingolfin, and marched beneath the banners of Fingon; and they came never back, save one.²

This passage already sets an ominous tone for Gwindor's fate; he and his brother Gelmir become unwitting pawns in a pivotal event from the Nirnaeth Arnoediad. For it is Gwindor who unknowingly sets in motion the events that will change the course of this crucial battle. He is not the only character to contribute to this doomed Union—Ulfang and his sons' horrifying betrayal of the sons of Fëanor looms large as well—but there is no doubt that more lives were needlessly lost and the battle itself doomed to failure due to Morgoth's twisted cruelty at the onset.

The narrative has already established that Gwindor's brother Gelmir was lost during the Dagor Bragollach, but as Fingon and his host wait for the arrival of Maedhros, Morgoth (who knows that Maedhros is detained and has directly caused his delay) unleashes the first of his brutal actions against the hosts opposing him and reveals that Gelmir is still a captive:

But the Captain of Morgoth in the west had been commanded to draw out Fingon swiftly from his hills by whatever means he could. . . the Captain of Morgoth sent out riders with tokens of parley, and they rode up before the outworks of the Barad Eithel. With them they brought Gelmir son of Guilin, that lord of Nargothrond whom they had captured in the Bragollach; and they had blinded him. Then the heralds of Angband 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 hands and feet, and his head, within sight of the Elves, and left him.³

This atrocity must have shocked the Elves who witnessed it but Fingon's host would have still held fast, waiting for a sign from Maedhros before advancing, if not for Gwindor:

By ill chance, at that place in the outworks stood Gwindor of Nargothrond, the brother of Gelmir. Now his wrath was kindled to madness, and he leapt forth on horseback, and many riders with him; and they pursued the heralds and slew them, and drove on deep into the main host. And seeing this all the host of the Noldor was set on fire, and Fingon put on his white helm and sounded his trumpets and all the host of Hithlum leapt forth from the hills in sudden onslaught.⁴

The Noldor have not waited for Maedhros. The entire battle plan meticulously set out by Fingon and Maedhros has been altered due to Gwindor's actions. There will be no "hammer and anvil assault", as Maedhros is still delayed and will join the battle too late and besieged by his traitorous allies and the hosts of Morgoth.

Gwindor sets in motion this too-early response by Fingon's host and is captured himself. There is no question of his bravery or skills as a warrior but his despair at the fate of his brother makes him lose all reason:

Ever in the forefront of that battle went Gwindor and the Elves of Nargothrond, and even now they could not be restrained; and they burst through the Gate, and slew the guards upon the very stairs of Angband, and Morgoth trembled upon his deep throne, hearing them beat upon his doors. But they were trapped there, and all were slain save Gwindor only, whom they took alive; for Fingon could not come to their aid.⁵

Gwindor does not appear again until the story of Túrin, where we learn what has become of him during the intervening years. His characterization is far richer and more nuanced in Christopher Tolkien's recent publication *The Children of Húrin* than in the earlier *Silmarillion*.

Against all odds, Gwindor has managed to escape from his captivity. This is a fascinating narrative, as up until this point Maedhros is the only other named character to have successfully escaped from Morgoth's clutches.

Gwindor's story gives insight into the fates of Elves captured by Morgoth and what happens to them in Angband. Gwindor, even in captivity, shows great spirit and resourcefulness.

It is Beleg who first discovers Gwindor, during his search for the captured Túrin. He comes across a sleeping Elf and his account gives the first glimpse of the escaped Gwindor:

Grieving Beleg looked at him, for Gwindor was but a bent and timid shadow of his former shape and mood, when in the Battle of Unnumbered Tears that lord of Nargothrond rode to the very doors of Angband and there was taken. For few of the Noldor whom Morgoth took captive were put to death, because of their skill in mining for metals and gems; and Gwindor was not slain, but put to labour in the mines of the North. These Noldor possessed many of the Féanorian lamps, which were crystals hung in a fine chain net, the crystals being ever-shining with an inner blue radiance marvelous for finding the way in the darkness of night or in tunnels; of these lamps they themselves did not know the secret. Many of the mining elves thus escaped from the darkness of the mines, for they were able to bore their way out; but Gwindor received a small sword from one who worked in the forges, and when working in a stone-gang turned suddenly on the guards. He escaped but with one hand cut off; and now he lay exhausted under the great pines of the Taur-nu-Fuin.⁶

This passage gives remarkable information regarding the treatment of captured Elves, most particularly Noldorin captives. Their inherent skills with metals and gems are utilized by Morgoth and mention is even made of the use of Fëanorian lamps, an astounding fact on its own.

Gwindor's captivity has greatly altered his appearance, but the reader is given a sense that his spirit is as yet unbroken. Bent and timid he may seem but Gwindor's actions to escape his captivity show that he still retained his fiery temperament and his skills as a warrior were not lessened despite his hard labours. It is a testament to his tenacity and resourcefulness that not only did he find a means to obtain a sword, he kept it hidden and killed his guards, possibly allowing other thralls to also escape.

But he has grown more cautious, initially counseling Beleg not to go after Túrin, for he would only join him in his anguish as a captive.⁷ Gwindor is broken, beaten down, disabled by the loss of his hand and the cruelty of his thralldom, but even now his capacity for hope somehow still exists. Beleg raises that hope in him, despite the ever-present danger of recapture or death, and against all odds Gwindor agrees to help Beleg search for Túrin.

This decision brings Gwindor into another tragic sequence of events as Túrin kills Beleg in the night, not recognizing his dearest friend as Beleg cuts his bonds.⁸ Gwindor again proves himself remarkably capable by taking charge of the near-catatonic Túrin and organizing a burial for Beleg. He retains Beleg's sword Anglachel as well.

Gwindor's courage and strength were renewed by his actions.⁹ Despite his suffering and loss of limb he has found new purpose with his care of Túrin. It is another example of the astonishing resilience of Elves. It hearkens back to Maedhros' own remarkable recovery after his years of captivity.

Gwindor is highly perceptive as well, something that will also figure in the later narrative. He brings Túrin to the Eithel Ivrin, and Túrin finally breaks his unnatural silence and grieves for Beleg. It is at this point that Gwindor gives Beleg's sword to Túrin; as he does so he correctly identifies that Anglachel mourns for Beleg¹⁰, something that the sword itself confirms at Túrin's end.

Gwindor brings Túrin to Nargothrond, his own home that he has longed for—and we soon learn who else he longs for: Finduilas, the daughter of Nargothrond's King Orodreth.

It is a bittersweet reunion, for Gwindor and Finduilas are revealed to have loved one another before Gwindor left to join the Union of Maedhros. More than loved one another, for it is disclosed in *The Children of Húrin* that they were in fact betrothed.

Finduilas is the one who initially recognizes her lost love, despite his disfigurement from his torment in Angband.¹¹ They are reunited but their relationship is not what it was. Gwindor, reinforcing the constancy of Elvish fidelity, loves her still. Although she too still cares for him, the arrival of Túrin soon alters the nature of that affection.

Gwindor, likely due to his high rank prior to his capture, joins Orodreth's council on his return to Nargothrond. Túrin, the newcomer whose prowess in warfare has impressed the king, does as well. Despite their friendship, Túrin and Gwindor are at odds when it comes to their strategy regarding Morgoth. Gwindor, ever mindful of his inside knowledge of the might of Morgoth, counsels caution rather than the brash, more confrontational advice Turin advocates.

Túrin advances in favor with King and council while Gwindor—maimed and thus unable to regain his previously great skill at arms—is dishonoured:

. . . 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.¹²

Gwindor's counsel is ignored. A bridge over the river Narog is built at Túrin's urging, despite Gwindor's protests against it—and so the Doom of Nargothrond is set.

Gwindor's wise counsel is not appreciated. His influence is minimal and his words disregarded. Even in appearance, he is likened more to an aging man than an Elf, while Túrin is described as one who could be taken for a Noldo, much more beautiful in appearance than other mortal Men.¹³

Even Finduilas, Gwindor's love, is not immune to Túrin's arresting presence. Her affections shift from Gwindor to Túrin, and Gwindor is well aware of that change, even if Túrin remains oblivious to her love.

Both Finduilas and Gwindor suffer during this time. Gwindor's resourcefulness and hope dwindle now that he is back in Nargothrond. He is considered a craven by his peers, his advice and cautionary words go unheeded by King and council, and he is losing the love of the one he holds most dear. The very things that gave him the strength to resist his fate and ultimately escape from Angband are what now bring him to despair.

Túrin has noted the growing coolness of his friendship with Gwindor and seeks him out, for he loves and pities him. He incorrectly surmises that his opposition to Gwindor in council is what has dimmed his friend's regard. Túrin, in his obliviousness, also mistakes Finduilas' inner turmoil for fear—in his opinion her unhappiness is sowed by Gwindor's words of warning, not by her unrequited longing for Túrin himself.

He speaks to them both but again does not comprehend the import of Finduilas' words to him, nor Gwindor's.

Gwindor has come to recognize that even though he is free of the shackles of Angband, he has still lost all that is meaningful to him—his kin, his place in the world, the respect of his peers and King, and Finduilas' affection. He knows that he will never regain what he has lost. Yet he still speaks his mind in a vain attempt to maintain the defense of his city and to protect the people he loves.

Finduilas suffers at this time as well—she knows she is not being fair to Gwindor but she cannot control her growing feelings for Túrin, even though she knows he does not return her love:

In truth Finduilas was torn in mind. For she honoured Gwindor and pitied him, and wished not to add one tear to his suffering; but against her will her love for Túrin grew day by day, and she thought of Beren and Lúthien.¹⁴

Honour and pity are not what Gwindor wants from her. Showing his powers of perception yet again, he realizes her regard for him has changed and he goes to speak with her, in essence releasing her from their betrothal. But he warns her to be wary of Túrin, initially regarding the folly of a union of Eldar and Edain but then because of Túrin's lineage and the curse Morgoth

has put on the House of Húrin. It is at this point that he discloses to her Túrin's real name, which up until this time has been unknown, as Túrin had given his name as *Agarwaen*, the son of Úmarth, when he arrived in Nargothrond¹⁵, choosing to keep his true identity hidden.

This leads to harsh words between Túrin and Gwindor, as Túrin feels Gwindor has betrayed his trust by revealing his name and calling down his doom upon him. But Gwindor again reveals the depth of his insight for he cautions Túrin that "the doom lies within yourself, not in your name."¹⁶ Knowing what comes later for Túrin, Gwindor's words are prophetic.

What Gwindor fears most eventually comes to pass, as Morgoth sends a great host against Nargothrond and with that host comes Glaurung, the Father of Dragons. The battle comes to its culmination on the field of Tumhalad and Nargothrond's forces are defeated and Orodreth their King is slain. Gwindor, despite his disabilities, is among the warriors and he receives a mortal wound. He is found by Túrin and brought out of the fray.

Once again Gwindor tries to impart advice to the headstrong Man. Gwindor, despite his regard for Túrin, has come to realize the doom carried by Túrin touches all those around him. Gwindor voices his regret at ever rescuing Túrin and with his dying breath begs him to save Finduilas, whom Gwindor still loves:

Let bearing pay for bearing! But ill-fated was mine, and vain is yours; for my body is marred beyond healing, and I must leave Middle-earth. And though I love you, son of Húrin, yet I rue the day that I took you from the Orcs. But for your prowess and your pride, still I should have love and life, and Nargothrond should yet stand a while. Now if you love me, leave me! Haste you to Nargothrond, and save Finduilas. And this last I say to you: she alone stands between you and your doom. If you fail her, it shall not fail to find you. Farewell!¹⁷

Gwindor meets his end defending the city he treasures, and his last thoughts are of the woman he loves. He is unable to save his kingdom, his Finduilas, his friend, or himself in the end.

His words are prophetic, for Túrin does not heed Gwindor's words and Glaurung thwarts him from his purpose; Finduilas meets her end at the hands of the Orcs. The doom that Túrin has tried to outrun finds him at last, and he too meets his unhappy end with Anglachel.

Gwindor could be easily considered a minor character in *The Silmarillion* but a thorough reading of the text and *The Children of Húrin* prove that he is anything but minor, playing a significant role in multiple tragic storylines in the narrative. He is richly characterized and is given scenes of dialogue and exposition that are commonly given to more central characters. Celebrimbor, Celeborn, and other names that are more familiar to the reader receive less exposition than this Elf of Nargothrond.

Gwindor's story shows parallels to Maedhros' own and gives the reader a unique perspective on the experiences of an escaped thrall. Gwindor shows remarkable resilience, ingenuity and loyalty but in the end his escape does not bring him the return he had hoped for—just bitter disappointment and despair.

Works Cited

1. *The Silmarillion*, "Of the Fifth Battle: Nirnaeth Arnoediad."
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3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
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7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
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17. *The Children of Húrin*, "The Fall of Nargothrond."

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Lotrfan has been entranced by the works of Tolkien since first reading *The Hobbit* at age ten. After discovering and binge reading Tolkien fan fiction in 2015, while recovering from ankle surgery, the author was encouraged to write fics herself. Favorite characters to read and write about include Fëanor and his extended family, from the *Silmarillion*, and Aragorn, Legolas and Gimli from the *Lord of the Rings*. Works can be found under Lotrfan at [AO3](#) and [SWG](#) and (due to an inadvertent typo) as lotrfn at [fanfiction.net](#).