
Character Biography

Maglor

By Dawn Felagund

Maglor remains one of the most popular and written-about characters in *The Silmarillion*, owing in part to his reputation of being kinder and gentler than his father and brothers. While there is support in the canon that he may have been the son who was most like his wise and gentle mother, he is far from a pie-eyed pacifist, and the dual natures of the second son of Fëanor certainly contribute to his allure.

Maglor is named as being an exceptionally skilled musician and poet, and according to the *Lay of Leithian* (HoMe 3), he was one of the three greatest singers among the Elves. According to *The Shibboleth of Fëanor* (HoMe 12), his Quenya name *Canafinwë Macalaurë* means "strong-voiced" or "commanding" (*Canafinwë*) and "forging gold" (*Macalaurë*). While the latter seems more a reference to his father's trade than Maglor's unique gifts as a musician, it is believed to have been a reference to his skills on the harp. Maglor's vocation is notable among the Noldor, who were not known for their gifts in music or poetry.

Little is known about Maglor's early life in Valinor aside from his profession as a poet and musician. According to a footnote to the essay *Of Dwarves and Men* (HoMe 12), Maglor was married, but nothing is known about his wife, whether they had children, or even if they were married prior to the Noldorin rebellion or later, in Middle-earth.

Though a master of more delicate arts than his father, Maglor is far from soft-hearted. He too swore his father's oath and followed Fëanor to Beleriand, murdering his kin at Alqualondë and playing his part in the treachery against Fingolfin's people. After Fëanor's death and Maedhros's capture, Maglor found himself unexpectedly foisted into the role of regent to the kingship of the Noldor, and according to an early version of the *Quenta Silmarillion* in HoMe 5, it was directly to Maglor that Morgoth gave his conditions for Maedhros's release, terms that Maglor rejected in the end, not trusting Morgoth to be faithful.

One can imagine that this must have been a terrible choice for Maglor to make. Throughout *The Silmarillion*, Maglor closely follows his brother Maedhros, and the two appear to have similar ideas--and ideals--about the governance of the Noldor. Alone of his brothers, Maglor joined Maedhros at the Feast of Reuniting that Fingolfin hosted, and the two brothers remained close in friendship with Finrod Felagund as well.

When the Fëanorians chose to move to eastern Beleriand, Maedhros and Maglor took upon themselves the most dangerous of the realms. Maglor's realm--called the Gap of Maglor--provided passage among the hills and easy access for Morgoth's armies to come into Beleriand. Nonetheless, until the Battle of Sudden Flame obliterated all the northeastern realms save Himring, Maglor bravely kept this land, lending further credence to the notion that he was skilled in the arts of war as well as music. After the Battle of Sudden Flame, Maglor fled to Himring, where he dwelt with Maedhros, and the brothers appear to have remained together until Maedhros's death at the end of the First Age.

At the Battle of Unnumbered Tears, Maglor again proved his mettle in killing the traitor Uldor before he could reach Maedhros. Despite this intervention, though, the Noldor were soundly defeated that day, and with the rest of his brothers, Maglor took to wandering in Ossiriand until word came that Dior held a Silmaril. Persuaded by Celegorm, the brothers pursued the Silmaril through two kinslayings, leaving Doriath and Sirion destroyed behind them. All of the brothers died in these attacks--denied noble death in battle on numerous occasions but instead destined to remain named *kinslayers*--except Maedhros and Maglor.

It was then that Maglor committed one of his most famous acts in choosing to foster the sons of Eärendil, Elrond and Elros. This is only one several ways that the Fëanorians--despite their violence and treachery--nonetheless helped to secure a free and peaceful Middle-earth in ages to come. Maglor adored his foster sons, but the weight of the oath was still heavy upon him, and when at last the Valar made war upon Morgoth and Eonwë the herald of Manwë gained the Silmarils, it was with loathing and regret that Maedhros and Maglor prepared to yet again attempt to satisfy the dogged oath.

But Maglor alone of the sons of Fëanor then considered abandoning the oath and returning to Valinor--as Eonwë had decreed--to face the judgment of the Valar. It was his hope that the Valar would extend a pardon to Maedhros and him, and he argued with Maedhros about this. Maedhros feared that the Valar would withhold their forgiveness, and the two sons of Fëanor would be without a means to fulfill their oath and unable to be released and, thus, doomed to the Everlasting Darkness. But, Maglor reasoned, if they could not be released from the oath, then the Everlasting Darkness was their doom no matter what. In breaking the oath, however, they did less evil, and so it was the proper course of action.

Despite the logic of Maglor's words, Maedhros prevailed, and the brothers disguised themselves and went to Eonwë's camp. After slaying the guards and stealing the two remaining Silmarils, Maedhros and Maglor faced certain death at the hands of Eonwë's soldiers, but Eonwë forbade slaying the brothers and allowed them to escape, presumably expecting that the Silmarils would pass the judgment that the sons of Fëanor refused to hear from him. And pass judgment they did: For the brothers' evil deeds, the Silmarils would not consent to be comfortably held, and they scorched the hands of Maedhros and Maglor. Maedhros took his own life then, but Maglor fled and tossed his Silmaril in the sea. The only one of the sons of Fëanor to survive multiple wars and kinslayings, Maglor refused to return to his people and wandered along the shores, singing in lament.

From the beginnings of his work on the *legendarium*, J.R.R. Tolkien imagined Maglor as a great singer, though his position as the kindest and certainly most repentant of the brothers was a bit longer in evolving. In the earliest account of the assault on Eonwë's camp found in the "Sketch of the Mythology" in HoMe 4, it was Maglor who was the more determined of the brothers, and he went alone to retrieve the Silmaril he believed was his. When the pain it caused revealed his rights over it to be void, he fell to the same fate as Maedhros later would and cast himself into a chasm.

As the tale evolved further in *The Quenta* (HoMe 4), the debate between the brothers about abandoning the oath is added, but their roles are reversed, and it is *Maglor* who convinces *Maedhros* to go along with his plot to steal the Silmaril. In this version, both brothers take their own lives, with Maglor again jumping into a chasm in the earth. Finally, the *Silmarillion* version

takes shape: Maglor takes the repentant--and more logical--role, is convinced by Maedhros, and ends up casting aside his Silmaril and wandering beside the sea.

Likewise, the evolving *Quenta* story underwent a brief spell where it was Maedhros who showed mercy upon the sons of Eärendil and chose to foster them, not Maglor. The reversal of the brothers' roles *twice* to show Maglor as the more merciful and remorseful of the brothers suggests that J.R.R. Tolkien may have been developing his character as the one most deserving of survival: He who showed the most kindness and even considered repentance before the end.

What was Maglor's final fate? We know little about this, whether he died during his wanderings, faded, or returned eventually to Aman. Or, perhaps, he wanders still along the shore. *The Quenta* in HoMe 4 says this of Maglor, that "... not all would forsake the Outer Lands where they had long suffered and long dwelt; and some lingered many an age in the West and North, and especially in the western isles and the lands of Leithien. And among these were Maglor as has been told ..."

Speculating about Maglor's fate--and his possible role in varying historical events--is certainly a common fan favorite. The truth may not be ours to know but remains ours to imagine, and more than one fan of the second son of Fëanor admits to searching for him still, wandering beside the sea.

About the Author

Dawn Felagund is the founder and owner of the Silmarillion Writers' Guild and has authored more than thirty stories based on J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Silmarillion*, some of which have been translated and published in fan magazines around the world. These days, she directs her fannish energies towards research projects and developing the SWG into a fun and valuable group for *Silmarillion* fans. Dawn can be emailed at DawnFelagund@gmail.com.