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# Character Biography

## Maeglin

By Russandol

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### Who was Maeglin, in a few words?

Maeglin's claim to fame in Middle-earth is to have performed the most hateful treachery to those of his kindred by one of the First-born, "most infamous in all the histories of the Elder Days". He betrayed his King and uncle Turgon, and his treason brought about the Fall of Gondolin towards the end of the First Age.

And yet, Maeglin's tale may spark pity (though ever so faint!), for Tolkien's characters are seldom entirely evil.

### Maeglin's story

Maeglin was born to the Dark Elf Eöl and [Aredhel Ar-Feiniel](#), daughter of Fingolfin and sister of Turgon and [Fingon](#), in the dark woods of Nan Elmoth, where Thingol had first met Melian the Maia. Against her brother Turgon's wishes Aredhel had left Gondolin to seek wider lands and forests beyond the Encircling Mountains; when she entered Nan Elmoth Eöl saw her and desired her; his enchantments led her to his home and he persuaded her to wed him.

At the time of Maeglin's birth, in the year 320 of the First Age of Arda according to the *Grey Annals*, the siege of Angband by the Noldor had lasted for about a century and a half, Turgon had dwelt in Gondolin for about two hundred years and Finrod Felagund had recently discovered the first Men to appear west of the Blue Mountains.

Aredhel secretly named her son Lómion, which in Quenya means "Child of Twilight," but his father Eöl did not give him a name until he was twelve years old, and then he called him Maeglin, "sharp glance" in Sindarin, "for he perceived that the eyes of his son were more piercing than his own, and his thought could read the secrets of hearts beyond the mist of words" (1)

Tolkien tells us that Maeglin physically resembled his mother's Noldorin kin: "He was tall and black-haired; his eyes were dark, yet bright and keen as the eyes of the Noldor, and his skin was white" (2) but in mood he took after his father: "His words were few save in matters that touched him near, and then his voice had a power to move those that heard him and to overthrow those that withstood him" (3).

For eighty years Maeglin lived in the woods of Nan Elmoth in East Beleriand. This area Eöl considered to be of the Teleri, his kin, and therefore he resented the nearness of the sons of Fëanor (the closest ones would have been [Celegorm](#) and [Curufin](#) in Himlad, to the North, or Amrod and Amras to the South).

From friendship with the Dwarves of Nogrod and Belegost in Ered Lindon, Eöl had become greatly skilled in smithwork, and in turn, Maeglin learnt this craft from his father and from the visits they both made to the Dwarves. Particularly Maeglin was taught “the craft of finding the ores of metals in the mountains” (4).

However it seems that Maeglin preferred the company of his mother to that of his dark, stern father, and every time Eöl left them, they would seek the eaves of the forest to see the sunlight, which he had ordered them to shun.

Also Aredhel spoke to her son about Valinor, about the deeds of the princes of the house of Fingolfin, and about Gondolin and Turgon. Retelling these stories stirred in her a desire to see the Hidden City and her family again. In addition, her son secretly wished to know the location of Gondolin, which his mother kept zealously from him, and he also began to crave to meet those of his Noldorin kin that lived close by.

But Eöl hated the sons of Fëanor, whom he considered, in his words “the slayers of our kin, the invaders and usurpers of our homes” (5) and he banned Maeglin from seeking them, and even threatened to set him in bonds if he dared disobey him.

Probably this ban only served to spur his son’s rebellion. In the year 400 of the First Age, Eöl went to visit the Dwarves on his own and Maeglin proposed to Aredhel that they flee to Gondolin in his father’s absence. So they did, but Eöl returned earlier than planned and followed them in secret all the way into the entrance to the Hidden City, where he was made a prisoner by the guard.

When he declared that the King’s sister was his wife, he was taken to Turgon, who welcomed him as kin. However, Eöl demanded freedom to leave Gondolin with Maeglin and Turgon refused him to protect the secret of his city. In an attempt to kill his son with a poisoned javelin, Eöl wounded his wife Aredhel instead, and she died that night.

This crime earned him a death sentence, and Maeglin’s father was cast down a precipice on the edge of the city. But as he was led to this death, Eöl cursed his son with dying in the same way as he did.

From the beginning Maeglin was dazzled by the splendour of Gondolin, and above all, by the beauty of Idril, the King’s daughter, his cousin. He took Turgon as his lord, and the King honoured him and held him in favour. He became an important lord in Gondolin, and even headed his own house; according to earlier versions of the story, its device was “a sable Mole” (6). He had many followers, mainly those “bent to smithcraft and mining” (7). He worked to improve the weaponry of the armies of Gondolin and he even wrought the Seventh Gate of Gondolin, named the Great (8).

We also know that “he had no love for any of the kindred of Men”. When the eagle Thorondor brought Húrin and Huor to Gondolin in the year 455, Maeglin was jealous of the two brothers for receiving the favour of Turgon. Perhaps resentful of the fact that they were allowed to leave the city (when he and his father had not been granted that freedom), he confronted them, and they swore to him that they would never reveal Turgon’s secret. Even though Húrin was later taken alive to Angband and put to torment, he was true to his word.

*The Silmarillion* does not describe Maeglin's deeds during the Nirnaeth Arnoediad, the utter defeat of the Noldor and their Edain allies against Morgoth in the Year 472 of the First Age. However we know that he actually followed Turgon to fight in this battle instead of remaining in the City as his Regent. Crucially, he stood next to his King when Huor foresaw that "out of your house [Turgon's] shall come the hope of Elves and Men" (9) and not only that, but "from you and from me a new star shall arise" (10), in reference to his descendant Eärendil.

Maeglin said nothing at Huor's words of foresight but he did not forget them either. He probably would long ponder their meaning. Because unless Idril married someone else and had a son, Maeglin, as Turgon's nephew, would in all likelihood be named to succeed the king at his death. Based on the low survival rate of the princes of the Noldor despite their immortality, this event would not have seemed at all improbable!

So far the tale had said that "wise in counsel was Maeglin and wary, and yet hardy and valiant at need" (11). How did he sway from honour and success to despicable treachery?

One key factor, if not the most critical, was his hopeless love--or should we more accurately call it desire--for Idril. This desire was hopeless because such a union between close kin was forbidden amongst the Eldar, even if she had reciprocated her cousin's feelings, which she did not. Worse still, she knew of his longing and thought it a perversion, "an evil fruit of the Kinslaying" (12).

In the year 495, Tuor son of Huor came to Gondolin bearing Ulmo's words of warning for Turgon, in which he was exhorted to abandon the city. Unsurprisingly Maeglin did not see Huor's son favourably and spoke strongly against him so that, in the end, Ulmo's counsel was disregarded.

Then, to Maeglin's dismay, the unthinkable happened: the one he could never have, the fair Idril, gave her heart to Tuor, a mere Mortal, and Maeglin watched them marry with Turgon's blessing. Any envy and rancour Maeglin ever had for Tuor would, in all likelihood, have ripened into full hatred at the happiness of his rival, who had robbed him of what he coveted most.

To further his misery, in the year 503 of the First Age, Gondolin rejoiced at the birth of Idril and Tuor's son, Eärendil Halfelven. Maeglin's designs to ever succeed Turgon fell to ruins.

A few years later, when Eärendil was still a child, Maeglin went beyond the city's boundaries in search for lodes of ore, in disobedience of Turgon's mandate, and was captured by Orcs, who took him alive to Angband. According to *The Silmarillion*, "Maeglin was no weakling or craven, but the torment wherewith he was threatened cowed his spirit, and he purchased his life and freedom by revealing to Morgoth the very place of Gondolin and the ways whereby it might be found and assailed" (13).

Morgoth was so happy at this that he promised Maeglin the lordship of the city and the possession of Idril, as victor's spoils. This no doubt eased any scruples Maeglin might have had. Worse still, he then returned to those he had betrayed to avoid suspicion and awaited the anticipated attack that would bring him the Dark Lord's rewards: fulfilled lust, ambition and retribution towards Tuor. Tolkien says, "and he abode in the halls of the King with smiling face and evil in his heart, while the darkness gathered ever deeper upon Idril" (14).

Maeglin did not have to wait long. On the fateful Midsummer's Day of the year 510 of the First Age, Morgoth unleashed all his power against a city that had arrayed itself for a festival. The traitor attempted to take or slay Idril and her son but Tuor fought him and finally cast him down from the walls of the burning Hidden City of Gondolin, and Eöl's curse was thus fulfilled: "and his [Maeglin's] body as it fell smote the rocky slopes of Amon Gwareth thrice ere it pitched into the flames below" (15).

Fortunately, Idril had felt foreboding and, in secret, unknown to Maeglin, she had long worked to prepare a passage out of the city. Because of this, she survived, and so did Tuor and Eärendil. But Turgon fell with his city, as did many others, like Glorfindel the beloved, Lord of the House of the Golden Flower, who fought a Balrog to the death and thus allowed the survivors of the massacre free passage to safety.

### **A quick summary of the evolution of Maeglin's character in Tolkien's writings**

The tale of the Fall of Gondolin and Maeglin's treason appears in Tolkien's earliest writings about Middle-earth. He is first mentioned under the name of "Meglin" in *The Fall of Gondolin*, a text which is believed to have been written as early as 1916-1917. Instead of partaking of the usual Elvish beauty he is painted as "less than fair", and rumours even speak of Orc's blood in his veins (16).

His name also suffered many changes: originally he was named Meglin; subsequent versions of the tale transformed it to Targlin, then Morlin, later Glindur (which was also the name of a new metal that Eöl had created, later called *galvorn*) and finally Maeglin (17).

In draft versions of the story (18) we read how Morgoth actually knew the secret of Gondolin even before Maeglin was brought to him, and Maeglin's betrayal was perhaps lessened, though he still conspired with the Dark Lord as to the best way to enter and conquer the city. Also, in earlier writings Idril openly mistrusts Maeglin and even has a premonitory dream about his treachery, so that she speaks to her husband Tuor of her misgivings and they plan a defence in secret. True to her intuition, Maeglin's deeds at the end are even more blatantly evil, and out of his hatred for Tuor's son and heir, he attempts to drag Idril and Eärendil (then called Earendel) to the battlements so that she may witness the death of her child at his hands, but she fights him "like a tigress" and so saves herself and her son (19).

### **What if?**

Falling into the clutches of the Dark Lord and being threatened with unspeakable torment when one is immortal and of greater endurance than Men must be no trifle, and perhaps we should not judge Maeglin too harshly for betraying Gondolin to Morgoth in those circumstances. Just the sight of the Dark Lord on his throne in Angband would make all but the most valiant cower to the ground in terror. But even if treason was inevitable, had Maeglin repented on his return to the city and confessed all to Turgon, perhaps Gondolin's fall could have been averted, despite the inexorable doom of the Noldor.

One can only wonder at what the history of Middle-earth would have been like if the last bastion of the Noldor had withstood the power of Morgoth, and whether other, different deeds of valour

like those of Ecthelion and Glorfindel against the Balrogs would have been sung during the ages to come.

Would the Valar have intervened at last to defeat their fallen brethren and throw him into the Void? Would the two remaining Silmarils have been recovered from Morgoth's iron crown? Would Maglor and Maedhros have made a last attempt to recover them? And what about the later Ages of Arda, the sinking of Númenor, the forging and destruction of Sauron's Ring, and so many other events? Would they have come to pass?

Perhaps many evils might have been prevented, but perhaps it was ordained in the Music even before Arda existed. Otherwise why did Ulmo lead Turgon to Gondolin, why did he tell him he would be sending him a messenger even before he left Nevrast ... if not to attempt to avoid events that had been foretold?

Was Maeglin's fate to betray Gondolin?

## Works Cited

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19. Ibid.

## About the Author

Russandol has quietly suffered under the spell of Middle-earth for over 25 years, from the first time she read *The Lord of the Rings*. Then, as recently as two years ago, while on an Internet quest to learn to write Tengwar, she stumbled upon the world of Tolkien fan fiction. As a result her affliction flared up and became sadly incurable. Russandol lives in Berkshire, England, and every time she goes for a walk or a ride in the woods she hopes to find a mallorn.