

## THE HOLD

by Brandon M. Dennis

We swept the forests, and the grasslands, and the mountains. We searched and searched, until we had rounded up all of them. We took them all to an old cobblestone hold in the middle of the forest. It was a large hold. The doors were massive! Fifteen feet from the first hinge of the double doors to the second. The doors resembled an arch when closed and when open, a bird with its wings outstretched. The doors themselves were three feet thick, as if they were castle gates. What ever was admitted entrance was certainly never coming out.

The hold was made entirely of cobblestone. It did not look like cobblestone though, for the structure was so old. Moss covered each stone, hence it's nickname "Green Sheol". The hold was immensely tall like a tower. It appeared to have many floors, but it was a different story upon entering.

Myself, along with the rest of the Nurith brought the captives into the hold at spear-point. They were terrified. The captives shuffled into the structure with their hands tied behind their backs and their legs cuffed together by a short chain. Amongst them you could hear cries of, "The Green Sheol!" and "Our doom! Our doom!" At one point many of them tried to escape. They were of course immediately slain.

Entering Green Sheol was a shock to the senses. There was a dank, murky smell to the place. The smell was similar to that of blood. Looking up, one immediately realized that there were no other floors. The windows were near the ceiling, approximately one-hundred-and-fifty feet in the air. Yet even so, massive planks of iron barred them. Once your eyes adjusted, one realized that it was not completely dark. Torches were placed strategically about the hold, giving off just enough light to cast eerie shadows.

But shadows were not needed. The place was infested with rats, mice and other foul creatures; roaches and spiders and creatures that emitted putrid smells. Even the feel of the ground was disgusting. At places it was soft and loose, so that ones ankles were buried in the muck. At others it was slimy and slick. Strands of the stuff would get stuck between ones toes. Occasionally, balls of fire would appear from nowhere, consuming whatever was in its path. The gasses and fumes in the air made this possible, let off by the various creatures that made their home here.

At last, all the captives were inside Green Sheol and the massive doors were shut. We, the Nurith, would never have to remain in these conditions of course. We quickly climbed the nearby staircases. At the top where the air was clearer, there was a ramp which outlined the inside perimeter of the hold. Before the captives understood where we went, we turned the crank which brought the steps up out of the reach of the captives.

We looked down at those hapless souls. We smiled as they screamed in terror as things slithered past their legs. Amongst the screams and curses, I walked over to our general; the Lord of the Nurith.

"Sir, your prideful-ness?"

“Yes, Peon,” he said in a booming voice.

“I have but one question.”

“And what might that be?”

“Well your mercilessness, we have no provisions for these captives, when in the past we did. Also, this group is about three times as large as any we have held before.” The general smirked.

“Do you think I have not thought of this?”

“No!” I quickly interjected. “No, my liege. I am just curious as to what will be done.”

“You shall soon see. Look!” He pointed towards the captives. I turned, yet I saw nothing. In the darkness I saw only the tops of heads. Suddenly I began to hear a gurgling sound that seemed to come from all around. I looked for its source. My eyes wandered until they came upon previously unnoticed tubes. I looked all about Green Sheol and spotted many of them. Steam and smoke began to trickle out of them. The captives were becoming restless and some were mumbling gibberish. Abruptly I saw a small amount of black liquid come out of each tube. There was a rumbling. My eyes went wide.

“No...” I said.

“Yes,” the general replied. He smiled.

Load after load of hot tar suddenly gushed forth from the tubes, drenching all the captives at the bottom of Green Sheol. It was a river of death pouring from the walls. The tar was boiling hot and enveloped the captives most cruelly. Horrible screams and shrill shrieks sprang forth from their mouths as skin slid off their bodies. Whatever it was that kept it on burnt up. The poor retches below were hopping around frantically in their chains. The room was filling up fast. The screams of agony were slowly receding as the lake of tar grew higher and higher. Soon there were no screams at all. Bodies floated both face upward and face downward in the black liquid. Their carcasses smoked and many had no skin. Those that did were still bubbling and jerking as their blood boiled. The stench was awful. It was a cross between vile rot and steak. The Nurith around me laughed wildly, mocking and chiding with each other. I looked into the general’s eyes. They were staring at the pool of blood and tar lustfully. His tongue poked out of his mouth and he breathed heavily. There seemed to be no other life in his face.

I felt sick. I saw the remnants of men floating and it chilled my bones. I had never seen anything like this before. I had never expected it. Bodies were twitching as last minute messages from the brain were sent to the limbs. I covered my mouth. The stench was too much. I heard a splash. One of my fellow Nurith slipped and accidentally fell in. He screamed and splashed about wildly as the tar melted his skin off. It didn’t take long for him to die and he soon breathed his last.

A mighty roar of laughter rang out from among the Nurith. This amused them! It amused them that one of their own, their fellow companion, had perished in such a way. I began to sob. This was not natural, this was not right. The Nurith’s body floated past. It didn’t look any different from the others. Same frame, same bones, same blood. Then why should these have died? What makes them any different from us? Nothing. Uniform,

that is all. I couldn't take this. I couldn't live with myself knowing that I participated in such an act. It was more than I could bear! How could I ever have peace again?

I dived headfirst into the lake of blood and tar, and felt no more.

I surfaced on the other side and immediately gasped for breath. I splashed about wildly as I regained control. I was no longer in a pool of black, but a pool of gold. No longer a pool of death, but a pool of life. Someone from the nearby shore offered me his hand. He pulled me out, and others came and clothed me in a white robe, for I was naked. I was embraced and received many kisses. I knew everyone, yet all were strangers. The man that pulled me out put a ring on my finger and a sash across my chest. His warm eyes comforted me.

“Welcome back,” He said.