
Character Biography Mablung of Doriath

By Oshun

Mablung of Doriath is one of a small number of named Sindarin Elves who, while pledging their allegiance and fealty directly to Elu Thingol, either under instruction from their King or at his sufferance, actually traveled extensively outside of the protected enclave of Doriath. Mablung, one of the principals or captains of Thingol's security forces guarding Doriath, is, like his comrade Beleg, deeply entrapped within the doom of the ill-fated children of Húrin and was involved in many of the affairs of Doriath in Beleriand. It does seem safe also to assume that Mablung would have been an active participant in the First Battle of Beleriand where the Sindar, under the leadership of Thingol, confronted and defended themselves against Morgoth's army before the return of the Noldor to Middle-earth.

The name Mablung means *heavy hand*, which one might interpret as a reference to his physical prowess and the fact that the principal weapon used by the Sindar in Doriath was the axe (1). Common to the genre of heroic sagas, one already has a clue as to the character of Mablung in his stalwart name. One might suspect and be right that he is to be written as another of those who can be viewed as one of Tolkien's quintessential First Age epic champions. Mablung is portrayed as bigger than life, with great force of character joined to compassion, possessing valour under adverse circumstances, and a capacity for independent action. Tolkien gives him wisdom and loyalty, while adding humility and purity of heart to his defining characteristics.

The first mention of Mablung in *The Silmarillion* is in the account of the Feast of Reunitin, the Mereth Aderthad (2). Thingol is said to have sent Mablung and Daeron bearing his greetings to that assembly. According to *The War of the Jewels* (3), Thingol did not choose to take part in this attempt by Fingolfin to organize a peaceful and friendly gathering of those who sought to be united in the struggle against Morgoth, where "many counsels were taken in good will, and oaths were sworn of league and friendship, and there was much mirth and good hope" (4). Thingol refused to come himself and is described as being cool toward the Noldor, in earlier accounts, because of his unwillingness to share the dominion of Beleriand with them or, in later versions, because he has, along with Melian, some indistinct insight into the future. One may infer that Thingol values Mablung and Daeron greatly to choose them as his personal stand-ins before the representatives of the far-flung Elven territories who gathered at that convocation.

Mablung also plays a role in the quest of Beren and Lúthien to gain a Silmaril. He is one of the messengers sent by Thingol, after he hears of the actions of Celegorm and Curufin in Nargothrond, to demand that the sons of Fëanor should assist him in finding his daughter. Before Mablung and his company have gone far, they encounter Carcharoth, the terrible Wolf of Angband. With a Silmaril in his stomach, not even Melian's protective borders can hold Carcharoth back. "Alone of the messengers Mablung, chief captain of the King, escaped, and he brought the dread tidings to Thingol" (5). Simultaneously, Beren and Lúthien return to Doriath, and are married before Thingol who softens at hearing the story of their quest. But a new threat has entered their borders.

. . . daily Carcharoth drew nearer to Menegroth, they prepared the Hunting of the Wolf; of all pursuits of beasts whereof tales tell the most perilous. To that chase went Huan the Hound of Valinor, and Mablung of the Heavy Hand, and Beleg Strongbow, and Beren Erchamion, and Thingol King of Doriath. (6)

After Carcharoth is killed it is Mablung, who removes the Silmaril from Carcharoth's body.

Then Mablung took a knife and ripped up the belly of the Wolf; and within he was well nigh all consumed as with a fire, but the hand of Beren that held the jewel was yet incorrupt. But when Mablung reached forth to touch it, the hand was no more, and the Silmaril lay there unveiled, and the light of it filled the shadows of the forest all about them. Then quickly and in fear Mablung took it and set it in Beren's living hand; and Beren was aroused by the touch of the Silmaril, and held it aloft, and bade Thingol receive it. (7)

Mablung also participates in the tragic Fifth Battle, the Nirnaeth Arnoediad or the Battle of Unnumbered Tears. Organized largely by Maedhros, the Elves and Men who participate in that great confrontation almost taste victory, but lose through a combination of betrayal and the lack of unstinting support from all of their potential allies. Thingol, in his increasing resentment and mistrust of the Noldor, withholds his potentially significant support. Mablung's principled and selfless heroism is shown in his response to that battle.

Then Thingol fortified the marches of his realm, and went not to war, nor any out of Doriath save Mablung and Beleg, who were unwilling to have no part in these great deeds. To them Thingol gave leave to go, so long as they served not the sons of Fëanor; and they joined themselves to the host of Fingon. (8)

Both Mablung and Beleg survive the Battle of Unnumbered Tears and return to Doriath. When Húrin, the Lord of Dor-lómin, is taken captive by Morgoth and does not return from that battle, his wife Morwen sends her son Túrin to Doriath to be sheltered and fostered there. Meanwhile, Morgoth curses Húrin and his children.

It is in Doriath that Mablung first becomes entangled in the curse of the children of Húrin. When Túrin, son of Húrin, reaches young manhood and returns from roaming beyond its borders with Beleg, it is Mablung who accuses Saeros of provoking and insulting Túrin within the halls of Thingol. "What ails you tonight? For this evil I hold you to blame; and it may be that the King's law will judge a broken mouth a just return for your taunting" (9). And he later insists, "Take heed, Saeros son of Ithilbor, lest you do the will of Morgoth in your pride, and remember that you are of the Eldar" (10). However, Mablung's attempts at peacemaking come to naught and Saeros is accidentally killed after fighting with Túrin, which results in Túrin's self-banishment from Doriath and the beginning of a whole series of dire events.

After Beleg departs from Doriath to seek Túrin and stays to fight with him against Morgoth's minions, Mablung is left as the chief of Thingol's marchwardens.

In order to tell the next part of the story of Mablung, one must work one's way through a series of events on two diverse fronts. After the death of Beleg, Turin comes to Nargothrond where he is accepted into the close counsel of Orodreth.

Meanwhile, Morwen and Niënor leave Dor-lómin and come to Doriath only to find Túrin has already left. There they remain for a time as the guests of Thingol and Melian.

Back in Nargothrond, Orcs and others in the services of Morgoth have moved against the surrounding area. Orodreth the Lord of Nargothrond and many of its warriors are killed in a sally against that threat. While they are away, a host of the Orcs and Glaurung the Dragon attack Nargothrond itself. Túrin returns to Nargothrond to find its sack all but complete and is enchanted by Glaurung and unable to act against him, while the survivors of Nargothrond are led away as captives.

Morwen, hearing of the fall of Nargothrond and rumors that Túrin has been there, sets out to find out for herself. Mablung is sent after her to protect her, but, unknown to them, Niënor follows along with them. Despite his most valiant efforts, Mablung fails to protect either mother or daughter and both are ensnared in the traps set by Glaurung the Dragon. At one point, Mablung recovers Niënor for a short time, but she escapes from his care, and wanders distraught and irrational with her memory having been erased by Glaurung.

Then at last Mablung returned to Doriath bowed with grief and with shame. 'Choose you a new master of your hunters, lord,' he said to the King. 'For I am dishonoured.'

But Melian said: 'It is not so, Mablung. You did all that you could, and none other among the King's servants would have done so much. But by ill chance you were matched against a power too great for you, too great indeed for all that now dwell in Middle-earth.'
(11)

Melian's words may have held Mablung's despair at bay, but did not relieve him of his sense of continuing responsibility for his charges.

For not only was Niënor now run witless into the wild, but Morwen also was lost. Neither then nor after did any certain news of her fate come to Doriath or to Dor-lómin. Nonetheless Mablung would not rest, and with a small company he went into the wild and for three years wandered far, from Ered Wethrin even to the Mouths of Sirion, seeking for sign or tidings of the lost. (12)

Niënor, wandering in the wilderness of Brethil, encounters Túrin. He does not recognize his sister and she cannot tell him her name, since she still is held under the spell of forgetfulness cast upon her by Glaurung. They fall in love and marry.

Hearing Glaurung is rampaging in Brethil, Mablung makes his way there, where he finally encounters Túrin again. The story that Mablung tells of the loss of Niënor causes Túrin to understand that the woman he has taken as his wife is actually his sister. Túrin kills himself in horror at the thought.

But Mablung came and looked on the hideous shape of Glaurung lying dead, and he looked upon Túrin and was grieved, thinking of Húrin as he had seen him in the Nirnaeth Arnoediad, and the dreadful doom of his kin. As the Elves stood there, men came down from Nen Girith to look upon the Dragon, and when they saw to what end the life of Túrin Turambar had come they wept; and the Elves learning at last the reason of Túrin's words

to them were aghast. Then Mablung said bitterly: 'I also have been meshed in the doom of the Children of Húrin, and thus with words have slain one that I loved.' (13)

Mablung returns to his duties in Doriath and is killed during the Sack of Doriath by the Dwarves of Nogrod, but not before he once more has responsibility for the Silmaril thrust upon him. After the death of Thingol, Melian speaks to no one except Mablung, entrusting the care of the Silmaril to him.

For there was battle in the Thousand Caves, and many Elves and Dwarves were slain; and it has not been forgotten. But the Dwarves were victorious, and the halls of Thingol were ransacked and plundered. There fell Mablung of the Heavy Hand before the doors of the treasury wherein lay the Nauglamír; and the Silmaril was taken. (14)

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About the Author

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