
Character Biography

Rochallor

By Oshun

Rochallor is the great warhorse of Fingolfin High King of the Noldor who carried his master to his final, desperate confrontation with Morgoth.

. . . filled with wrath and despair he mounted upon Rochallor his great horse and rode forth alone, and none might restrain him. He passed over Dor-nu-Fauglith like a wind amid the dust, and all that beheld his onset fled in amaze, thinking that Oromë himself was come . . .¹

The etymology of the name *Rochallor* is based upon the word in Quenya for horse.

roch 'horse' (Quenya rokko) in Rochallor, Rohan (from Rochand 'land of horses'), Rohirrim; also in Roheryn 'horse of the lady' (cf. heru), Aragorn's horse, which was so called because given to him by Arwen (*The Return of the King* V 2).²

In the course of researching the story of Rochallor, this writer came across an unfootnoted assertion that Rochallor is one of the Mearas (the great horses of Rohan of whom Shadowfax is the most famous example). I was unable to find in the texts evidence of a direct connection. However, it does seem apparent and logical that Rochallor's lineage may be traced to the horses brought by the exiled Noldor from Aman.

But their [Fingolfin and Fingon's] chief fortress was at Eithel Sirion in the east of Ered Wethrin, whence they kept watch upon Ard-galen; and their cavalry rode upon that plain even to the shadow of Thangorodrim, for from few their horses had increased swiftly, and the grass of Ard-galen was rich and green. Of those horses many of the sires came from Valinor, and they were given to Fingolfin by Maedhros in atonement of his losses, for they had been carried by ship to Losgar.³

Alternatively, one could argue that there is no distinction between the breed of horses of which Rochallor is a named example and the so-called Mearas.

These were the mearas, who would bear no one but the King of the Mark or his sons, until the time of Shadowfax. Men said of them that Béma (whom the Eldar call Oromë) must have brought their sire from West over Sea.⁴

It is interesting to note that the first referral to Rochallor in *The Silmarillion* (the first citation at the top of this page) mentions also Oromë and, by implication, presents the reader with the visual image of the Vala riding his own grand steed Nahar as described in the first chapter of *The Silmarillion*.

And Oromë tamer of beasts would ride too at whiles in the darkness of the unlit forests; as a mighty hunter he came with spear and bow, pursuing to the death the and fell

creatures of the kingdom of Melkor, and his white horse Nahar shone like silver in the shadows.⁵

The fascination with and the romanticizing of the bond between a hero and his noble steed is deeply etched into some primitive part of the human imagination. Generations of children, even those growing up in a setting where they infrequently, if ever, ride a horse, crave to read about great horses. A fantasy hero's horse is often known by name, even when his wife and the mother of his children is not. The real world history of Alexander the Great and his famous horse Bucephalus has captured the imagination of storytellers and their audiences for more than a millennium.

Historically, the use of the noble steed as a symbol of all that is good and beautiful is nowhere more clearly developed than by Plato in *The Phaedrus*.⁶ Therein

Reason is depicted as a noble steed "straight and well-knit, with high neck and arched nose, in color white, with black eyes, a lover of honor in all temperance and modesty, a friend of true glory, . . ." whereas desire, or emotion, is a horse of a different color-- "crooked, lumpish, ill-jointed, with a stiff neck, a short throat, a stub nose, in color black, with gray eyes, sanguineous, a friend of lust and boastfulness," ⁷

Lynn Forest-Hill, Fellow of the Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Culture University of Southampton, has written an interesting article on the role of horses in Tolkien's work, making the point that in writing his mythology for the English people Tolkien could have drawn upon evidence of earlier all-but-lost myths of the island.

The faithfulness of the horses of heroes is a familiar theme in many myths and legends, but Tolkien, in his literary quest to create a mythology for England, would have been hard pressed to find indigenous English myths or legends as sources for his horses and their heroes. England has little in the way of horse-based mythology although there is spectacular evidence that it once existed. The Iron Age Celtic tribes that once inhabited the island of Britain left evidence of the status of the horse in that society. On a hillside at Uffington just south of Tolkien's former home in Oxford, is a great stylised carving of a horse which may have been sacred to the Celtic horse goddess Epona. The green turf of the hill was cut away in prehistoric times, exposing the white chalk beneath, and while the cultural and symbolic significance changed through time, the carving has always been tended. As it lies close to another evocative ancient site, the neolithic burial chamber or barrow called Weyland's Smithy which Tolkien visited, he would have known of this mystical white horse.⁸

Tolkien includes and describes in detail several great horses in his legendarium. In *The Lord of the Rings* alone, we meet humble and diligent Bill the Pony, Glorfindel's magnificent Asfaloth, Éomer's valiant Firefoot, and many more. Arwen sends Aragorn's horse Roheryn to him with Halbarad so that he will be able to ride his own loyal horse and not a borrowed one, however gifted and well-bred, when he faces his greatest challenge of traversing the Paths of the Dead and engaging in the battle of Pelennor Fields.

Nowhere could I find a reference in the texts to the color of Rochallor. (Nahar, Shadowfax and Asfaloth are white, as is Plato's noble steed in *The Phaedrus*.) Coloring aside, one might presume that Rochallor was a stallion and large. Most readers' visual image of Rochallor would

be the massive warhorse upon which is seated a perfect image of martial knightliness in the person of Fingolfin, the first among the great Noldorin warrior-kings in Middle-earth.

In the story of Fingolfin and Rochallor, Fingolfin has already succumbed to irrationality; his emotions have gained control over his reason. In a fit of frustration and rage, he allows his destructive impulses to command his own noble steed. Rochallor valiantly carries his master right up to the gates of Angband. There Fingolfin challenges the Dark Valar Morgoth to single combat. Although Fingolfin acquits himself well, maiming the dark lord, his assault is shown to have been a suicidal one from which he could not have emerged victorious.⁹

In *The Silmarillion* account, we are not told of the final fate of brave Rochallor. The noble steed, however, survives and, although harried by wolves, he escapes. His end no less tragic and heroic than his master is recounted in *The War of the Jewels*.

Now Rochallor had stayed beside the king until the end, but the wolves of Angband assailed him, and he escaped from them because of his great swiftness, and ran at last to Hithlum, and broke his heart and died. Then in great sorrow Fingon took the lordship of the house of Fingolfin and the kingdom of the Noldor.¹⁰

Works Cited

1. *The Silmarillion*, "Of the Ruin of Beleriand and the Fall of Fingolfin."
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3. *The Silmarillion*, "Of Beleriand and Its Realms."
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5. *The Silmarillion*, "Of the Beginning of Days."
6. J. Wright, *The Phaedrus, Lysis, and Protagoras of Plato: A New and Literal Translation Mainly from the Text of Bekker* (London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1921).
7. V. J. McGill, *Emotions and Reason* (Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, 1954) viii, Questia, Web, 1 Feb. 2012.
8. *Lord of the Rings, Tolkien's Equestrian Epic*, by Lynn Forest-Hill, <http://www.tolkiensociety.org/ed/horses.html>.
9. *The Silmarillion*, "Of the Ruin of Beleriand and the Fall of Fingolfin."
10. *The War of the Jewels, The Grey Annals*.

About the Author

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