

Chapter 1 Melkor's Cell



Sauron opened his eyes. He found himself lying on a narrow bed in a windowless room, with absolutely no idea how he got there.

He sat up. He was wearing the clothes he'd had on when he was captured. They were muddy and ragged, and there were burrs in his hair. He must have been fleeing, evading capture, seeking safety in the wild places. Obviously it hadn't worked.

He looked around. The room was long and narrow, divided in half by an iron grating with a small door, more like a hatch, in the middle. He tried it, but found it locked. He tried shape-shifting into something small enough to get through the grating. For the first time in his life, nothing happened.

Beyond the grating, he saw a massive iron door set into the stone wall. He noticed a narrow barred window in the door about the size of a letter slot. A spy hole. He tried to look through it, but couldn't.

He walked to the far side of his cell. There was a hole in the grating, a narrow opening just large enough to allow a food tray to be passed into the cell. Next to it, a water pitcher sat on the floor near a spigot. He tried it, and water ran across the floor to a drain hole a few feet away.

Then he saw the row of iron rings in the wall. They looked like attachment points for chains. He looked again and saw a corresponding set mounted in shallow depressions in the floor.

He knew where he was. This was Melkor's old cell, in the sub-basements of the Prison Fortress of Mandos.

Melkor never spoke of the cell where he lay chained for

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three ages, so Sauron didn't know much about it. But he believed this was it. He sensed the strength of the enchantments laid around it, sealing the cell far more effectively than stone and iron. This was not an ordinary cell. None could escape.

He didn't know what it had been like in Melkor's day, but he could imagine. The only furnishings in the cell were the rings in the walls and floor that held his chains. Melkor's bed was the cold stone floor, his blankets were the rags he wore, and his plate and fork were his hands, to the limited extent he could use them. The privy was the hole in the floor. He was probably left in darkness most of the time.

The cell had been made more comfortable since then. In addition to the bed, there was a table and chair, and in the far corner, a bucket with a lid. The table was set with a dinner tray and cup. It also held some books, writing paper, quills, and ink. A pair of lamps flanking the iron door provided warm yellow light for the whole room.

There were no lamps inside the grating, so the shadows were deeper at his end of the room, but there was still enough light to read by.

But even though the cell was comfortably furnished, nothing could drive out the cold and damp. If he sat still long enough, the chill reached into the marrow of his bones. He wrapped himself in the blanket whenever he sat still at the table, or even when he paced the floor.

Sauron didn't think he was being punished, although he wondered why not. The cell was furnished, and the food seemed to be the same as might be served to the guards. Normally the best you could say about prison food was it was nutrition, and usually not enough.

He thought perhaps he was being constrained while something else happened, important enough that someone wanted him kept out of the way. He couldn't imagine what it might be. He wished he had someone to ask.

He was sitting on the bed, playing Cat's Cradle with a piece of yarn he pulled loose from the blanket, when he sensed the

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presence of someone nearby. He looked up and saw the cover plate over the spy hole slide open.

"Hello?" he said.

He walked up to the grating. The cover plate slammed shut.

"Wait! Don't go! Talk to me!" he shouted.

He stood against the grating and stared at the door long after the other person left.

Sometime later, he heard the cover plate slide back, but this time, he heard the sound of a key in the lock. He heard a bolt being pushed back, and the door swung open.

He saw a guard, one of Námo's people, come in with a tray. When the guard let go of the door, it swung shut by itself.

The guard walked toward the pass-through in the grating, but stopped when he reached a line on the floor about three feet away from the grating. The guard set the tray on the floor and pushed it towards the pass-through.

"What's your name?" Sauron asked. The man never even looked at him.

The guard turned to go. He knocked on the door. Sauron heard a key turning in the lock, and the door was pushed open by an unseen person on the other side.

"Why am I here? Am I awaiting trial?" Sauron said to his retreating back. It was possible his trial already happened. He wished somebody would tell him.

The guard left, and the door swung shut and locked itself behind him. The cover plate slid closed. Sauron noticed there was no keyhole or handle on this side. People could get locked in here by accident.

He knelt beside the pass-through and reached through the opening. The tray was just out of reach. He changed position and stretched a little further. He managed to snag the edge of the tray with the tips of his fingers, and pulled it in with no problem.

Sauron was outgoing by nature, so the social isolation was hard on him. The next time the guard came close to the grating, he'd reach through it, seize him by the arm, and hang on to him until he said something.

As an experiment, he pushed the tray aside and lay on the

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floor. He put his arm into the pass-through as far as it would go, all the way up to his shoulder. But no matter how he tried, his fingers fell a few inches short of the line painted on the floor.

All of a sudden, he knew what the line was for. It was to warn the guards to stay back. No matter how hard he tried, he would never be able to touch someone who stayed on the other side of it.

Chapter 2 Concealed Weapons



Sauron had no one to talk to, so in addition to being bored, he was lonely. He was frustrated by the guard's silence and considered various ways to get him to talk. The second day of his imprisonment, when the guard came in with a breakfast tray, he said with studied casualness, "So, you must not have searched me when I was brought in here. Or if you did, you did a poor job of it. The knife I always carry in my boot is still there."

That was a lie. He did carry a little knife in his boot, but it was missing, and so was the dagger he'd been wearing on his belt when he was captured.

The guard looked right at him and said, "Hand it over, then." He pointed to the pass-through. Enjoying this game, Sauron said, "Come and get it." *Finally, someone was speaking to him. What a relief,* he thought.

"Tell you what," said the guard. "I'll trade you the knife for the tray. You go first." Sauron didn't really have a knife, so he acted as if he were being stubborn. The guard shrugged and left the room, taking the tray with him.

Sauron picked up the water pitcher, pouring yesterday's water down the drain hole before refilling it with cold water from the spigot. He turned the handle and a small trickle of water ran out, then nothing. He poured the water from the pitcher to the cup. It was only one finger deep. He regretted pouring the water down the drain because he didn't know how long this game was going to last.

At noon, the guard returned with a tray for the midday

meal. Again he spoke. "A trade. The tray for the knife. You'll get the water turned back on, too." Sauron was getting tired of the game by now. Like all Ainur, he could go a long time without food, but he was starting to be uncomfortable from thirst.

"You win. I'll do what you want. But I don't actually have a knife. I just made that up." The guard gave him a look of disbelief and left, taking the tray with him. *The trouble with being an accomplished liar, he thought, is that people don't believe you when you're telling the truth.* His word was not good and everybody knew it.

In the late afternoon, the outer door opened and the guard came in, accompanied by four others Sauron hadn't seen before. One of them carried a pair of irons connected by a short length of chain. He was giving orders to the others, and appeared to be their captain.

"I suggest you turn over the knife." The guard captain said. Sauron was silent. "Then we're going to have to search the cell and everything in it, including you." Sauron repeated the story he'd told the guard. The Captain's eyes weren't cruel, but he was unmoved by anything Sauron had to say.

The guard captain motioned Sauron over to the grating, and indicated he should sit on the floor with his back against it, and put his hands through the holes. Sauron did, and didn't like it. The man locked an iron cuff around each of Sauron's wrists.

Chained to the grating, Sauron tried to make himself comfortable by leaning against it and watching the guards at work. His nose itched. He felt resigned.

Two guards crossed the white line and walked up to the hatch in the grating. They knelt and did something to release the catches on the hatch cover. Sauron couldn't tell what it was, because a metal plate blocked his view of the locking mechanism.

They lifted the cover, which was hinged along the top. Three of them climbed in through the narrow opening on their hands and knees while the fourth held it open for them. The largest of them could barely get through the narrow opening. He almost got stuck in the middle, but was able to free himself with some

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difficulty and squeeze through.

While he watched them, Sauron idly wondered how he'd gotten in here. He was bigger than the one who got stuck. For that matter, how did they get the furniture in? Maybe they took it apart and reassembled it inside the cell.

Once the last of the three guards was inside the cell, the one holding the hatch cover released it and let it f closed. The guard captain also remained outside. He stood near Sauron and watched him closely.

The three guards searched the bedding and turned over the mattress, feeling for metal. They looked underneath the bed, table, and chair. They looked in the pitcher. They flipped through the pages of the books and under the writing paper. They searched every corner of the cell.

Satisfied there wasn't a knife hidden in the room, the guards walked toward Sauron, regarding him with detached interest. "You're next." They stood around him in a half circle, looking vaguely threatening.

After they finished with him, Sauron decided that trying to fight them off was probably not the best idea he'd ever had. Especially not when it was three against one, with his hands behind his back. But he was bad-tempered from hunger and just hadn't felt like cooperating, and he was a fighter by nature.

So now he knew what it was like to like to lie face down on the cold stone floor with his arms twisted behind his back as far as they would go, and a boot on his neck. Never mind the searching part, which got a lot more personal than he had expected.

When they finished with him, the two who remained outside the cell opened the cover to let the others out. It must have locked itself when it closed, because it took two of them working together to open it.

They lifted the hatch cover, and the three guards in the cell crawled through the opening. When the last one was out, the hatch cover was released. The guard captain shook it to make sure it was locked. Only then did he produce a key and remove the irons from Sauron's wrists.

The guard captain pounded on the outer door. It swung

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open, and the five of them filed out. The door swung shut and locked itself behind them. The cover over the spy hole closed.

Sauron stood and rubbed his wrists, which had gone numb. Then he tried the spigot. Water flowed freely. He put his head under it and drank.

Chapter 3 Jailhouse Fever



during the afternoon of the fourth day of his imprisonment, Sauron felt ill-tempered and out of sorts, without being upset about anything in particular. By early evening, he had a headache and went to bed earlier than normal. He lay down without bothering to get undressed for the night, feeling unwell.

He was restless during the night. In the morning, he woke up soaked in sweat. He was shaking with cold but burning hot behind the eyes. He pulled up his knees to ease the pain in his stomach. When the guard brought his breakfast, he said he didn't want it, but could he have a cup of tea instead and something for nausea?

The guard told him, "If you're going to be sick, do it in the drain hole, because I can't get in there and clean up after you. Not without my captain's say so, that's for sure." He left the room, taking the tray with him.

He came back with tea and an extra blanket, and put them through the pass-through. Sauron put his feet on the floor and started to stand up, but lay down again when the room started to spin. He didn't think he could walk.

Sometime later, the guard came back to check on him. He left and returned with others, including his captain, who was carrying a pair of irons.

The captain directed Sauron to come over to the grating at the position furthest from the door. Sauron didn't think he could make it that far, so he crawled to the part of the

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grating that was closest. His arms collapsed underneath him, and he lay on the floor, feeling wretched.

The captain reached his arm through the grating and touched his face, but yanked back when another guard yelled, "Be careful, he bites!" The man pushed up his sleeve and displayed a half-moon shaped bruise. "I got this when we tried to search him." he said.

"Feigning illness to lure guards into the cell is an ancient ruse." the captain said to the others. "And this prisoner is particularly strong and cunning.

"I think he really is sick." said a guard.

"It could be he's pretending to be more incapacitated than he really is. We need to handle this with extreme caution. He's very, very manipulative. That's why you're all under orders not to talk to him. He might actually be able to talk his way out of this cell. We need to treat him like a dangerous prisoner who's healthy and strong."

The captain told Sauron to put his hands over his head, through holes in the grating. He did it, and the captain snapped the irons on his wrists. The guards unlocked the grating door. The captain and two others entered the cell. One of the guards knelt beside him. "I can feel the heat coming off his body, even without touching him. And I don't think he's more than semi-conscious."

They would have picked him up and carried him to bed, but the captain wouldn't allow them to unchain him while the guards were still in the cell. They left him lying on the floor chained to the grating, but they covered him with the extra blanket, and put the tea within easy reach.

They left the cell. The captain removed the irons from Sauron's wrists. He pulled his arms back in through the grating and wrapped them around himself, but he didn't get up.

The guards came back a few hours later. They had a healer with them, one of Estë's people. Sauron was lying on

the floor where they'd left him, shivering and uncomfortable. The captain chained him to the grating. The guards opened the hatch and entered the cell, followed by the healer.

The healer knelt beside the patient. "There's plague in the region where you were captured. I'm pretty sure you have it, too." the healer told him. "You're not going to die, but you're in for a rough time." While he talked, he felt his patient's forehead for fever, felt for swelling at the base of each limb, and pressed on his stomach with firm pressure. So firm that his patient pleaded, "No. Please stop. I'm going to be ..."

After they cleaned him up, the healer tried to give him medicine. Sauron twisted away from the phial of bitter liquid, but the healer knew a few tricks for getting drugs into unwilling patients.

The healer directed the guards to rearrange the furniture in the cell. They moved the bed from the back wall to the side wall, with the pillow against the grating.

While they worked, Sauron lay on the floor with his eyes closed. He heard the healer and the guard captain arguing about him. The healer wanted to unchain him so they could lift him onto the bed, but the guard captain wouldn't hear of it.

On the other hand, the healer refused to put a sleep spell on a patient who had just been sick. It wasn't safe. Finally the guard captain agreed that if the prisoner were bound hand and foot, he would remove the chains, but only for as long as it took to move him.

That done, the two guards struggled to lift Sauron's limp form onto the bed. He was still wearing day clothes, so once they had him settled into bed, they undressed him to make him more comfortable.

One of the guards put the chair beside the bed to make a nightstand, and put a basin and a cup of water on it. The

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other guard brought over everything else he might need, and arranged it within easy reach. The healer covered him with the extra blanket.

After the guards left the cell and locked the hatch behind them, the guard captain unchained his wrists. By then, the medicine was starting to work. He was falling asleep, and didn't stir.

Sauron was deeply grateful to the healer for thinking to position the head of his bed against the grating, and inwardly thanked him for his kindness. The next time the guards needed him to wear irons, when they came in to take care of him, all he had to do was reach his arms over his head across the pillow and put his wrists through the grating. He wouldn't have to leave his bed and crawl across the floor. Or worse, try to crawl back to bed after they left, because he didn't think he could.

Sauron had had the plague before.¹ In the Second Age, plague swept through Gondor. It reached Mirkwood the year after. Sauron, who was living in Dol Guldur at the time, was one of its victims. It didn't kill him, but he had a pretty good idea of what the healer meant by being in for a rough time of it.

¹ see *Plague* by Uvatha the Horseman

Chapter 4 Námo



n the first day he felt well enough to leave his bed and get dressed, Sauron heard the key in the outer door. When it opened, two guards entered the room. One was carrying a washbasin and the other had a folded stack of clothing.

They told Sauron he was to wash and put on clean clothes. He had not bathed or changed clothes during his captivity, and was badly in need of both. His hair hung in greasy strings. The cycling fever and the sweating it caused hadn't made him smell any better. Fastidious by nature, it was unlike him to stay grimy for long, even when he was working in the Forge.

The first guard put the washbasin through the pass-through. The second guard put the stack of clothes on the floor in front of it where he could reach them easily. Then they left the room. Sauron noticed that the metal cover over the spy hole in the door remained open.

There were towels in the washbasin. Underneath them was a piece of soap. Sauron the washbasin underneath the spigot and turned on the water. While waiting for it to fill, he stripped off his clothes and dropped them on the floor. He normally folded anything he took off and stacked it neatly, but his clothes were so filthy, he knew he wouldn't be putting them on again. He used the pitcher to pour water over his head. The water was cold, but it couldn't be helped. Being clean was a luxury and he intended to enjoy it.

After he finished, Sauron wrapped himself in a towel and finger combed his wet hair. He felt good for the first time since

he woke up in the cell. Then he went over to look at the clothes.

The garments they brought him were new and clean, in colors that looked good on him. They were made from fine materials. The cuffs of the sleeves were decorated with embroidery. He admired skilled workmanship, even though he rarely wore fine clothing himself.

Then he had another thought, and froze. The clothes were for a formal or even a ceremonial occasion. What he needed in a prison cell were everyday clothes, preferably warm ones. The only ceremonial occasion in his near future that he could think of was a summons to the Circle of Doom.

Soon after he finished dressing, the outer door opened. He had a visitor. Normally he looked forward to having someone to talk to. But he fell silent when Námo, the Lord of Mandos, entered the room accompanied by two of his people. Lord Námo, grim and unsmiling, was the only one among the Valar who revealed prophecies and pronounced doom.

Námo spoke.

"But in after years he rose like a shadow of Morgoth and a ghost of his malice, and walked behind him on the same ruinous path down into the Void."

Námo told Sauron he was summoned to the Circle of Doom. Námo himself was going to take him there. Sauron was about to face what he'd avoided for so long. He stood there, stricken. It was about to happen. He had known about the prophecy for a long time, but it was in the distant future so he hadn't worried about it. Until now.

I have nothing left to fight with. I have lost. It is time to negotiate the terms of surrender.

Námo spoke a few words, and the grating slid up into the ceiling. He commanded Sauron to step forward.

One of the guards held chains. Another took hold of Sauron's wrist. The outside door was unlocked and pushed open an inch or two.

Without thinking, Sauron shoved the first guard aside, punched the second, and bolted through the open door. He went flying down the corridor towards the stairs ..

Daylight!

until he tripped over a wire stretched across the passage, and fell flat on his face. He was on his feet in an instant, and already running, when Námó stepped through the door and ordered him to stop.

Not going to happen.

He heard Námó speak an incantation. A white light exploded in his head and dropped him in his tracks.

Chapter 5 The Circle of Doom



hen he came to, he was lying on his belly with his cheek against the cold marble floor. His hands were bound behind his back. When he tried to move, he heard the clink of chains. Not good. His vision returned slowly. He saw feet, and the hems of robes, everywhere he looked. From their voices, he knew they were members of the Council of Valar

Ever since the end of the First Age when Melkor fell, Sauron's greatest fear was of being brought to the Circle of Doom and standing before the Valar. Now he was here.

Manwë was the first to speak. "First of all, this isn't a trial. You were tried in absentia long ago. We are here to pass sentence. Is there anything you'd like to say first?" said Manwë.

"There is." said Sauron.

He arched his back and tried to look Manwë in the eye, but got a cramp in his neck. He rolled over on his side, and with great difficulty, got one and then the other knee under his body. He sat back on his heels and looked Manwë in the eye.

"You have no right to judge me." said Sauron.

"Excuse me?" asked Manwë.

"You have no right to judge me. This proceeding is illegal. When I left to follow Melkor, I moved from Valinor to Arda, outside of your jurisdiction. The laws of Valinor do not apply to Arda."

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And even if they do, just try to enforce them. You're never there, he thought.

"You cannot convict me for breaking the laws of Valinor, because I dwell in Arda, and they do not apply to me."

"The jurisdiction of the Valar covers all of Ea." said Manwë.

Shit.

"Would you like to know the charges against you?" asked Manwë.

Bite me.

"I'll take that as a yes." said Manwë. "In addition to the crimes you committed while serving Morgoth, you tortured the Elven smith Celebrimbor to death and led the invasion of Eriador. Whole populated regions disappeared. You masterminded the Invasion of Valinor, which was very nearly successful. It resulted in the drowning of Númenor and the extinction of the Númenorian people. You started the Great Plague which decimated Gondor, and you imprisoned the Dwarven king Thrain, who went mad before he died."

Sauron listened to the charges. His face held no expression.

I didn't even do all of those things. I didn't start the Plague, I claimed to have done it. I never intended the invasion of Valinor to be successful. They only got through by accident. And I didn't drown Númenor, Ilúvatar did.

"And there's one other thing. You hit the guard who took care of you while you were ill. He's injured, by the way."

"Please tell him I'm sorry." Sauron said.

I hope he understands why I did it. When I was sick, he must have seen how hard I fought to live, Sauron thought.

Sauron knew, when he was honest with himself, that the Valar gave up trying to reform him long ago. His sentence would have no prison term, no penance or servitude. They weren't going to bother to punish him. They just wanted

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him gone. Not living in Arda anymore. Not living at all.

Manwë pronounced the sentence.

“Sauron Gorthaur”, he pronounced in slow formal tones. “The Council has determined that you have gone entirely to evil and cannot be reformed. You will be brought to the Door of Night in the extreme West. There you be put into the Void.” Manwë looked grim. He added gently, “It will be quick. You won’t suffer.”

What they did to Melkor, they are about to do to me, he thought.

“Now that I have pronounced your sentence, is there anything you would like to say?” This was an occasion for the condemned to apologize for his crimes, or to beg for the mercy he did not deserve.

Sauron’s first impulse was to bargain. “Please don’t do this! I’ll do anything you want.” He would agree to enslavement, imprisonment under harsh conditions, to a repentance that was real. But Sauron knew there would be no pardon for him, and he wasn’t fool enough to ask for it.

“I want to say goodbye to Aulë.” Sauron said softly.

“I’ll ask him.” Manwë replied gently. “But he might not want to see you.”

Aulë stepped forward and stopped several paces in front of him. Sauron’s first Master held his face carefully neutral. Aulë looked just like he always had, long wild hair, bushy beard, tall with massively wide shoulders and muscular from working in the Forge. He looked without expression at his former servant, the one who had been his favorite, the one he had disowned.

Sauron spoke the words rehearsed for this occasion, should it come. “Aulë, I want to thank you for raising me. For teaching me to work with my hands. To make beautiful and useful things from the humblest materials. For everything you ...” Nervous, Sauron realized he’d forgotten his lines.

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Then, without knowing he was going to do it, Sauron flung his arms around Aulë's neck. "Oh, Aulë! I missed you so much! So many times after I left you, I wanted to come home!"

Aulë stiffened. He stood impassively with his hands at his sides, his face a mask, unreadable. Finally Sauron let go and stepped back, his feeling badly hurt.

"What do you want from me?" Aulë said. "To use my influence and get you a lesser sentence? To take you back into my service?" His eyes were cold.

"I'm frightened. When it happens, will you pray for me?" Sauron said softly.

Aulë swept Sauron up in a bear hug, squeezing him hard. Sauron thought his bones would break, and wished it would go on forever. But too soon, a guard put his hand on Aulë's arm. "I'm sorry. It's time."

Aulë released Sauron from the embrace and, with his hands on his shoulders, regarded him from arms' length. "If I don't see you again, take care of yourself." he said gruffly, and cuffed Sauron lightly on the shoulder. Sauron nodded, but couldn't speak.

There were people, Eönwë among them, who wanted to say goodbye, but he didn't want to see them. He'd already begun to withdraw to a place inside his head where they couldn't follow. He was shutting down. He didn't answer when people spoke to him. After a time, he didn't understand what was being said to him.

Chapter 6 The Void



It was a half day's journey from Valimar to the Door of Night on the Western-most edge of Valinor. They walked behind Manwë in silence. Sauron walked with his head bowed, his hands bound behind his back. The chain connecting his ankles was unusually short, forcing him to take small steps. If he'd tried to run, he'd have fallen flat on his face. Each of his guards kept a restraining hand on his elbow, but it wasn't necessary. He had given up.

He heard that a rabbit in the jaws of a wolf, when all hope is gone, goes limp and feel no pain. When they stop struggling, a feeling of calm comes over them. That's what he was feeling now.

They reached the Door of Night just before sunset. Now, they had only to wait for the Door to open. When it did, they would have to act quickly. They only had a few minutes before the setting Sun descended through the Door and forced them back.

They waited. Sauron regretted not seeing Eönwë. He spoke to Manwë. "Eönwë wanted to say goodbye to me, but I wouldn't see him. Please tell him goodbye for me, and will you tell him I'm sorry I turned him away?" Manwë said, "I will. I think he understands."

It was almost time.

Manwë blindfolded Sauron's eyes. "There's no reason he needs to see this" he explained to the guards. *That was so like*

Nightmare

Manwë. He was always kind, even to a vanquished enemy. Even to one who deserved this.

Sauron prayed softly. "Ilúvatar who made me, I descended into Ea to help build the world you created with your thought. Now I return to you in utter disgrace. The fault is my own. Never have I deserved your love less, and I never needed it more." Manwë was close enough to hear, but stepped back to allow him his privacy.

Sauron heard the Door open, a sound like iron screaming. He guessed the door was standing fully open now, because he could feel cold on his face. Unimaginably cold. He knew he was standing on the brink of The Void. He was grateful he couldn't see the empty sucking blackness beyond the Door. He was badly afraid.

It was time.

He knew what was supposed to happen next, what he was supposed to do, but he couldn't move. It was only one step, but he simply couldn't move.

"Do you need help?" Manwë asked. Sauron nodded mutely. "Take a minute. Just let me know when you're ready." Manwë stepped behind him and held his arms. Manwë's grip restrained him, but it also gave comfort. Sauron wasn't going to be ready, ever, and they both knew it. Another minute went by, but he still couldn't make himself give the signal. It didn't matter. Without warning, he was shoved from behind. Hard.

Hard enough to make him lose his balance and fall forward. He expected to land on his knees, or his face. But instead, he kept on going, falling into the pit that had been prepared for him.

He screamed.