

Excerpts from Chapter 11 of Deadly Secrets

Even before reaching the town limits, the salty scent of the sea blew strong against Darian's stinging wet face. As if angered by their arrival, the dark heaven pelted them with its wet freezing fury, thoroughly drenching the marching and mounted soldiers alike. Only Duc de Vannes and Princess Madaleanna remained dry and untouched by the furious weather as the entourage hustled toward the warmth and the shelter of Cronus' castle.

Though the castle sat at the southernmost point of Vannes, Darian spotted the spectacular fortress some distance outside the city limits. Strategically positioned on a cliff overlooking Gulf du Morbihan, Cronus' stronghold only needed protection in the front, during the time of a siege. Like the Cliff of Dover, the massive sea wall provided a natural defense by encircling the castle at the end of the point. Carved and chiseled from the high cliff, three towers protruded out of the peninsula like crooked fingers reaching up for the sky. In each of these columns, the young squire saw large windows in the castle above the horizon of the city's shops and homes.

Though soaked and shivering in the cold summer rain, the young man stared with amazement at the city as he went past the whitewashed buildings. Thick wooden shutters on the homes sealed out the Elements. So well, it almost seemed like no one was inside the low-ceiling houses. As he went down the cobblestone streets leading to the eerie but magnificent castle, Darian noticed something odd. He saw no one braving the weather to pay homage to or even catch a glimpse of the Princess of Armorica.

As if they had reached an invisible line, the buildings of Vannes suddenly stopped. About fifty yards from that mark the first of two walls stood. Only about fifteen feet high, the first black stone barrier offered minimum resistance to any persistent perpetrator. Beyond the first perimeter, another two hundred yards of jagged rocks stretched before him. And then appeared the next wall, the one that seemed to touch the very heavens. All the while, the rocky terrain gradually elevated.

At each end of this huge wall, a colossal bartizan guarded against any type of barrage. At the center of the overwhelming wall, a cluster of stalagmite-like spires served as the main gatehouse. As they drew closer, Darian noticed that the irregular surface effectively allowed for just about every possible angle with its strategically placed arrow slits.

Looking at the abnormal but awesome architecture, Darian noticed the cold chilling side of the siege.