

Chapter 1: A New Challenge

“It had been awhile since I had job worth my time and effort, a real challenge.”

A mansion on the outskirts of the city was known for its castle-like appearance. Some still say it is a castle, but the smarter ones know that it's a mansion surrounded with castle-like walls. The owner of the mansion a Noble that goes by the name of Doumont had the walls built to make it less likely it would be robbed. Either he thought thieves would think it was a castle, which hasn't ever stopped anyone before or just harder to ascend and get over. In any case Lankin was going to get in, he never thought of robbing the place before, it never seemed to be a challenge. Recently though a thief was caught, scaling one of the four towers that surround the mansion. They found him hanging from a rope arrow between the second and third windows on the tower. He was caught thereafter and now is supposedly rotting in a prison. Either way Doumont started to “thief-proof” his mansion, by replacing all the wooden ledges with stone ones, under the windows on each of the floors of the towers. Just yesterday Lankin heard that all the towers were done except for the one on the far right. So he decided that it would be a challenge to rob a mansion that no one had before, and he can only use one of the towers. He didn't have a map or any idea of what was to be expected this just made it more interesting and exciting to him.

Lankin still had a favor for a fellow thief of which he owed his life, he wondered if he was the one who was caught. Lankin was staying in a small apartment and someone had tipped off the authorities that a thief was staying there. The fellow thief, who didn't give his name just only, told Lankin not to return to his home and not to ever again. Lankin agreed but was still curious; he watched his apartment from across the street on the rooftop. Lankin was beginning to think nothing was going to happen, a glance at the town clock revealed 2:00 Am. He still wasn't sure so he stayed where he was, he was awakened by the noise of a crash, when he looked at his apartment he was someone breaking the door down. Lankin decided to stay put for now and to have a look see tomorrow night. He slept on the roof till morning then he went about his business spending most of the day in a bar. He thought he might see that thief again but he wasn't there, so he would wait till midnight. As midnight struck on the town clock, Lankin moved through the shadows towards his apartment. When he arrived he saw a man standing opposite the building, he was dressed like a peasant but he wasn't too convincing.

Lankin knew the second he walked into the building he would be labeled as the thief, so he went around back and used a rope arrow to get to the roof. He pulled the arrow out and rammed it into the roof again, in the section above his apartment. He checked to see if it would hold then he started to descend, he passed the first apartment window and slowed before he came to his. He grabbed the rope and wrapped it around his foot tightly, he stretched out upside down and peered into his apartment. He didn't see anyone so he let some slack on the rope and moved down a bit farther. He thought to himself for a second then he pulled the window up, he looked in again and was confident now that no one was inside.

He grabbed the rope tightly and moved his foot so it came free; he spun around and caught the ledge with his right foot. He steadied himself and let the rope go, he crouched down and slipped into his apartment feet first. He remained crouched and look

around, the authorities really had made a mess. He hoped that they hadn't found his secret stash. He stood up and moved slowly to the middle of the room; the rug hadn't been tampered with.

"Good," he said to himself as he moved to the left to find the end of the rug. He rolled it over and over until he saw the little hatch embedded in the floor. He gave the rug one more push and reached into his pocket, he pulled out a key and fished the lock out of the niche. He opened the lock and removed it; he tossed it aside and took hold of the handle. He opened it slowly, some creaks are best left unheard. He rested the hatch on the floor and reached into the compartment grabbing a small dark leather bag. He opened it to see his gold; he closed it again and put it in his bag. The rest of his apartment was trashed nothing was worth searching for, so he threw the lock and key into the compartment, closed the lid, and rolled the rug back over it.

"Well, looks like I'll have to find a new place to live," Lankin said as he moved towards the window. He grabbed the rope and slid out onto the ledge, he hung his legs over while he secured the rope around his arm and checked again to see if it is secure. As he was turning to start climbing up he heard a noise; he turned and looked back into the room. He heard another noise; it came from the door. Lankin need not to stay to see what lay behind the door, he quickly moved off the ledge and began to climb the ledge. He heard the door open before he was fully out of site so he had to pull his legs up and try to climb in an awkward position. He managed to get out of view but he was still curious so he waited a minute more. He heard someone talking and moving about inside. He couldn't risk looking so he just forgot about it and continued to climb. He reached the top and grabbed the ledge; he pulled himself over and looked down once again. No one had opened the window so no one had seen him. He pulled the rope arrow out and rolled up the rope, he stuffed it all in his bag. He didn't want to go back down to the street it would be too risky, he didn't want to stay up here either. He looked around and saw that the adjacent building was close and he might be able to make a jump. He moved to the edge and leaned over, he looked up until he saw the other building's ledge.

It would be a tough jump, but it would be better than being discovered sleeping on the roof. He stepped a few feet back, and took a deep breath. Lankin began to run and when the ledge was just before him, he pushed all his weight on his right foot and launched himself. He didn't look down or too the left or the right; he looked straightforward and targeted that other rooftop. He landed on both of his feet but was leaning forward so he fell and rolled a few feet, he saw that he over reacted. That jump was a lot shorter than he had first thought no need to argue now he might have been heard. So he got up and went to the side of the building that was facing the alley. He looked down and saw no one, this time he would have to leave the rope arrow, which might lead to him, but he would have to take that chance. He pulled from his quiver the rope arrow he used before; there was no wood anywhere. So he broke the rope free from the arrow and made a loop, he then put it around a stone on the roof and pulled it tight. He moved over the side and slid down the rope, and he got close to the ground he felt the rope move, he looked back up but the stone hadn't moved.

He quickened his pace but it was too late the knot was too weak and the rope unraveled, luckily for Lankin he was only three feet from the ground so he landed on his feet but not in silence. He gathered up the rope and threw it aside; he looked back to see if anyone had heard him fall. Nothing yet but no need to find out, Lankin left the area

immediately and found the bar of which he is a friend of the owner. He let Lankin sleep in one of his rooms for half the price. Lankin has been staying in the room above the bar for about two weeks now, two weeks since he lost his apartment. So he decided that it might be good to live here above the bar, but he couldn't keep paying half price the man is just doing that because Lankin is a friend. Well tonight if all goes well Lankin will have a good load of gold after casing that mansion. Then he can pay full rent and make that his new apartment. Lankin asked around all day to the people he knew that could get him some info at that mansion, no one had anything. The only map of any kind he could get was of the outside showing which tower had the wood ledges, and when and where the guards were. The map also revealed that the back of the castle-like walls was built into the mountain, so he couldn't come up from behind. He studied it for awhile, two guards started in front of the mansion. They would walk opposite each other until they hit the mountain on either side then turn around and come back. So if he blackjacked either of them, the other would notice and would alert the rest of the guards. Lankin would have to do this mission on the spot, as things happened he would have to adjust. This was just another twist and challenge, and he was up to it.

Lankin got as much sleep as he could, he didn't know how long he would be out and he didn't want any fatigue. He had the bar keep wake him at 11:00, he needed to get to the mansion and it wouldn't be just a walk down the street. Lankin got ready taking what supplies he had left, five rope arrows, twelve water arrows, and twenty-two broad-head arrows. Also his sword, and his blackjack, he hoped he wouldn't need anymore than what he had. He left town just twenty minutes after he woke up; he wanted to get to the mansion by midnight. The dirt road, which led out of town, and to another town a few miles down, had only one cut off point, which led to the mansion. He knew where to turn of the road because there would be a small sign that marked the Doumont residence. As he neared the sign he slowed and moved towards the woods, he didn't know how many guards were around. He stayed in the wooded area until he could see the top of one of the towers; he then moved to the road and looked to see how many guards were at the front gate. Three guards stood watch at the front gate, one on each side and one in the middle. He saw one of the perimeter guards just turning the corner to check the back. That was his chance, he moved slowly under the cover of the night and the trees. The guards at the front gate were chatting about something, Lankin wasn't close enough to hear and he didn't really care. He saw the perimeter guard walking with his back facing him; he has to move now.

Lankin moved out of the cover of the trees and slowly made his way over to a small bush. Even when he crouched the bush barely covered him; he had to be careful. The perimeter guard had turned and was starting to come back; Lankin would have to move to another area of cover when the guard turned to face the front gate. He waited in tormented silence, he could just be discovered if the guard looks at the bush or even hears a noise. The guard turned the corner and Lankin shot right out, he knew he didn't have much time but he had to find a place to hide. He noticed that the mountain was covering most of the side of the wall and the forest. Lankin found a few trees that wouldn't be much cover but with the help of the mountain should work nicely.

He stood in between them and watched the guard once again walk the distance, turn, and walk back he was mumbling something about how stupid it was to guard this wall that no one can get in anyway. Lankin had his position till the guard was at a

considerable distance, then he came from the shadows and looked up at the tower. The first level was low enough to jump to, so he decided to go for the second. He pulled from his quiver a rope arrow, he aimed it up at the second level ledge and before he let it go he looked to see if the guard was there. The guard wasn't to be seen he must have turned the corner already, Lankin must hurry now. He checked the trajectory of the arrow one last time and released it.

The arrow flew through the air smoothly and hit directly into the wood ledge, the rope then came free and fell above Lankin's head. He grabbed it and checked its dependability, it seemed reliable so he began to climb. Half way up he saw the guard getting close; he increased his speed he didn't want to be caught like the other thief. That would be humiliating, and he didn't feel like breaking out of a prison. He grabbed the ledge and immediately began the retrieval of the rope. He pulled it up as fast as he could, then he pushed his back into the stone and remained motionless. The guard passed under him and went back toward the front of the wall; Lankin put the arrow in his quiver and pulled out a fresh one. He aimed it at the fourth ledge and released it. When the rope came down to where he could grab it he checked it and began to climb. He reached the ledge to see that the window was much smaller than he thought. He looked inside and thought he saw a guard so he had to be careful. As quietly as possible he crawled up on the ledge, he saw that the guard was sitting in a chair also asleep. He knew if he tried to get into the room he might wake up the guard, but he didn't want to kill him with an arrow. He put his bag and quiver through the window and set it as close to the floor as possible, it hit with a quiet thud. Lankin looked down the guard shouldn't be able to see him for here. He turned sideways and squeezed into the window; he put his left foot down and pushed to fit the rest of his body in. He pulled his right leg up to fit it through and he almost lost his balance but he gained it back before he fell. He took up his bag and quiver and got his blackjack off his belt, he raised it up and struck the guard. The guard never woke up he just fell out of the chair.

The room was small and simple, a chair, a table and one door that probably led down the tower. Lankin searched the guard for anything of value but only turned up a key. The door of the tower was open so he descended the stairs, as he neared the last window signaling the end of the tower he slowed his pace. He didn't want the perimeter guard to hear him, he moved past the window but couldn't see much outside. He reached the end of the stairs and before him was a door, he didn't hesitate to take out the key. With a click the door opened, he put the key back into his bag. He slowly opened the door and peeked out, he didn't see anyone so he opened it farther. He saw no one so he opened the door more, he thought to himself

"I guess they don't have guards watching the perimeter of the mansion." He stepped out of the tower and closed the door behind him, he didn't want to lock it because if he had to run he would need it open. He looked up at the tower directly across from him, he couldn't see a guard but he couldn't be too sure. He moved as best as he could through the shadows toward the mansion, he didn't see or hear anyone so he hoped none of the tower guards saw him. He had no idea how to get in; he would have to go on from now just acting on what he saw. He moved to what he thought would be the back of the mansion, he looked around the corner. He saw no guards so he stepped around and looked to see if there was a door. He only found a few windows that unlike the tower had glass in them, breaking a window would be useless.

He went from one window to the other looking in and trying to open it, none of them opened. He went to the corner and looked again, still no door but he had to try the windows. He found one window that was open, he looked in and found what seemed to be a servant's quarters. He pushed open the window slowly, and looked in again he couldn't see much. With the window now fully open he pulled himself up onto the sill. He watched the bed closely and saw that there was breathing so someone was in the room. He put one foot in and waited then the other; he stood up careful not to push his full weight for creaks are dangerous. He moved slowly to the bed, when the unexpected happened. He was just a few feet from the bed when a creak sounded from below his left foot. He didn't move again but continued to stare at the body, it had moved and was beginning to sit up. The person sat up and looked around, it was too dark to see anything but he did notice that the window was open. Lankin knew this could only get worse so he placed his blackjack in his hand. The man pulled the sheets off of his legs and began to turn to get out of bed when he heard a noise. He looked again at the dark room but saw nothing; he was sweating profusely and couldn't help but scream. Lankin moved in closer whispering,

"I won't kill you if you stay quiet." The man jumped at the voice but nodded in response, he stood up next to his bed and tried to get something from the stand next to his bed. Lankin used this moment to make his move, as the man moved his hand closer the stand Lankin came up behind him. The man stopped reaching for the stand and fell into Lankin's arms.

"Now we can't have you making trouble can we." Lankin pulled the man into his bed and put the covers over him, then he closed the window. He checked the stand to see what he was going for; on the stand was a little dagger. Lankin now safe that the servant won't make noise was free to search the rest of the room. He found only a few coins under the mattress, so he took the dagger too. He put his ear to the door but he didn't hear anything, he wasn't too sure about going right into the hall but he had little choice. He slowly turned the handle and when it stopped he pulled the door open. He pushed his face against the wall to peek through the crack the door made; he could only see a torch that lit most of the hallway. He opened the door planning to be the servant if any guards saw him. He tipped his head out and looked down the hall the other way; again he only saw a torch. Lankin stepped out closing the door to his back, he stood against the door and tried to decide left or right?

He saw that there was a staircase to his left so he decided that right would be good for now, one floor at a time. He passed by four more doors, he figured that they were servants too so he didn't bother. He reached the end of the hallway when he abruptly stopped; he heard a noise from around the other corner. He moved back against the wall, but the light from the torch made him visible. He didn't know how much time he had but he had to try, he pulled carefully from his quiver a water arrow. The torch was only across the hall so he didn't have to carefully aim, time was also against him. He let the arrow fly as soon as the torch lined up with the point of the arrow. The water arrow popped above the torch and the water flushed it out. He quickly put his bow at his side and remained silent. It seemed like forever but finally a guard emerged from the other hall, he was walking rather carelessly. He passed right by Lankin but stopped below the torch, he looked up and shook his head mumbling something.

“Those damn torches never stay lit the whole night,” he continued down the hall. Lankin didn’t move until the guard was by the door he had came through, then he put his bow back and turned the corner. He opened the third door from his right at random just to see what he may find. He saw a plain room but the bed was not empty, it looked to be a servant’s room again. Lankin made the assumption that the whole first floor was the servant’s quarter’s. He was about to close the door when he heard the guard coming back, the only thing he could do was get into the room. He slipped into the room and closed the door as quickly and as quietly as possible, now he could only wait. He heard the guard walk by the door, he was stuck either side could get him caught. The guard to sense something or the servant to wake up. He waited till he heard the guard fade, and then he opened the door and moved back down the hallway he came. As he passed under the torch he felt something touch his foot, he bent down to find his water arrow. It was useless to him now but the guard could have stepped on it, “damn” he said as he shoved the arrow into his quiver.

He came to the stairs the end of the first floor, he turned to see if the guard was coming then he began to climb the stairs. He had just reached the top when he turned to see the guard from the first floor coming up the hall. He moved to the side of the banister and stayed close to the wall, the guard stopped at the steps and started to walk back. Lankin let out the breath he was holding in, and looked down the hall. There were more torches along this corridor about one above every door. He would have to be extra careful here, he didn’t have enough water arrows. He moved from door to door but they were all locked, he lost his old set of lock picks and after this task he could buy a new set. He didn’t know what to do either just pass them all by or try to get a key. He moved down the rest of the doors and leaned onto the wall before he peeked down the other hall. He noticed that the mansion was a basic square design, boring but easy to navigate for him. He didn’t see a guard but he figured that there would be one, so he armed himself with his blackjack. He wasn’t trying anyone of the doors because he figured they were all locked anyway. He had almost reached the end of the hallway when he heard a door open. He spun around trying to see who was coming out but couldn’t see which door was opening. He wanted to find out but he needed to hide, so he tried the doors closest to him. As he tried a door he saw something move in the corner of his eye, it was the door across the hall.

He quickly moved to wall of the opening door and waited, the door still hadn’t opened fully yet. Lankin wondered if it could be the wind, or a trap, he moved closer to see. As he neared the door he noticed that it was moving slowly open and close as if someone was fooling with it. He moved in front of the door and held his blackjack high; he heard a belch and then a few words that were jumbled. He pushed the door slowly and looked in, he saw a swaying arm with a sword in hand. “A guard,” he thought to himself as he carefully pushed to door open more. He got it open enough for the person to notice and back up, Lankin was about to strike the figure when it spoke.

“Hey, umm hey what you think your doing there now?” Lankin moved into the room and with the help of a torch on the other wall saw a drunken guard. He was barely standing and was wobbly, he tried to pick up his appearance when Lankin saw him but he was too drunk.

Lankin put his hand on the man’s shoulder and gave him a push, the drunken man nearly fell over but he somehow regained his balance. Lankin moved to the man’s side

and brought his blackjack to the drunken guard's head. He jerked and Lankin thought it didn't work then the man dropped his sword and fell forward, making a rather risky amount of noise. Lankin checked the hall both ways and closed the door; he wondered why a guard would be drunk if he's on patrol. He checked the guard for any keys; he only found a small heavy leather pouch on the back of his belt. It looked like a money pouch and it was, there were thirty gold coins in it.

"Guards don't make that much," Lankin knew something was wrong. He figured the guard was stealing from the Lord of the house and didn't care so he got drunk. It seemed to be an archive room, bookcases, desks, and tables covered with papers. The guard must have been trying to destroy something, or get some info on something.

"Hmm, I could find some useful information here," Lankin began to shuffle and skim through all the papers. He noticed some odd money papers; Doumont was making one thousand gold coins a month. He was getting them from someone but there was no name or anything, all the other money transaction's had a name or a business. It also seemed that he wasn't paying the guards much at all, only five gold coins a week. Maybe the guard was trying to find out whom Doumont was getting his money from. Lankin wasn't here for this, so he just left the rest and went for the door. When he reached for the door he saw that the keyhole was deformed. He opened the door and look at it on the other side, it was also deformed. It looked like someone had jammed a sword into the lock to break it; it must have been the guard. Well that didn't matter now he had to continue. Lankin closed the door and walked down the rest of the hall, when he reached the end he looked down the other hall. He saw what looked to be an open archway, he moved down the hall quietly and towards the archway. When he reached it he tilted his head in, and saw a magnificent dinning room. He didn't see any guards or servants so he stepped into the room; he glanced around and saw a few good pieces he could pick up. He moved around the table taking some various items, there were four tables around the room that had supplies in them. He checked each one for anything of value, most had dishes, cups, but one had a few gold plated goblets. He took a few of them and put them in his bag, he wanted more but it would get too heavy.

He put his ear to the door at the back end of the dinning room; he thought he heard someone talking.

"Must be the kitchen," he said as he tried the door. He opened it and looked in, he saw chopping tables, and kitchen supplies piled up. He opened the door more to see a servant doing something over by a table. He moved into the room and readied his blackjack, the closer he got the more confused he became. The servant was eating but he was talking, and drying some supplies. Lankin moved behind him and looked to see what he was eating, some meat with a few vegetables. Lankin was feeling a bit hunger but first things first; he struck the servant and made sure he didn't fall from the chair. He thought that the servant was the only one in the kitchen but he heard a voice from a door to his left.

"What happened? Are you ok?" Lankin wasn't sure what to do, he moved the servant to look like he had fallen asleep on the table. Then he moved behind a huge stove with a small fire still burning in it, then he waited. He heard footsteps then.

"What happened? Oh my God are you choking?" Lankin saw a man who was also a servant, when he got to the table and bent over to see what had happened, Lankin moved.

He must have made too much noise because the man stood up and Lankin had to strike him sooner than expected. The servant twisted and turned to face Lankin, he was not too happy. Lankin also angry pushed the man so he would turn, then he struck him again on the back of his head. This time the servant fell, but not quietly he knocked over a metal platter. It hit a few times before Lankin stepped on it; he looked around to see if anyone had heard. Now he had to hide these two before someone sees them.

Lankin picked up one man and drags him into the room he came from; it's a small storage room. It has a bad odor it smells like rotten meat, he laid the servant up against a barrel. He went back for the second one and put him up against the wall, across from the other guy. He closed the door and put the chair in front just in case. On the way out of the kitchen he grabbed an apple, he moved through the dinning room and came to the archway. He looked out to check before moving again, he continued down the hall until he came to staircase. He looked at it oddly when he realized that the mansion is as simple as it gets. It's a square with the stairs all lined up on one side, one above the other. That's why the guard was so long one way and short the other, well now he knows the lay out.

He thought to himself, "so far only one guard per level so I should expect only one." He climbed the stairs slowly looking to see if the guard was on his way towards him. He noticed that one of the torches near the end of the hall was out, he made his way under the torch and checked the hall. He figured the guard would be around soon so he would wait, while he was waiting something occurred to him.

"If all the doors are locked like the other floors I'll have no place to drop the body." As he realized this he saw a shadow on the other end of the hall. As he watched it get closer he came to a conclusion, "I can't knock this guard out." The guard came around the corner whistling and walking like he owned the place. Lankin stood his ground and waited he would have to wait till the guard passed, then he would have to get to the other hall.

He stood against the wall and went over in his head what might be able to be seen. His sword was sheathed, his blackjack was on his belt, his hood was covering his face, and he had gloves on. He opened his eyes again to see the guard just a few feet away from him; he breathed in one last time and held it.

The guard whistled right past Lankin, he continued down the hall. Lankin knew he only had a few moments before the guard hit the stairs and would come back, so he moved. He darted from the shadow and moved as fast as he could without making any noise. He reached the end of the hall and breathed heavily, he needed to know if the guard saw him. He reached into his quiver and produced a water arrow; he aimed it at the torch on the wall across from him. He shot and immediately put his bow away; the torch went out with a splash.

He was retrieving the arrow when he heard, "oh I can't believe it another torch, I can't stand this anymore." Lankin knew the guard was on his way down, so he looked around the corner to see him. He was walking as he was before so he probably didn't see or hear him; he smiled and moved on. He moved down the hallway as he did the other but he didn't stop at the other corner, he continued till he reached the stairs. He put his hand on the banister and listened for any guards, he heard footsteps so he moved against the wall. He saw a guard come to the head of the stairs and turn around, he didn't look down...lucky for Lankin. He came to the top of the stairs to see the guard turning the

corner. He went quickly to the corner when he noticed that the floor had a rug on it. He looked down the hall and saw the guard; the whole hall had rugs. Lankin knew something special was on this floor, he moved with ease over the rugs. They silenced his steps so he could catch up with the guard faster, he saw that the guard had three keys on his belt so he figured he'd blackjack him. He removed his blackjack from his belt and moved in closer to the guard. He wanted to be careful not to have him fall and make noise. He swung his blackjack and it hit perfectly, the guard grunted and began to fall but Lankin caught him. He laid him on the rug and removed his keys, he looked at them but only one was gold. He held them as he went down the rest of the hall; he didn't stop till he reached a dead end.

"If I counted correctly there are four floors, so I guess no fifth one then. He turned to face double doors; each had a symbol on it. It looked odd and he had never seen it before, he wasn't sure what it meant. The only thing he did know was to use the gold key.

He only opened one door he need not bother with the other. He put the key back into his bag and pushed the door open. The farther the door opened the more the room showed to be extravagant. This must be Doumont's room, silk drapes, fancy rugs, and paintings on all the walls. Lankin stepped into the room and closed the door; the room was very well lit. He looked at the bed but it was empty, Lankin breathed a sigh of relief.

"Well, now I'm free to have a look around." Lankin began to check every draw, box and behind every painting. One box caught his attention it was larger then the others, and it was on a dresser adjacent from the bed. It was intricately carved and was locked; the keyhole was too small for Lankin to jam his sword into. He would have to find the key, he continued to search the room. Another dresser on the other side of the room had a mirror and three little chests. He looked at the dresser and figured it was a woman's one, when he opened one of the chests he saw jewels.

"So Doumont is married," Lankin didn't pay much attention to what was in the chest he just dumped all it's contents into his bag. He dumped the rest into his bag also he didn't care much for details, jewels are jewels. He also looked behind the mirror, sometimes people hide things in weird places. He moved to the bed and checked under the pillows, under the bed and the sheets. He had to check under the mattress too; he lifted it and moved it to the other side. Nothing, but something did look odd a part of the mattress was whiter then the rest.

Lankin knelt next to the bed and leaned in to take a closer look, he moved his hand over the bed. He could feel a difference when his hand moved over the whiter part, he unsheathed his sword and laid it on the bed. He pushed his sword across the bed when it reached the odd part it lifted. He put his sword back and peeled back the material; he pulled it until he could see a small opening. He gave the material one more yank and it came free from the mattress, he looked at the opening. It looked as if someone had carved out a small area of the bed and covered it. Lankin reached in with his thumb and index finger, he felt something so he pulled it out. It was a tight squeeze but he still got it. It was a key.

"Wow, this must be for the chest." Lankin got up and went over to the chest; he put the key in and turned it. He turned the key a full three hundred and sixty degrees before he heard a click, then he removed the key and put it on the dresser. He opened the chest and found that the lid was rather heavy. The lid was held up but three hinges and

two leather straps on the inside of the chest, it was also lined with leather. Lankin looked at the chest contents; there were a number of small pouches, and a palm size gold and silver symbol, the same as on the door. He picked up the symbol and took a closer look at it; it was D formed by a dragon. Around it were some other creatures and assorted objects, Lankin dropped it into his bag. He picked up a pouch and shook it he heard coins so he took the rest also.

On the bottom there was a book, it was dark green and hard to see but Lankin felt it when he was getting a pouch. The book fit the bottom of the chest perfectly and he couldn't get his fingers around it to pull it up. Lankin stepped back and looked at what he had, he needed something small and thin. He saw the key that he had put on the dresser next to the chest; he picked it and tried it. He slid the key between the small space of the book and the inside of the chest. He pushed the key against the book and pulled it, the book moved up along with the key and Lankin grabbed it. He again put the key back on the dresser.

He opened the book and on the first page was a label, 'Lord Doumont.' Under it was that symbol again, this time it was blue and red. Lankin flipped through the book randomly and found that mostly it was Doumont Journal or even his Memoirs. Oddly though in the back were some purchases and collections, they looked to be the same as the ones in the archive room but these had names. Lankin closed the book and thought for a moment, then he put the book in his bag.

"Maybe I can find out who or what is giving Doumont his money."

Lankin closed the chest but threw the key under the bed; he didn't bother with the mattress. He locked the door on his way out, he held the gold key in his hand and for some reason he felt anger toward Doumont. He closed his hand around the key and bent down, he pushed the key under the door as far as he could. He got up and went down the hall; he still had those other two keys. He took them out as he walked up the hall and then he stopped, he had gotten a good amount of money from that one room. He wondered if he should bother with the rest of the mansion, he let his hand fall to his side as he looked up at the ceiling. He stood silent for a few seconds then he looked straight ahead; he opened his hand and let the keys fall to the rug. He continued to the stairs, as he neared them he remembered the guard. He didn't want to be bothered anymore; he couldn't understand why he just snapped like that. He waited for the guard to reach the stairs and turn, then he moved soon after. He followed the guard faster than usual he increased his chances of getting caught.

The guard as before was whistling although he seemed to be walking oddly, he was walking slow and looking from door to door. Lankin was not paying attention and moved up behind the guard, he was about to swing his blackjack when the guard turned.

"AH HAH, I thought I heard someone behind me, THIEF!"

Lankin was still holding his blackjack; he was stunned by the guard's reaction. The guard with his sword in hand pointed it to Lankin.

"This is good for me you know, Doumont will give me some extra gold if I kill you."

Lankin was still stunned although he put his blackjack away; his hand was on his sword. He had only one fight with a guard before and he only won because the guard was tired and weak.

“C’mon, have out with you.” Lankin unsheathed his sword and stepped back, he was very worried and couldn’t focus on the guard attacking him. The guard rushed Lankin and he wasn’t ready he moved to the right just in time so the sword would miss him. The guard pulled back and jabbed again, this time Lankin blocked it.

“Ah so you can fight,” the guard was having fun fooling with Lankin, he would get a raise for this. Lankin knew he couldn’t win this he had to get away. The guard tried to rush Lankin again but this time Lankin moved and swung the sword at the guard. The guard not wanting to be decapitated tried to duck but failed and lost his balance. Lankin didn’t wait to see if it had worked he turned and ran for the stairs, the guard was on one knee and using his sword he got up.

“Run all you want, you can’t get away,” Lankin ran up the stairs and down the hall. When he reached the end of the hall he pulled the torch from the wall; he swung it around till it went out. He threw it aside and knelt on one knee, he took his bow and one broad head arrow. He waited till he could hear the guard coming up the stairs then he pulled it back.

He saw the guard’s head line up with his arrow; he didn’t want to kill the man. If he released now he could get him in the head or the neck. He waited till the guard was just about off the stairs, he moved he bow to the lower left. Lankin released the arrow and it shot out towards the guard, he didn’t even see it coming. The guard dropped his sword and let out a cry of pain; he grabbed the arrow and began to fall. Lankin stood up and walked over to the guard, he was lying on his back in an awkward position.

“See I didn’t have to kill you to get by you,” Lankin had shot the guard in the left arm the arm he held the sword in. The guard didn’t say anything he just lied there still clutching the arrow, Lankin went down the hall and around towards the other stairs. As he passed the archives room on the second floor he stopped, he wanted some more info. He opened the door to see the guard still on the floor only now he had puked. Lankin stepped over to the table and took some of the papers that he read before.

“I can use these along with the book,” he went down to the first floor with no trouble. He didn’t want a confrontation with the guard of the first floor so he went into the room he came through. It was easy to find the third from the stairs, inside he moved to the window. The servant was still in bed and that was a good sign, so the guard in the tower should still be unconscious. He slipped out the window and moved across the grounds from the mansion to the tower. He reached the mansion door unnoticed; he opened the door and got in. He took the tower key from his bag and locked the door, but he didn’t drop the key he put it back in his bag. He climbed the stairs and moved slowly to the door at the top, he opened and saw the guard still lying on the floor.

“Good,” he said as he looked out the window down to where the guard might be. He saw the perimeter guard just under him, so he took out one of his rope arrows and rammed it into wooden ledge. The rope dropped down and Lankin squeezed out of the window. He made his way down to the second ledge; he made sure he could stand here unseen then he looked for the guard. He was rounding the corner, Lankin tried to pull the rope arrow out but realized if he did get it loose it could fall and he would be seen. As the guard passed under Lankin removed another rope arrow, again he rammed it into the ledge. He waited till the guard passed before he let the rope fall; he slipped down the rope and made a small leap to the ground. He had to get this arrow out or he might not get out of the area, he yanked the arrow but it broke in half. The feather end and rope fell

to the ground beside him, he gathered it up and moved to a bush. He watched as the guard went about his duty, while he was putting the rope under the bush. He stayed close to the guard while moved from the bushes and trees; the forest was too thick here. He saw the last bush before he would have to get into the trees, he watched the guard turn the corner then he moved. He moved to the bush to see the guard turn at the front gate, the other guards at the front gate were still chatting away. Lankin waited till the perimeter guard was at a fair distance before making a move into the woods. He was just about clear when he snapped a twig; he stopped and stood motionless. He turned to see one of the gate guards looking his way; the guard was about to step forward.

“Hey, it was just an animal.” The guard next to him called out and he turned to join in the conversation once again. Lankin cursed the twig and moved on and made his way to the road. As looked up at the sky he breathed in deeply and began the walk back home.