

afternoon and once they leave the domaine, will dispatch the first carrier hawk.' As the barber brushed the loose hair from his shoulders, he stood up. It is the second hawk that concerns me.' He studied the haircut in the mirror. 'My hair is thinning like a woods caught in the Blight. I look positively cherubic' His wife could not repress a small laugh. 'Cherubic?', she smiled, 'with a dirty halo methinks.' 'Ha Ha' he responded in a monotone. 'Upon arrival of the second hawk, I must be notified at once. If the news is bad, ready my Pegasus at once and tell my squire to set out my Armor, Sword and Shield.' 'Papa' asked Cobina, 'what do you ponder?' 'Methinks they are dead or prisoners of some evil out on the Carcassone. Send word to Boudwin de Brienne and alert him as well.' The Second Hawk arrived the next day, at mid morning and the Marquis was astride his Pegasus within the hour. 'Papa still rides well,' said Andrea. 'It's his big butt,' said Cobina, 'It anchors him in the saddle. You have it as well.' And she ducked her sisters fist. Not being bound by the land was marvelous. He was 200 feet in the air and the Pegasus was flying straight to the site mentioned in the missive. An ancient burial ground, avoided by wise travelers. By four in the afternoon he could see the yeomen on the ground and within minutes was talking to his warden. 'Signs indicate the Francois caravan stopped here to loot the graves.' The Marquis shook his heads and cursed. The warden continued his report, 'They were surprised and attacked by something.' The Marquis slapped his thigh in frustration. 'Did you say loot the graves?' and the warden nodded, gesturing to a large tomb. He saw the tools, the prybars, the hammers and the lock pick devices. The door was ajar. Muttering a small prayer, he entered to see sepulchers rudely open and items strewn across the floor of the tomb. He left and told the warden to restore what was inside, then seal all the violated resting places. The Mounted Yeomen did as ordered. The warden, a skilled tracker and scout, said that the signs indicated at least one minotaur, 15-20 humans, three Orcs or big Gobbos. The path they left by was to the Southeast, to the Tombs. The Marquis gave orders that after securing the tombsite, the yeomen were to send a hawk requesting AndreaLynn to pursue with her command. He also requested the squadron of Pegasus Knights to be dispatched and head due south from the violated tombs. The orders were understood and he began the trip south on the back of his Pegasus. Now the reader must understand that most folk, commoner and noble alike, consider Pegasi to be nothing more than flying horses and this is erroneous. Pegasi are smarter than the most intelligent horse. Their eyesight is sharp as an eagle or hawk and in all manner of light. They do not make the sounds of horses, but are content to trill a bit when happy and coo a bit when quiet and in combat their screeches rend the air like knives drawn across slate. He was 200 feet into the air and flying unrestricted. Soon the fingers of night could be seen crawling on the earth below. The Iranna mountains were closer now. The moment he saw the campfire he moved to get lower. He wanted to observe the camp from the ground. He wanted to go to the east. The Pegasus ignored his nudges and landed on the south side of the camp, behind a hill. Quietly it climbed the hill until the Marquis could observe the camp. It turned his stomach. He saw the Orcs first laughing and singing. A large shape on the ground indicated the Minotaur and it was a big one.. The Humans were busying themselves getting ready to sleep. The flash of colorful clothing indicated the Francois women were alive. 'Excuse me sir, can you help us?' The voice was quiet and pitiful. Calming himself [the Pegasi did not react], Hercule du Bois Guilbert turned to see two small children, dirty, clothes tattered, eyes wide with fear. The youngest of the Francois family ! He dismounted and went to them and embraced them in a hug. The boy said 'Make no sound sir, for they didn't see us leave.' The little girl sniffed a bit. 'Mamma is dead.' She started to cry, but the Marquis was able to make her stop. He put both children on the back of his steed, then mounted behind them for their safety. The children asked 'It is going to fly?' and the Marquis said yes, swinging up into the saddle. The beast flew off to the North effortlessly, carrying its riders without alarming them. For an hour it flew and then it landed near a copse of alder and brambles. The Marquis made a quick camp. He cleaned the children and fed them and by the time the other knights arrived, the children were asleep. The Gallant spoke with the Marquis saying two of his company would take the children back to the Sentinel. 'What do the rest of us do?' The squadron with the Marquis were heading south, but no campfires could be seen from the air. All the way to the Iranna Mountains no sign of the war party could be found. It was as if the earth had swallowed them up. A thought pierced his mind and he reversed his flight. It was dawn now and he could see far. He spoke to his Pegasi steed. 'Let us see how smart you are. Find the enemy campsite.' Twenty minutes later he was on the ground near the very middle of the dry lakebed that was his southern border. Marveling at how smart his beast was he instructed his knights to search for a hole in the ground. The knights did as they were told and within moments such a hole was discovered. Three meters square and covered to look like the land around it. The Marquis spat. 'Damned Skaven and in League with the Marauders, I reckon.'

Flags

After marking the entrance to the tunnel, he had returned to the Sentinel. Both daughters had not seen their father so serious. He went straight to his war room and got parchment, ink and quills. In his own hand he wrote his report on what they found out near the Iranna Mountains. He ordered an expeditionary force of infantry to enter the tunnel and find out where it went and to find the Francois family. Cobina would lead the expedition and he cautioned her in his letter to exercise caution. He authorized the Mounted Yeomen to accompany the Infantry. As an afterthought he ordered the Poinsettas, the Columbines and another squadron of Knights errant to follow behind the Vanguard in support. In his orders he gave a time frame of 16 days at which point the expeditionary force should return posthaste to the Sentinel.

His second letter was to be copied and posted throughout the tract. A call for laborers for a work effort just within the borders of his domain. A series of shafts, 6 meters square to a depth of 150 meters. All the rock, debris and talus removed was to be transported to the western reaches of the dry lake bed and there formed into a stout wall spanning the kilometer gap between the plateau cliffs and the ridge called Red Wall. The Battle Standard Bearer entered. D'Artagnon Richelieu was tall and handsome and a good friend. He sat down across the table and spoke. 'Do you think it is war?'. The Marquis shook his head. 'I do think the Skaven and this new threat of Brigands, whatever that means, bears studying.' He finished writing and stretched. 'I also feel that we should have plenty of supplies in case of Siege. More arrows and weapons to be sure.' D'Artagnon said nothing and this got the Marquis attention. He looked at the Standard bearer who broke the silence. 'I will keep thy daughters safe, m'lord'. It might have been taken as an affront, but the Marquis did not react. Five days later, a courier hawk arrived with a message that the Forces would be delayed at least two more days. The Francois males had been found dead and were being returned in closed coffins for burial. There was a separate letter from Cobina for the Marquis eyes only. He read it.

'Papa dearest, Today we found a rear guard of the fiends and destroyed them. No one escaped our wrath. The remains of the Francois males, including the sons had been flayed and their skins made into banners. I retched and was not alone in that. I am sending you their remains for proper burial, but the coffins are not to be opened. We found some human stragglers of the villainous forces and interrogated them. I have much to tell you.. The tunnel continues south into the Iranna foothills and comes out near the old Dragon Caves. From there the trail leads through the mountains and towards SkavenBlight. They were not careful about covering their tracks. I will see you in 4 days, Cobi

He read the letter twice and then went to his Seneschal to see how the Lakebed project was proceeding. Here he got good news. Enough laborers showed up to start the initial excavation of 12 shafts approximately a half kilometer apart. More were coming every day. Word had spread to Brionne and all along the rivers that the d'Ascoynes were paying-. 'PAYING!!!!?' shouted the Marquis d'Ascoyne, 'Who said anything about wages?' He was up and pacing the floor when his wife entered the room. 'I did.' And she calmly walked across the floor to her husband and took him by the arm, leading him back to his chair. 'Yes I did. Three copper coins a month, at the end of each month.' The Marquis shook his head. His wife continued as a servant brought in some dragonberry tarts and fresh cold milk. 'This whole endeavor may cost us', and here she emphasized us, '2800 Gold.' 'Now we are paying wages, I trust this is a custom that will not catch on. Paying Peasants to perform their natural duties. How unnatural. Anything else?' She sat down and leaned forward. 'Dear, you made no effort to conceal your plan to reclaim the old lake. When completed it will transform the entire lakefront border into livable property. The laborers will want to live- along the lake perhaps- and that is a good tax source.' Seeing the gold lining of the grey cloud, the Marquis relented a bit. His wife concluded that within six years the initial expenses would be replaced fourfold.. Not withstanding the fees paid to the dwarves. The Gold Lining turned to lead in the grey cloud. 'How Much?' was the weak inquiry. Another six thousand came the response from his wife. 'You want quality work in mining, you hire the men of the earth.' 'Glothamoir?' 'Glothamoir.' 'Done', said the Marquis. Thunder Powder is not for the Face. Cobina and her forces had returned. Three men wounded, but that was all. She wrote her report. She bathed and she went on with her life. Outwardly little, if anything had changed, but the Marquis devoted much of his time helping his youngest daughter cope with the horrific discovery in the tunnels. Lady Gandolfyn also provided care and counseling.. Fall came and went and the Winter blanketed the Carcassonne in shroud of Snow. Work at the Lakebed was progressing rapidly. By midwinter 16 more shafts had begun. Little precious metals were found, just rocks and boulders. What was discovered was a rich layer of good earth five feet below the surface of the dry lake bed. The laborers worked through the winter for the bowels of the earth were warm. The wall between the plateau and Red Wall Cliff was taking shape. There was no denying it. The wall was a dam, 60 feet tall. Thick at the bottom

and a mere ten meters wide at the top. By spring the dam was over two thirds complete. With curious spillways and passages. Overseeing construction of the Dam was Glothamoir Stihlhand. He was old now, the whiteness in his beard and eyebrows matching the Marquis. His hand was still steady as was his wit. Always welcome at the Marquis' table he had many fine dinners with the family. The planting was done throughout the Tract and the long days of summer passed slowly. Of the shafts sunk eight had penetrated to tunnels, of which all were naturally formed three were sufficient to allow mounted warriors to ride free. One was positively huge! 20 meters wide and eight meters tall. It ran to the Northeast some 22 kilometers. Glothamoir was impressed. ' 'Tis an old Karak highway, I think' He and the Marquis explored the entire length to the Northeast. They discovered old lamps, airshafts, many still working, writings in dwarven runes. They found the ancient wreckage of three carts carrying goods and jewels and gold in small amounts. When the tunnels crossed under a river, water was seen dripping from the ceiling. After the first week, they found where the tunnel had collapsed. The barrier was insurmountable. They returned to the original shaft site. In their absence three Skaven tunnels had been discovered some 26 meters below the Dwarven corridor. To the credit of the workforce the tunnels were restored carefully so no trace was left of the discovery. A young dwarf, Oberon Coppertop, said he had set up a device that would warn the humans of a Skaven incursion. He was terse in the explanation. 'Red Smoke means you have Rats.' Coppertop said it was the same kind of alarm that they would use to signal the explosion in a few months. That said and done, the shafts were completed two months later. The Gavenie was diverted while the final section of dam was completed. . 200 wagons had already deposited rock and sand and ash and a ton of burnt seashells which were mixed with other dwarven soils to create facing, called concrete. The Dam was 11 meters in height and 54 meters through at the base Now to restore the river to its original course, the dwarves decided to use their Thunder Powder to great effect. The day of the explosion most of the Tract showed up to watch from the top of the Plateau. Three miles away the dwarves brought in many wagons, loaded with powder barrels. These were placed along the wall above the concrete bed. The River was low. The people waited for an explosion.. They were not disappointed. The Dwarves lit fuses and jumped into fast wagons. The human teamsters raced across the lakebed while the fuses slowly, inevitably burnt to the powder. The waiting was nerve wracking. The wagons stopped and turned at two miles from the site.. Finally a singular column of red smoke erupted from the side of the cliff. It shot out 20 meters before climbing into the sky. Moments later, the powder ignited. The resultant explosion could be heard 20 miles away. People were stunned, shocked and deafened by the report. Babies cried, Children Screamed, faint hearted folks collapsed. The Concussion wave could be seen rolling across the lakebed. For those watching from the wagons., the shock wave struck them down. It felt like being hit with staves. A great column of dust roiled up and away from the cliff. The entire cliff face had fallen onto the concrete base, damming the river quite well. The dwarf was delighted. "Sir d'Ascoyne I say in honesty and without fear of reprisal you have the finest domain by a dam site' .. After the explosion there was no sound by nature. A huge ring of smoke rose higher and higher into the sky. Glothamoir was well pleased. 'Brought down the whole side of the cliff as neat as a knife through honeycakes. 'Some honeycakes, dwarf', said AndreaLyn, 'I shan't get rid of the ringing in my ears for a week'. 'What?' shouted Cobina. 'The explosion left my ears ringing' shouted back AndreaLyn. 'What' said Cobina. 'My ears were-' and she realized that her sister was pranking. She quickly mouthed the words without uttering them. Her sisters eyes widened. Andrea continued mouthing words and gesturing with her hands. Cobina shrieked 'I've gone deaf!' and clapped her hands to her ears. Upon hearing her sisters laughing she made a face. The laughter grew and spread across the crowd like a rainbow in the sky. Glothamoir Stihlhand pulled his pipe out. 'Just had the two did you?' Lady d'Ascoyne said yes. The dwarf nodded and smoked his pipe. 'That's well and good. Your culture could only handle two of that quality.' Before the dust had settled, workers were applying the grey mixture over the rubble. It will harden within a week', said a dwarf engineer. 'We call it cement.' Three days later the task was complete and the waters were still seeking their new boundaries. The lake was less than six feet deep Gullies and ravines began to fill up and by the end of the drying period the lake was 14 miles long and three and a half miles wide. During the third week, industrious peasants introduced young trout and carp and bass to the new lake and by the sixth month,, fish could be seen jumping to catch the many insects drawn to the body of water. Atop the dam, Glothimer Stihlhand shook the Marquis' hand.. Six Freight wagons pulled up beside the two warriors , the Marquis mentioning that 24 Jereboams of applejack were provided by a grateful out post of Bretonnians in the Carcassone. Two weeks later the Storm of Chaos swept the Land