

Chapter 1 Rebellious



Airon, Melkor's second-in-command and the commander of his forces, prepared for war against the Hosts of Valinor. Tension had been mounting for a long time, and it was about to come to a head.

Messengers flew back and forth between the two warring parties. The most recent dispatches from the Valar had taken on a new tone, one of menace and threat. Melkor returned them defaced and unopened. c

In the meantime, the forces of the Rebellion strengthened their own defenses far beyond what they'd ever been before. The Valar attacked them during the Age of the Stars, and reduced their fortresses to ruins. Now, Angband was protected by Thangorodrim, raised for its defense, as well as an extra curtain wall, higher and thicker than before.

In the plain before the gates of Angband, enormous armies of orcs stood in formation, rank upon rank. Black banners snapped in the wind. The mood was festive. They were eager to hear the horns signal the start of battle, and show what they could do.

Their armies were more than sufficient against the armies of Elves and Men, but in the coming contest, they would be facing the Host of Valar. An array of Balrogs stood ready to meet them, each one armed with whip and mace, and trained to fight in formation. The Valar fought one-on-one in an undisciplined way. The close combat tactics, drilled over and over, should give the advantage to the Rebellion.

But Melkor's greatest weapon was something the Valar had not seen before. In great secrecy, Melkor bred a host of dragons deep in the pits of Angband.

Rebellious

Mairon walked up and down the kennels in the dragon pits, reviewing their progress. Many were still juvenile, like Glaurung was when he assailed Nargothrond, but some were fully grown. The largest and most dangerous of these was Ancalagon the Black. He was the reason the forces of the Rebellion didn't fear the Valar.

We're ready. Bring it on, he thought.

Chapter 2 Defeated



Most of the orc armies had been killed or routed. The Balrogs closed ranks and advanced to face Manwë's herald, Eönwë, the greatest swordsman in Ea. It was over quickly. Maybe one of them survived, at most.

It got worse. Their entire defense was built upon the fleet of dragons, and the mightiest of them, Ancalagon the Black, had just been slain. His broken body fell out of like a stone and crushed the peaks of Thangorodrim.

The hollow mountain groaned, and began to collapse. He couldn't see through the dust, but he thought he saw the outer curtain wall fall into the crater it left.

He looked outward. The Host of Valar was advancing towards the gates of Angband. Melkor had seriously miscalculated. Even with their fortifications intact, and all their forces, they could not have withstood them.

He stood there stupidly, slack-jawed. His arms hung limp at his sides. The pole of Melkor's standard must have slipped from his fingers then. He wasn't sure when it happened, only that he didn't have it later.

The Host of Valar drew so close that he could see their faces. Hard, angry, pitiless. He expected they would call upon them to surrender and prepared to throw down their weapons, but they didn't. They approached with their weapons drawn, their eyes without mercy. He dropped his weapons and ran.

Chapter 3 Hunted



Mairon flattened his face against the ground and held his breath. In the distance, he heard the horns of Oromë, the baying of the dogs. They were hunting down the stragglers. They were hunting him.

If they found him, he was finished.

A group of hunters thundered past, pursuing a terrified Balrog. The Balrog tripped, and before he could get up, they closed the distance between them. The first to reach him raised his spear, drew back his arm, and took aim.

“No, please! I yield!” he begged.

Mairon realized the Balrog was someone he knew. He remembered him from the Battle of Gondolin. He’d belonged to the squad of Balrogs Mairon had led.

Balrogs were simple creatures. None of them were clever, but this one was hardworking and reliable, and Mairon liked him.

The horseman rammed the spear through his body. There was a sickening crunch. Mairon heard a scream, and then a few whimpers, but they didn’t last long. He heard Oromë’s hunters laughing.

Mairon tried to flatten himself against the ground even more, if that were possible. The hunters were so close, he could hear them talking among themselves.

“We chased him into the deepest dungeons of Angband. I wasn’t close enough to see what happened, but I heard a little of it. He begged for his life. He was sobbing, ‘I surrender, I surrender!’ but they didn’t stop. It was like watching a pack of dogs tear a rabbit to pieces.

Surrender

“The pleas gave way to screams. I heard him cry out in fear and anger. Then they changed in tone to screams of unbearable pain. And then there was silence. That was the worst. I listened for a long time, but there was nothing more. The pack surrounding him broke up, relaxed now. It was over.”

Melkor. They got him. Mairon didn't make a sound. If he had, they would have found him. He waited until they were well away, then let grief roll over him in waves.

He realized he had been lying to himself. Until now, he thought Melkor would face trial and a return to his old cell, from which he might never emerge. But there would be no trial. Melkor was gone.

Angband was in ruins, Melkor's Rebellion was utterly defeated.

Mairon hated being hunted, hated the suspense of waiting to be caught. He knew he was a target. He knew they won't let him escape.

He was tired. He wanted to go home.

He longed for his life before the Rebellion, for familiar faces, his own bed. He would beg Aulë to take him back. So much had happened since he'd left Valinor. Would Aulë even recognize him?

Chapter 4 Arrested



Mairon put on a fair form and made his way back to the tent city that had sprung up on the plains before the gates of Angband. The gates of Angband were smashed, Thangorodrim had collapsed, and oily black smoke roiled through the collapsed roofs of the fortress.

When Mairon was evading capture he was afraid, but once he decided to surrender, all he felt was tired. He felt like he was moving underwater. Walking was an effort, and he was so tired he could have fallen asleep on his feet right there.

He felt apprehensive about approaching the camp. A line of Elven warriors guarded the perimeter. They carried kite-shaped shields and were heavily armed.

He pushed back his hood so his face showed, and spoke to them in a friendly way. He knew from experience it's easy to shoot an anonymous figure, but less so a person with a face and a voice.

When they saw him, they drew their swords. Each of the archers notched an arrow. In an instant, half a dozen steel tips were aimed at his throat.

It occurred to him that he should have removed Melkor's badge before he approached them. His error might have cost him his chance to surrender. His mouth went dry. Very slowly, he held his hands away from his body.

Their leader addressed him with contempt. "Sauron Gorthaur."

Mairon hated that name. Sauron was the Elvish word for filth.

Surrender

“Put your hands up.” the Elven captain said. Mairon laced his fingers behind his head. His hair felt greasy, and there were leaves in it.

The line of warriors formed a circle around him, their weapons drawn. He saw fear in their faces. None of them would come within ten feet of him, and if he looked at any of them directly, they flinched and pulled away.

One of the Elves returned with three young Maiar. They were dressed as if for battle, and carried formidable weapons. Mairon didn't recognize them, but they seemed to know who he was. They pushed through the circle of warriors.

“Don't move.” said. their leader

Mairon kept his hands on his head.

The Maiar approached him, their weapons drawn. Two stopped just out of reach, while the third one circled behind him.

Unseen hands roved over his body. He felt his sword belt being unbuckled, and a knife was taken from his boot. Papers were removed from his pockets, including a personal letter, battle plans, and a list of the names of spies. He should have gotten rid of that earlier, but he hadn't been thinking clearly.

“Put your hands behind your back.”

Mairon lowered his arms with exaggerated slowness, then crossed his wrists behind his back. He felt a cord being wrapped around his wrists two or three times, then cinched tight and knotted. Almost right away, his fingers began to swell.

“Let's go.” said the leader.

Mairon followed, walking between the other two Maiar who had his arms in a vise-like grip.

The Maiar brought him to a large tent. It must be a command tent, because guards were posted on either side of the entrance. In front, a pole supported a large banner.

The wind was still, so the banner hung slack. He couldn't read it, so he didn't know who he was about to face. Oromë, whose hounds and hunters he had run from. Or worse, Tulkas.

If it's Tulkas, I'm going to get hurt.

The wind picked up and lifted the banner. Eönwë.

Arrested

He sagged with relief. Eönwë was a good person, and he believed that other people were basically good, too. More important, at the core of his being, Eönwë was kind.

If anyone could be manipulated, it was Eönwë.

Chapter 5 Released



he Host of Valinor were victorious, but their victory had come at a great cost. Several of their number had been injured or maimed, and one had fallen. The mood in the camp was solemn.

Then, during the night, Eönwë's tent was attacked and his guards slain. Someone grabbed the Silmarils Eönwë recovered from Morgoth's crown and fled with them. The whole camp was roused, and the attackers were caught and unmasked as Fëanor's sons. They would have been put to death, but Eönwë let them go. The decision was his to make, but it was not popular.

Eönwë sat behind the rough table he was using as a desk. Several of his councilors crowded around him, discussing the attack and the loss of the Silmarils so soon after they were recovered from Morgoth's crown.

A young Maia burst through the tent flaps. "Sauron Gorthaur has surrendered!" he said.

This was a major development. When they captured Morgoth, his elusive second-in-command vanished like smoke. The Hunters of Oromë were out looking for him, but Eönwë had no reason to think he'd be captured alive. Their first order of business was to bring him in and interrogate him.

Eönwë didn't want to see him.

Sauron helped Morgoth make war on the Children of Ilúvatar, killing them or worse, turning them into monsters. It was an unforgivable crime.

He was my friend once, when we were young. He was a decent person then. Perhaps some trace of who he had been still remained, and could yet be salvaged.

"Bring him in." said Eönwë.

"Why would you even agree to see him, when he's evil?" asked one of his captains.

"I don't know if I believe in evil. I know he behaved badly, but he must have had a reason for it. I just want to understand. Even if he ignored the rights and feelings of others, perhaps it was due to a kind of blindness, rather than a willful intent to do harm. The harm done may have been accidental."

The tent flap was lifted from outside. Sauron Gorthaur came in between two guards, his hands behind his back. He looked like he'd been sleeping in a ditch. His face bore no expression, and his eyes were on the ground.

"What brings you here?" Eönwë asked, his voice carefully neutral.

Sauron opened his mouth to speak, but no sound came out. Eönwë was about to tell him to speak up. He stopped himself when he noticed Sauron's face was chalk white and he was trembling.

"Take your time." Eönwë said gently.

Sauron swallowed and tried again. "The Rebellion has been crushed. I am defeated. I wish to be reconciled with Aulë." He spoke in a monotone.

"Release him." said Eönwë.

The guards let go of his arms. One of them shoved him between the shoulder blades, making him stumble. He fell to his knees and stayed there without moving, his hair hanging over his face.

"Is he injured?" Eönwë asked one of the guards.

"No, he doesn't have a scratch on him." said guard.

Eönwë heard he'd fled the field of battle before the battle began. *He's not hurt, he's scared*, Eönwë thought with contempt.

"What do you want from me?" Eönwë asked him.

"I seek pardon. I will swear under oath that I reject what I did when I served Melkor, and that I have abandoned my old ways. I wish only peace between us." he said.

Not good enough, thought Eönwë. He hadn't said anything about standing trial and submitting to justice, and he hadn't expressed remorse.

Surrender

“Get up. Sit.” Eönwë pointed to a chair recently vacated by one of his advisors.

One of the guards pulled him to his feet and the other cut the leather cord with a knife. Sauron sat down, rubbing his wrists.

Eönwë picked up a pen. He began the interview with the standard questions. *What is your name? Who did you serve? What was your role?* He wrote down everything Sauron said.

Once Sauron was answering questions and allowing his answers to be written down, Eönwë moved on to the real interrogation. These questions would elicit the confession used in his trial.

Sauron admitted only to things Eönwë already knew. His answers sounded rehearsed. He minimized the consequences of what he’d done, and shifted blame for his own crimes onto other people.

Sauron seemed to be watching Eönwë’s face closely, gauging the effect of his words, and modifying accordingly. It was annoying, but not unexpected. Eönwë knew Sauron was manipulative.

Eönwë also noticed that Sauron’s words didn’t match his expression. When he agreed to something, he shook his head no. When he said he deeply regretted something, he smiled. And when his expression did match his words, it came a half a second too late. Eönwë marveled that even as accomplished liar like Sauron made those mistakes.

Sauron was playing the role of someone who’d repented and changed sides, but that’s all it was, playing a role. Eönwë was getting frustrated with him. *Why can’t he trust me enough to tell me the truth? Until he surrenders for real, I can’t help him.*

Eönwë decided to bring the interview to an end. He motioned a guard over.

He would ask him to add Morgoth's servant to the row of prisoners who lay facedown in the holding area, their eyes blindfolded and their wrists bound behind their backs. And if they tried to get up, the point of a spear in their back would help them to realize that staying down was probably a better idea. They would remain like that, until they were brought to Valinor for trial.

But when Eönwë looked back, he saw something in Sauron's face. The mask slipped, and for an instant, Eönwë saw behind it. Grief, suffering. That's what Eönwë would feel, too, if his home were destroyed and his own master killed.

Eönwë looked around at the others and mouthed, "Leave us." They looked at him questioningly, but did as they were told. After they filed out of the tent, Eönwë said,

"I'm sorry. I know how much you lost today."

Sauron hung his head, his hair hiding his face. Eönwë waited. There really wasn't anything he could do for him, except sit with him and let him grieve.

Finally Sauron spoke. "Don't waste your pity on me. I don't deserve it."

"Why do you say that?" Eönwë asked him.

"I did something bad."

Eönwë waited.

"I was the commander of Melkor's forces, and his Standard Bearer. I stood beside him. I was supposed to protect him. But when Host of Valinor overwhelmed us, I panicked. I dropped his Standard and ran."

That was the first authentic thing Sauron said since he got here. How to encourage him to talk, before he closed up again?

"When we were young, you were responsible and obedient. You never got into trouble. I'm just trying to understand what happened." said Eönwë.

"It seemed so right, at first. It was exciting. We were away from home for the first time. The constraints were gone. We could do more, get things done faster, than we could in Valinor."

"What happened next?"

Surrender

Sauron started talking, and once he got started, he couldn't stop. The words tumbled out unchecked. Eönwë noticed that, for once, his expression agreed with his words.

Eönwë wrote furiously, trying to capture everything he said. His normally careful handwriting sprawled across the page, barely legible, as he tried to keep up with the flow of words.

Then Sauron looked at the ground, his voice barely above a whisper.

"Excuse me, I didn't catch that." said Eönwë.

It took Eönwë a moment to realize what he'd just said, and when he did, his hand froze in midair. It was something deeply personal, but it wasn't a crime, so Eönwë saw no need to record it. He rested his hand beside the paper until they moved on to another topic.

During the interview, Eönwë kept his face neutral, although he was staggered by the crimes Sauron admitted to. Shape-shifting into a giant wolf and eating the Firstborn Elves. Promising someone his life in exchange for betraying his friends, and killing him anyway. Attempting to procure Lúthien Tinúviel for Morgoth's bed.

Eönwë struggled to understand Sauron's motives. Sauron enjoyed wielding power. He enjoyed being feared, and cruelty came easily to him. But that wasn't what drove him. His purpose was to control Arda, in order to restore order and harmony.

If he's had a different temperament, he might not have been drawn into evil. If he were less impatient, if he didn't rush into things and cut corners. If he were less angry. But in Morgoth's service, no one stopped him from committing evil deeds in the service of a worthy goal.

In his misguided way, he served something other than himself. Because of that, Eönwë believed he could still be saved.

"I don't have the authority to grant you pardon. Go to Manwë and receive his judgment. Renounce your allegiance to Morgoth, and confess to everything you did in Morgoth's service.

“Don’t be afraid of Manwë. He wants to help you, if you truly regret your past deeds. And he knows that Aulë wants you back.”

Sauron got up. He bowed to Eönwë, then slipped out of the tent and vanished into the night.

One of Eönwë’s advisors entered the tent.

“You’re letting him go?” asked his advisor.

“He’s a voluntary surrender. I can’t spare the men to escort someone who turned himself in. I need them for those who were taken unwillingly.

“And I don’t want to deprive him of his best chance to demonstrate repentance. If he shows up for trial on his own, rather than being brought in as a prisoner, it will show he really means it.”

Chapter 6 Vanished



When he left Eönwë's tent, Sauron intended to seek out Manwë as quickly as possible. He practiced what he would say to Manwë, and to Aulë, when he saw them. He thought about his old home, and how it would be nice to be back.

He was exhausted, and didn't leave for Valinor that first night. Over the next few days, he was so overcome with grief for Melkor, for everyone who fell in the War, he just sat and stared into space. For a time, he felt stunned, and was unable to make decisions.

A day at a time, he put off leaving. Eönwë's camp pulled up and moved away. Eventually, he'd delayed so long, it started to be embarrassing.

He thought about the trial. He dreaded stepping into the Circle of Doom to answer charges and speak in his own defense. He hated being judged, and if he were honest with himself, he was deeply afraid of being humiliated.

Would they ask him to renounce Melkor? He loved Melkor. He'd already let Melkor down in battle. He didn't want to recant his allegiance, too.

Manwë would decide his guilt or innocence. Manwë was forgiving and kind, but his judgment would be fair, not merciful. Mairon dreaded the moment at the end of the trial when the sentence was pronounced.

And then the Valar would decide how he should be punished. They would debate the length of the prison term and the harshness of the conditions, while he stood before them with his hands clasped in front of him, his eyes on the floor.

And centuries later, when he finally emerged from prison, he would return to Aulë's household. But he wouldn't be First Maia anymore, he would return as a slave. That's what happened to Ossë, and what Ossë had done wasn't nearly as bad as what he had.

His world would contract to the house and the land around it, because he wouldn't be allowed to leave the property. He would have the tasks that no one else wanted, the ones so tedious or disgusting that the lowest of the servants refused them. His day would start earlier and end later than anyone else's. Long hours of drudgery were part of the punishment.

He thought he could do it. If he were allowed to complain, and make sarcastic remarks, and throw a fit from time to time, he thought he could do it. But an important condition of penal servitude was that it had to be done with a glad heart. When Sauron thought of himself kneeling on the flagstones with a scrub brush in his hands while other Maiar walked around him, he felt his hands curling into fists.

Sauron was proud. He didn't think he could endure it.

And he was angry. He was so angry for what they'd done to Melkor, for what they might do to him. He couldn't forgive the Valar.

The Host of Valinor were gone. Beleriand collapsed into the sea. Arda was left in shambles. Why didn't they stay and repair the damage from the war? He began to do it himself, to the extent he could, and felt resentful that no one was helping him.

It occurred to him that, instead of rotting in prison, he could atone just as well by doing anonymous good works. Besides, it served no purpose to lock up someone with his intelligence and energy, not when he was needed here in Arda.

He went into the East, where he helped primitive hunter-gathers learn to farm. He taught them to smelt iron ore into simple tools for cultivation. He taught letters and writing to people in a remote fishing village, and taught them to sing praises to Ilúvatar.

A life of anonymous good works was a quiet life. He was often bored. He regretted not being able to talk about his past, or let anyone get too close to him.

Surrender

Twelve hundred years after Melkor's downfall, Sauron came west to Eregion and joined the Workshop of the Jewel smiths. Finally, he was in his element. He taught the most gifted among them everything that Aulë had taught him.

But it turned out that among the Jewel smiths, he as much the student as the teacher. In all the years of atonement, that had never happened before.

The Elven Smiths were planning to do something that had never been done before. They wanted to forge rings that magnify one's own natural abilities. Such a project would never have occurred to him on his own, but he thought he might be able to help them with it.