

“Blow that thing back to Hell,” he shouted to the anti-aircraft cannons, and they all converged on the nearest catapult and blew it to flaming splinters. But there was an explosion behind him as one of the cannons topping one of the towers of the keep was rent past capacity and blew apart. The gargoyles were doing all they could to remove the cannons as a threat and leave Blackthorn open to full siege assault. Now five catapults were pitted against six cannons, and the Alinorians were braving a constant attack on two fronts by archers on the ground and gargoyles in the air.

The catapults lurched forward to the middle of Rogoroth’s ranks and soon another boulder was launched. To Radu’s horror, it instantly smashed one of the forward cannons upon the wall. With another boom, flaming pieces of shrapnel and stone rubble came showering down from the turret. There were now only five cannons remaining and the catapults were not even in position yet. Radu now recalled all of his previous impressions of Count Rogoroth’s might and began to think that the lull they enjoyed the night before was but a quiet prelude to their bloody end. The swarms of gargoyles dove out of the air and slaughtered soldiers and tore weapons to pieces. Their defenses had quickly been rent asunder and it would not be long before they were left naked to the catapults’ assault.

With a crash of thunder, another cannon was blown to pieces and gargoyles and dragons took to the air again, clutching smoldering plates of steel and hurling them triumphantly into the wind. Radu had merely four cannons left and Rogoroth’s catapults were now near the front lines and were, all five, firing at will. With their weapons diminishing, Radu feared that they would have to expend all their energy on the catapults and ignore the assault of the innumerable flying devils.

“Again,” he shouted to the towers. “Take out as many as you can!” The cannons fired relentlessly at the hulking siege weapons, easily blowing each apart. One cannon fired as a catapult did and the boulder was vaporized in mid-air shortly before the catapult was as well. In a short time, Rogoroth’s catapults had diminished in number, but Alinor’s cannons were incurring heavy damage from the gargoyles and more than one were approaching their end. Meanwhile, as the boulders were battering the walls and the demons were tearing at the cannons; as the archers and axe-hurlers were assaulting the human soldiers; Fenlon’s black conjurers were weaving spells against the mortal men of the city.

The necromancers and orkish magicians, along with priests of the kind of skeleton and dark elf and wight, sent heaving waves and bolts of dark energy to bash against the walls, and to pierce and burn the soldiers atop the parapets. Some even called the elements of fire and thunder to aid them in their wicked task. Fenlon, himself commanded them, and he possessed great magic as well. Fenlon was one of Magus’ most powerful sorcerers, and was considered wise and fearful amongst his orc brethren. He was a fell looking orc dressed in black robes and a headdress cut from the hide of a wolf, with the beast’s head upon his brow. His beard was long and gray and curled like smoke. His eyes burned blue with power and in his fist he gripped a black scepter of cursed wood from the Wethorin, adorned with feathers and skulls.

He threw his hands into the air and drew burning red energy into him, and flames danced up his arms. With a wail he threw his clawed hands out toward the walls and the

flames leapt out to beat against them. Again and again he did this, until the parapets were ablaze with burning men, and the bricks of the wall began to heave and crack. Radu looked downward from the wall after slaying a gargoyle and saw the old warlock heaving the bolts of fire. Knowing that this orc was an officer of great power, Radu gripped a sniper rifle and set his site on the evil magician.

A shot was fired, and the flames around the old orc sent the bullet away without harming him. A second shot was fired and the bullet pierced the flames and struck the warlock in the arm. He howled in pain, but could not recover before two more shots pierced him in the chest, and the flames around him subsided. His fetid staff fell to the ground and he dropped to his knees in anguish. As he wailed, the other necromancers and warlocks grasped their heads as if they were experiencing the same pain as he. Flashes of lightning danced out from him and struck the others down one by one, all collapsing to the ground.

The men cheered as they looked down on Fenlon's defeat, but they looked up when they heard shrieking in the sky. The gargoyles hollered and screeched, and they seemed suddenly to lose their desire to attack. Instead they flailed around in the air as their eyes were awakened to the light of the sun. Without Fenlon's magic to defend them, daylight's rays began working their power over them, and their scales turned gray and hard as rock. As their wings steadily became as stone, they began to fall from the air like meteors and smashed against the walls or the ground below. Soon, every one of the ferocious gargoyles had become nothing more than statues and had left the sky to plummet to their deaths.

In four shots fired by their leader, the Alinorians had been rid of two heavy burdens. The magicians had lost their powers, at least for now, and though the dragon whelps still sailed in the sky, they were far fewer in number and ferocity than the now extinct gargoyles. It was a point of great turning in the day; and while the sun's light lasted the cannons of Blackthorn hammered the catapults of Orinost without restriction. By the first signs of dusk, Rogoroth's remaining catapults were reduced to smoldering piles of wood.

"Hah hah! That's got 'em," Radu shouted ecstatically. "Now everybody at the wall's edge through rank 4, concentrate your fire on the enemy troops below! Ranks 5 and 6, keep those dragons away!" The sun was setting on the world, but to Radu, it still shone on them. He seemed not to be phased by exhaustion this past day, and aroused the sleeping troops to take up all available positions and hopefully route Rogoroth's invasion force once and for all. This was the moment of Alinor's glory and every man took part in it.

Count Rogoroth bayed with frustration as the catapults were blown asunder and the fortress let loose its full fury once more. One of his high officers had perished and his siege weapons were no more. He turned and ordered all close combat troops arriving to move to the front lines and mass the archers in the rear. He had too few archers to risk their destruction. What he had more than enough of was knights and foot soldiers, but these would be of no use to him until the gates were sent down. He hammered his spear

against his breastplate to inspire his soldiers and summoned his spear-rack. Two skeletons donned in regal armor came forth with a tall rack holding an array of deadly spears. Lances, partisans and poleaxes of various shape and size. Each one had a name more terrifying than the last and each one was forged for Rogoroth by wight smithies from the wastes of Zaerkerness.

Rogoroth placed Steeltooth on the rack and gripped a spear with a long serrated blade in its stead. This, his blood stained gauntlet held tightly and, with sinister accuracy, hurled over the 3rd wall of the citadel, impaling a human soldier. With a malicious cackle he gripped another spear and repeated the assault. His eyes were so potent, they say, (Second to those of Daniel Cimcelor the Bow Master) that when the rest of his body was laid to rot, his eyes remained in the sockets of his skull, ever watchful; ever vigilant. And so did those beady eyes behold Radu Corvino and his vulgar mortal companions; and he hated him. With that hatred consuming his every thought, he sent the next spear sailing at him.

Radu ducked to the cold stone floor of the parapet as the dazzling spear whizzed through the air, imbedding its foul blade in the wall behind him. When he was sure its course was ended, he stood carefully to his feet, gripping the edge of the stone blockade and peered down. He perceived instantly the burning red eyes of Rogoroth, staring at him from behind the dead eyeholes of his mask. This was a battle between two men, and Rogoroth saw the numerous soldiers he commanded as an extension of himself, a weapon. Radu, on the other hand, knew that each of his soldiers were their own man, with their own names. To him this was a battle between Rogoroth and every man, woman, child, and beast of Alinor.