

CHRONICLES OF ARBORELL

WIND HAMMER



A CORE GAMEBOOK ADVENTURE FROM THE
CHRONICLES OF ARBORELL

WAYNE F DEPSLEY

Windhammer

A Core Gamebook in the Chronicles of Arborell
Interactive Fantasy Series



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Also available from the Chronicles of Arborell

At the time of release of this Windhammer Core Gamebook edition the following titles were also available from Arborell.com. Please note that this is not an exhaustive list and more information on each can be found at the Chronicle's download page.

The Windhammer Core Gamebook (PDF and HTML editions)
 The Windhammer Enhanced Combat System
 Shards of Moonlight Gamebook (PDF and HTML editions)
 A Murder of Crows online Gamebook
 Torchlight - Quest for the Orncryst
 Torchlight Text Editions - Quest for the Orncryst
 Well of Shadows Gamebook (PDF and HTML editions)
 The Complete Blood and Iron (HTML and PDF editions)
 The Chronicles Micro-Gamebooks Series
 The Dark Water Omnibus (PDF edition)
 Legends of the Deep Guild (PDF edition)
 Song of the Dromannion (HTML and PDF editions)
 The Inquisitors Lament (PDF edition)
 Honour Amongst Thieves (PDF edition)
 First Book of Haer'al (PDF and RTF editions)
 The Mythology of the Oera'dim (PDF edition)
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 The Atlas of Arborell
 The Sorrows of Gedhru and Aume
 The Hammer and the Darkness
 Ghered who found Purpose
 Hamulkuk and the Moon Dragons
 The Lexicon of Arborell
 Warriors of the March

All these titles and much more can be found at

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"It is said that a Man's destiny is decided by the Fates at the moment of his birth, and no matter how he may hide that doom will always find him."

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Introduction to the Windhammer Core Gamebook



Welcome Adventurer to the world of Windhammer, a PDF format adaptation of the first Core Gamebook in the Chronicles of Arborell interactive gamebook series. Since 2001 the Windhammer gamebook has been available to readers who enjoy interactive fiction both as an online work and as a html-based download file. Over these years the gamebook has evolved and grown into a 600 section fantasy adventure, and in converting Windhammer to a PDF format a few changes have had to be made. It is important to the gameplay of this title that some of those changes be highlighted here.

The most important change required in this adaptation to the PDF format is the difference in how the language of Haer'al, or the Elder Tongue, is presented and utilised. In the original online gamebook a reader could find clues to their adventure written in this ancient language and hidden within special text graphics. These clues were then uncovered by placing a mouse cursor over those selected graphics. This cannot be done in this format. Instead the clues are identified by a “clue-glyph” placed throughout the text, each clearly showing those hints to the game in their original Haer'al form. These clues can be identified by a tree symbol and translated if desired.

For readers who have not previously travelled these lands the language of Haer'al is the foundation of EarthMagic and the key to its use in the world of Arborell. Although the language of Haer'al has considerable importance in the ongoing development of the story of this series, in Windhammer it is used merely as a device to provide clues that can be helpful in making decisions within the adventure. A reader must however, translate the clues and this can only be done using the First Book of Haer'al. This title is available for download in both PDF and RTF formats from Arborell.com.

It should be noted that using the clues provided in this manner are not mandatory to your adventure. This addition to the gameplay is simply a way that a reader might delve even deeper into the cultures and traditions of this ancient world. It is not necessary to complete Windhammer.

Please enjoy your journey into the world of Arborell.

Using This Gamebook

Windhammer is an interactive fantasy gamebook adventure and in the world that is about to unfold you are its hero. It is you who will decide how your journey progresses, and it will be you who will make choices and decisions that will determine your ultimate success. Within these pages you control your own destiny. Windhammer is a gamebook that has its own unique rules, and it will be necessary for you to understand them prior to beginning your quest. These rules are outlined below.

To play Windhammer you will need;

- a pencil or pen,
- two six-sided dice,
- a printout of the character status and combat record sheets provided with this book.

If you wish to play Windhammer using the Enhanced Combat System a copy of the rule-set can be found at the Chronicle's website. If you wish to decode the clues provided in this adventure in the ancient language of Haer'al you will require the First Book of Haer'al also available from the Chronicles of Arborell website.

Prior to commencing your journey you should read the directions and other information provided within the background information and introductory section of this adventure. Within the history of Stoneholme, and the circumstances of Halokim Vesh's recruitment to his quest, lies information that may help you on your journey. Subtle clues can be found throughout your quest, and the following will help you discover them.

Before beginning we should look first at what is a gamebook adventure for it is not a novel in the usual sense. It is a work of interactive fiction, a solo adventure that allows you to make choices as to how you wish to proceed within the story and in doing so influence how it progresses. You will combat any who might stand in your way, collect new items and equipment as you travel, and ultimately win through to your quest's end.

To read Windhammer in the same way that you might read a normal book will make little sense. To play Windhammer begin by reading the instructions that follow. Within these instructions can be

found everything you need to know regarding gameplay, generating a character, finding equipment, and resolving conflict situations.

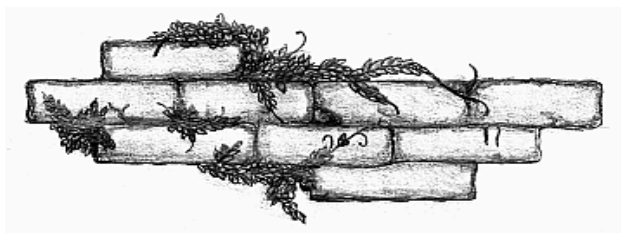
From there you commence your quest at the section entitled “Maenum”, and proceed on your journey according to the directions you encounter as you read the text. You will find that making a map of your progress whilst in Stoneholme will greatly assist you in finding your way through the many passages and halls of the fortress. A map will be especially useful if you wish to avoid traps on subsequent attempts to restore the Tellandra.

Additional appendices have also been provided with more in-depth information if you wish to gain a deeper understanding of the long history of this turbulent world and the creatures that inhabit it.

Your Quest

Deep within the subterranean labyrinths of the ancient mountain fortress of Stoneholme stands a pillar of stonewood known to the Dwarvendim of Arborell as the Tellandra. For more than a century it has been lost, hidden far from the sight of men by the creatures of the Horde as they assail it in an effort to destroy its power. Until these last few days it has withstood the onslaught of the Hordim, and the greater strength of the Dragon Windhammer, but now it lies shattered. Whole, the Tellandra stood as the most powerful conduit of magic in the known world. Broken, its power ebbs like blood from an open wound, dispersing unseen into the darkness of Stoneholme's deepest chambers. With each passing day the powers of Magic and Lore weaken.

It is your quest to find the stonewood pillar before its magic passes completely from the world. Once found it can be restored, and then, with its power renewed, the forces of chaos can be contained and destroyed. This is your task.



Your Character

Before beginning your quest you will need to establish the strengths and attributes of your character. Unlike many other gamebook adventures, you do not roll dice to determine character values. In the Windhammer gamebook you are given 50 character points that must be spread amongst five core character attributes. In addition, you may also choose specific skill areas that you may use to enhance the effectiveness of your character. To give your character a greater chance of success there are also a number of talents that may be chosen as well. How these attributes, skill areas and talents are applied to your character is explained in the following text.

Your Character Status Sheet

At the end of this book can be found a Character Status Sheet. This sheet must be printed prior to commencing your adventure. It is on this sheet that all the activity of your quest is recorded, and upon which many of the decisions you must make will be based. The sheet requires that you record a number of facts about your character; specifically his strengths, attributes, endurance level, skill areas and chosen talents. This sheet is also used to record equipment carried, artifacts and other items found on the way, rations available, and the number of times you can use the uniquely Dwarvendim skill known as the Shimmera.

In developing your character the first thing that must be decided is the relative strength of your character's attributes. If you look at the character sheet you will find that there are five listed; Strength, Agility, Endurance, Luck and Intuition. Your character has 50 points that must be distributed amongst these attributes and each attribute has a range of numbers given in brackets next to them. This is the minimum and maximum limits for points that can be ascribed to each. For example, the Strength attribute allows for a minimum of 5 points and a maximum of 11 character points. How strong you wish your character to be will be determined by the number of points you give him within this range. All fifty points must be used on these five attributes, but they must be spread within the limits given for each. Distribute these points carefully. It is not only strength and endurance that will see you to this adventure's end. In determining how many points you will apply to each attribute the following information may prove useful.

Character Attributes

Strength

How strong you are is the first quality that needs to be established. This attribute allows you to place between 5 and 11 character points, and is your choice as to how strong you wish to make your character. This is your strength, and it will only change during the quest if you suffer substantial injury. The text will tell you by how much you should reduce your strength attribute if you sustain such an injury. With rest injuries can be healed, and the text will give full instructions on how you should account for such changes.

Agility

The next attribute to determine is agility. You may allocate between 1 and 5 points to this attribute. Your ability to move quickly, and undertake difficult physical tasks will be determined by the points you give here. You should consider carefully how many points you allocate to this attribute. As with strength, your agility will not change in the course of this adventure except if you are injured, or if you are encumbered in some way. If you are required to modify this attribute the text within the story will provide full instructions as to how these changes should be accounted for.

Endurance Points

You may apply as many as 35 character points to your Endurance, but not less than 15. This amount is your maximum endurance point level and is recorded on your character sheet as your initial value. Except for one special circumstance it cannot be exceeded during the game. As you encounter the creatures of the Horde, or the even more lethal traps that litter the halls and secret places of Stoneholme, you will find your endurance points rising and falling as you are either injured, or take meals or sleep.

Your level of endurance determines how fit you are, and how well you are fairing in the face of the challenges of your quest. Should your endurance fall to zero then, unfortunately, you have died and your quest has ended. It will then be to your next life that you must look for greater success.

Once you have determined the number of points you are giving this attribute, record the amount also in the Endurance Points box on your character sheet.

Luck

Luck plays a large part in the success of any quest. In your journey through the pages of Windhammer you will find that luck will play a significant role in determining how easy or how difficult your road will be. You may give up to 5 character points to this attribute. This is your luck factor. It is constant and will not change whilst you are on your quest. A high luck score will make your survival easier, but not all the challenges you will face require it. As with all these attributes think carefully on how lucky you wish your character to be.

Intuition

Not everything that you find within this adventure will be as it seems. Your quest will place before you circumstances that may appear straightforward, but will prove at best distractions, and at worst lethal challenges. It will be your intuition that will guide you and it should be considered carefully when distributing character points. You may apply up to 5 points to this attribute.

Your Combat Value

Once you have ascribed character points to each of these five attributes, you will need to return to the first two; Strength and Agility. Apart from their importance as individual attributes to your character, they also determine one very important aspect of your character's ability to succeed in this adventure; your Combat Value.

Add these two amounts together and place the total in the sub-total box of your character sheet. This is your character's initial Combat Value and is a measure of your character's capacity to survive mortal combat. Have no illusion about the dangers you will face on this quest. If you are sighted by any creature of the Horde you will be attacked, and the combat will not end until one of you has fallen. There is no opportunity for escape. Survival will depend on how well you fight, and your Combat Value will determine this.

You will notice that both Armour bonuses and Skill/Talent bonuses also combine to make up your final Combat Value. For the moment leave these blank. Skill and Talent bonuses will be determined by your choices in the following sections of these instructions; any Armour bonuses will be determined in Section 1 of this gamebook.

In the next section you will need to pick both character skills and talents. Depending on what you choose there may be bonuses that can also increase your fighting capabilities.

Skill Areas

In the course of an adventurous life, Halokim Vesh has developed a range of survival skills that will be of great value to your quest. Below are six skill areas, all of which can help you on the hard road that will lead ultimately to the Tellandra. You may pick two of these skill areas to take with you on your travels. Read the information below and choose wisely. Once you have chosen the skills you believe will best serve you on this adventure, tick off the appropriate boxes on your Character Status sheet and adjust your character attributes to account for any bonuses that your choices may bring. Each of the six skill areas are described in full below.

Bushcraft

A life spent in the wilds of Kalborea has finely honed your ability to live off the land, and move unnoticed through its differing terrains. The skill area of Bushcraft provides the skills of navigation, native food lore, weather lore, camping and woodcraft, an innate sense of direction, fire-making and camp cookery. Such skills can be extremely valuable as you travel the lands of Northern Kalborea. If you choose this skill area you may add an additional five points to your total endurance points. This is however, the only exception to the rule that your EP cannot increase beyond its initial level. Keep in mind though, that this skill area only has practical value whilst you are travelling to Stoneholme. If you find Stoneholme and enter its dark halls these skills may prove of lesser value.

Skill Bonus: Increase initial Endurance by 5 points.

Huntmastery

This skill area provides more than just proficiency in hunting. Within this skill area can be found animal knowledge and husbandry, tracking, hunting skills, an ability to sense ambush and keen vision. These skills allow you to find food and track possible enemies without falling victim to them. If you choose this skill area you may add one bonus character point to your Combat Value. Like Bushcraft, the Huntmastery skill is only of value whilst you are travelling the plains and forests of Kalborea. Once you enter Stoneholme these skills will prove of lesser value.

Skill Bonus: +1 to Combat Value.

Weaponmastery

Weaponmastery provides proficiency in all common weapons found in Arborell. Your life as a thief has tempered your combat skills to a point where you have proven yourself a formidable opponent, and if you choose this skill area you will be able to add one additional point to your Combat Value. This skill area cannot be chosen however, if you have already chosen Huntmastery. When choosing your character skills you cannot choose both Weaponmastery and Huntmastery. In this adventure it must be either one or the other.

Skill Bonus: +1 to Combat Value.

Lorecraft

EarthMagic runs through the world of Arborell as a physical presence, one that can be harnessed by those who understand its Lore. As a novice at the Temple of the Suns in Das Frontiere you were only beginning to understand the power of EarthMagic when the Temple's doors were closed, and you were thrown into the street. (More can be found on this in the appendices to this book and in the Windhammer companion novella - The Inquisitor's Lament.)

At this time you possess latent powers, untrained and unfocused, that will help you on this quest. Such powers include an innate ability to sense the proximity of EarthMagic, and an ability to activate some magical items. Specific spells or knowledge of EarthMagic are not currently available to you, however choosing this skill area will add a bonus of one additional character point to your Intuition attribute. If you already have 5 character points ascribed to Intuition it is within the rules to increase this attribute to 6 points. In this case all intuition tests will automatically be successful. Although Lorecraft may seem somewhat underpowered, do not underestimate the advantages that may come from being able to sense EarthMagic.

Skill Bonus: +1 to Intuition Attribute.

Brigandry

Yours has been a hard life, one that has on more than one occasion required theft or deception to survive. Your Brigandry skills have been hard-won, and may prove useful to you yet again. Brigandry skills include an excellent local knowledge of the criminal elements of Northern Kalborea, forgery, disguise, lockpicking, pickpocketry and an

extensive appreciation of traps and other lethal devices. Such skills carry no bonus to any of your character attributes, however they have kept you alive for many years and cannot be discounted if you are to succeed in your quest.

Stealth

Stealth is the stock-in-trade of the successful thief and you have been very successful in your time. This skill area includes knowledge of camouflage, silent movement, tactics and diversion methods, and a greater ability to use the Shimmera. Such are your skills in this area that if you choose Stealth you will receive one additional bonus point to your Shimmera total.

Skill Bonus: +1 to Shimmera.

The Shimmera

Roll one die. This is the number of times during your quest that you will be able to use the uniquely Dwarvendim skill known as the 'Shimmera'. It is not magic by any means, but an illusion that has proven invaluable when in combat against large, powerful opponents. As it is an illusion, somewhat like a magician's sleight-of-hand, the circumstances for its use must be exactly right. This means that its use is somewhat limited, but can be very useful when the circumstances permit.

It is rumoured that the Shimmera takes advantage of a defect in the design of the Hordim, one specifically created to provide an edge in combat for the ancient Trell'sara if ever they had a need to defend themselves from their own creations. As a technique it is known only to the Dwarvendim of the Stone Kingdoms. Long contact with the Hordim has shown this defect can be exploited, if the warrior using it has the intuition to judge its use correctly.

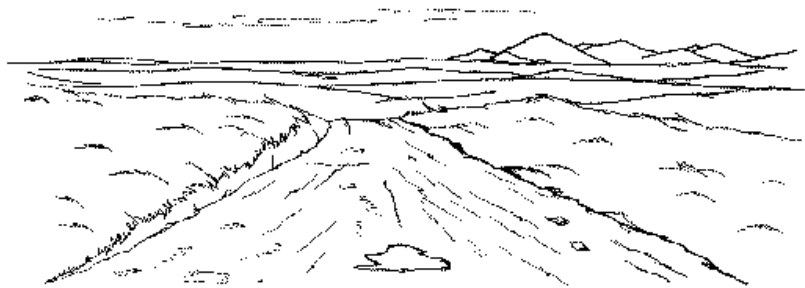
How it works is a matter of some discussion amongst scholars. The general agreement is that all Hordim have a small blind-spot at the edge of their vision, one that tricks them into believing something moving quickly towards them and to the left has disappeared. For reasons that are not understood such a disappearance causes an overwhelming attack of vertigo in the creature, and allows an attacker one quick opportunity to deal a lethal blow. Experience has shown that the Shimmera only works against single opponents, and has no use against the beasts of the world or Dragons.

The Shimmera can only be used in two situations. The first is combat. To be able to use the Shimmera in combat you must be facing only a single opponent (the text will tell you when you may attempt to use this skill). Upon commencing the illusion you will disappear from the creature's view, and in the resulting incapacitating vertigo you will have your opportunity to finish the combat quickly.

The second situation where the Shimmera can be attempted is to aid escape from pursuing enemies. Although this skill does not work against groups of Hordim in the fashion of its design for combat, it does confuse small groups, especially in darkened areas. Use of the Shimmera against pursuers will allow escape but use of this skill under these circumstances is difficult. The text will tell you if it is an option you can use.

Please note that even though the Shimmera was designed by the Ancients as an advantage in combat, it did not save them from their ultimate fate at the hands of their creations. This failure is a testament to the limitations of this skill and its use should be confined to times of great desperation.

In this adventure any use of the Shimmera is preceded by an Intuition test. Such a test must be successful if the Shimmera is to be used. A failure has no detrimental effect, but the skill can only be attempted once in any combat. Each time you use the Shimmera you must record it on your status sheet. Remember that you can only use it during your quest the number of times indicated by your throw of the die, and only when the text gives you the option to do so.



Chosen Talents

Once you have determined your character attributes and chosen your character's specific Skill Areas, the next step in customising your character is to choose two talents. These talents enhance certain aspects of your character's ability to complete your quest and should be chosen carefully. It is not mandatory but you may choose two of the following ten talents. Write the talents you have chosen into your character sheet, and if you wish write the specific nature of these talents into the Quest Notes section as a reminder.

Strong Back

A player with the talent of Strong Back may disregard all carry limitations. You may carry as many rations as you wish, and as many items of equipment or found objects as you think you need. Strong Back also allows an automatic success for any Strength attribute test required if you are trying to climb, or drag yourself, out of a hole or pit. There is one disadvantage to this talent. Once you have exceeded the normal carry limits a penalty of -1 to Agility and Combat Value applies.

Heroic Confidence

This talent is for all of us who enjoy charging into combat without thinking, only to discover their opponent more than a match for them. If you choose the talent of Heroic Confidence, you will obtain an advantage of +1 to your Combat Value purely due to your faith in your own abilities. This advantage lapses in each combat if you lose even one endurance point. A wound will automatically return your combat value to its normal level for the duration of that combat. Your next combat will find your heroic confidence once again restored.

Back to the Wall

A character who possesses the Back to the Wall talent will gain a temporary +1 advantage to their Combat Value if fighting any creature whilst trapped in a room or dead-end. If you are lucky enough to survive the combat, your Combat Value will return to its normal level once you have found a way out.

Beast Slayer

If you choose the Beast Slayer talent you will gain a +1 advantage to your Combat Value when fighting any creature other than Hordim or

Man. Note that this talent cannot be chosen if you already have chosen the Sword Focus or Hordim Bane talents. Critical hit rules apply if you are facing any beast and have selected this talent.

Hordim Bane

An adventurer who possesses the Hordim Bane talent will enjoy a +2 increase to Combat Value during all combats with any creatures of the Horde. The cost of this advantage is the physical fatigue that will follow each combat. A -1 reduction to your Strength attribute applies once combat has ended until you have the opportunity to eat. A further reduction of 2 endurance points also applies until you can take food. This talent cannot be chosen if you intend to choose either the Beast Slayer or Sword Focus talents as well. Only one of these three talents can be used during any one adventure. Critical hit rules apply if you are facing any living Hordim and have selected this talent.

Leap of Fate

The Leap of Fate talent allows a player the opportunity to re-roll any three unsuccessful jumping attempts. This talent applies to any attribute test required as a part of a leap.

Skin of the Teeth

Choosing the Skin of the Teeth talent provides a player with the ability to survive a reduction of endurance points to zero or less. This talent allows you the opportunity to keep fighting after being reduced to zero in any combat, but for only as long as you win all further combat rounds in that fight. If an opponent can be defeated before your character is wounded any further you will survive, and be given 1 bonus endurance point to continue your quest.

Shadar in the Making

A Shadar in the Making exhibits unusual affinity to EarthMagic. This affinity is expressed in a heightened sense of intuition. This talent gives the player a +1 to their Intuition attribute and the ability to re-roll on any two failed intuition tests. If you already have 5 character points ascribed to your Intuition attribute it is within the rules to increase this attribute to 6 if you choose this talent. If this is the case all Intuition tests will automatically be successful and the ability to re-roll is not necessary.

Sword Focus

A Player who chooses Sword Focus will have a +1 increase to Combat Value for as long as they wield a sword. If at any time a sword is lost, or replaced with a more potent weapon, combat values must be returned to normal levels. Note: This talent cannot be chosen if you are intending to choose either Beast Slayer or Hordim Bane talents. Critical hit rules apply if you are facing any living foe other than Dragons and have selected this talent.

Blessed by Providence

If the talent of Blessed by Providence is chosen, a player may re-roll any two failed luck tests during the course of their adventure. This talent cannot be chosen if you intend to choose the Leap of Fate talent as well. Only one of these can be chosen at a time.

Once you have finalised your choices regarding character attributes, skills and talents you must then look to the completion of the remainder of the Character Status Sheet.

Equipment and Items Found

A large area of the character sheet has been allocated to the recording of equipment and items found. At this time this part of the sheet should be left blank. You will be given the opportunity during the adventure to choose the equipment you will be taking with you, and anything else you find on your quest will need to be accounted for here. Please note that at the beginning of your quest you will be given 50 additional character points that can be used to equip yourself for the adventure. This opportunity arises in the text of Section 1.

Once you have acquired these items a carry limit does apply to any further items found or bought on your journey. Only 8 additional items may be carried at any one time. If you do find something and you are already at your carry limit, you will have to drop something else to keep it. This limit does not apply however, if you have chosen the Strong Back talent for your character. Under these circumstances there are no carry limits. Your character will suffer a -1 reduction to agility if the normal carry limits are exceeded though.

All the equipment items listed are extremely valuable to your task. Do not lose them. Other items of equipment may well become available to you as your journey progresses. If you find anything you should record it on your status sheet.

Rations

To begin your quest you will have in your possession enough food to last for 6 meals. This should be enough food for 3 days. These meals can be taken at any time (but not during combat) and each will restore 6 endurance points to your ongoing endurance level. There is a limit of one meal per section unless the text specifically allows you to. You cannot exceed your initial maximum endurance rating at any time during the game. There will also be opportunities in the text to eat food found as your quest progresses. The text will tell you how such windfalls should be used.

The text may also suggest you eat a meal at certain points in the story. It is your choice whether you do or not. The following rule does apply in this situation however. Generally, these meal breaks are indicated because of the time of the day in the story, or because of the time that may have elapsed since your last meal. If you choose not to eat a meal then it means you will go hungry and two endurance points must be deducted from your endurance rating. If you do eat a meal then your endurance rating will be increased by the usual six points.

The rations that you have with you will need to be recorded properly on your status sheet. Each meal eaten should be noted on this sheet. Remember you may only carry a maximum of 6 rations at a time in your pack.

Nahla Bread

Nahla Bread is the essential backup food for any traveller crossing the wilds of Arborell. Light and nutritious, it provides a quick and effective meal for anyone who finds themselves far from habitation and fresh foods. A prudent traveller will take a supply of Nahla Bread with them on any long journey. Each bread will restore two endurance points when eaten, and the same rules apply as for rations concerning their use. Due to their light weight there is no limit to how much Nahla Bread can be carried.

Artefacts

In days long gone, the fortress of Stoneholme was the seat of power of the Stone Kings. Within its walls there are still many treasures scattered, hidden in secret rooms or discarded within long disused passages. If you find any of these artifacts, and you think they might be useful to you, take them and record them on your status sheet.

Adversary Combat Values

Each of the creatures that you encounter will have their own combat value and endurance level. The Combat Record Sheet allows you to record these details in the boxes provided. This sheet should be printed out prior to starting your adventure. How you use these values is described in the following section on combat resolution.

Combat

Your quest to restore the pillar of stonewood will lead you into the depths of a chaotic realm and there you will encounter the many creatures of the Horde. Stoneholme is now their dominion and they will protect it any way they can; no matter what the cost in their own lives. You will be attacked, and you will be forced to fight for your life.

Combat must be conducted as follows;

- **Step 1:** Determine the creature's combat value and endurance points. Record these on your combat record sheet found at the end of this gamebook.
- **Step 2:** Roll two dice and add your combat value to the number thrown. This is your combat strength for the round.
- **Step 3:** Throw two dice and add the number rolled to your opponent's combat value. This is your adversary's combat strength for the round.
- **Step 4:** Compare both combat strengths. The higher combat strength wins the round, and an amount of endurance points must then be deducted from the loser's total endurance points. If the winner of the round has a combat strength four or more points higher than his opponent, he has struck a heavy blow and four endurance points must be taken. If the winner of the round wins by three points or less, the blow has been minor and only one endurance point can be taken from the loser's endurance points. If there has been a draw in the round there are no winners and the round must be repeated.
- **Step 5:** Repeat steps 2 to 4 for the next combat round. Combat continues in this way until either your endurance, or the endurance of your opponent falls to zero. At this point the combat has been resolved and one of you is dead.

Critical hits on double rolls of 5 and 6.

The rules above apply for all combats conducted within this quest, however for an adventurer that has chosen either the Weaponmastery skill or the Beast Slayer, Hordim Bane or Sword Focus talents a further rule applies. If at any time in the course of a combat you roll a double 5 or a double 6, and you possess any of the skills or talents mentioned, then you have rolled a critical hit and will have killed your opponent outright. This advantage applies to all combats for an adventurer who possesses Weaponmastery, except when fighting Dreyadim or Dragons. This advantage only applies if you otherwise have chosen Beast Slayer, Hordim Bane or Sword Focus when those talents would normally be useful to you. As an example, critical hits can only be made upon creatures of the world if you have Beast Slayer, only on Hordim if you have the Hordim Bane talent, or only while you are using a sword if you have Sword Focus (but as with Weaponmastery not when fighting Dreyadim or Dragons). If you have not chosen any of these skills or talents the critical hit rule does not apply.

The Windhammer Enhanced Combat System

The Windhammer Core Gamebook and all other gamebooks found within the Chronicles of Arborell series rely on the standard combat system described above to reconcile encounters between player characters and a wide range of combatants. This standard system is more than adequate for most players but an enhanced combat system (ECS) has also been produced for those who like their combat a bit more realistic, and a lot more intense.

The ECS can be used in place of any encounter found within the Chronicles of Arborell except for combat situations that have their own specific combat rules. An example of this circumstance is the combat rules provided for fighting the Dragon Windhammer in this gamebook. The combat scenarios found in almost all other encounters can be fought using this system instead, whether you are conducting the adventure as a Man of the South or as an Oera'dim.

The full rules to the ECS are available as a separate title from the Chronicles of Arborell and as mentioned are an alternative to the standard rules if you wish to engage in combat that allows the development of fighting styles and combat tactics.



Testing Character Attributes

There will be times during your quest that you will be asked to test your character's attributes. Whether it be strength, agility, intuition or just plain luck, you will be required to roll dice against them to determine success or failure in a particular activity. It is a simple test. If you are required to test against your strength for example, you will be required to roll two dice and then compare the number against your strength attribute. If the number you have rolled is the same or less than your strength points you have passed the test and can proceed according to the directions given. If you roll higher than your strength points you have failed the test and another set of directions will be given. All attributes except endurance can be tested, and apart from your strength attribute all other attributes are tested with a single die.

Saving Your Game

Windhammer is a large gamebook, one where there are many paths that can be taken, and many ways to come to an untimely and sometimes gruesome end. To help players find a path through this adventure a number of rules have been developed so that progress can be saved.

As a PDF document there is no automatic way to save the progress of your adventure built into this gamebook. If you wish to save your progress it will require that you print another character sheet and transcribe the information you have on your current character sheet over to the new. A Saved Game Section box has been provided on the character sheet so that you can record the section you wish to restart from in the event that your character dies. You can save your progress in this manner as many times as you wish, it will simply require that you print a new character sheet for each.

With your character sheet determined you are now ready to continue on to the next stage of your preparation. Copies of the status sheet, combat record and a map of Northern Kalborea are provided at the end of this book. As mentioned before, these sheets should be printed out, and in the case of the character status sheet completed prior to starting your journey.

In the accompanying pages you will find considerable information about your character, who the Dwarvendim are, and the reasons why you are about to undertake a most hazardous journey into the heart

of a dark domain. Read these words carefully.

Although the nature of the Horde may at first be sketchy you will know as much as most adventurers do. For most of the peoples of Arborell, the Horde is the stuff of legend and myth, but now the Horde has returned and the worst nightmares of Men have come to reality. If the names Morg, Hresh, Mutan, or Jotun are unfamiliar do not be concerned, as a short introduction to these creatures is provided in the appendices of this book. You will find as you progress through this adventure that they will indeed become all too familiar.

Good luck.



Windhammer is set in the northern frontier lands of Arborell, in the sparsely settled regions of Northern Kalborea. Your journey begins upon the ramparts of the frontier fortress of Maenum.

May Glory and Renown follow all who
are successful here.

Maenum

Baradin Hedj looked over the battlements of the High Watchtower and sensed instinctively that something was wrong. Behind him the blue and grey banners of the Union whipped and curled in the embrace of a chilling gale, but the icy wind that blustered off the northern tundra before him was the least of his concerns. In the complete darkness of a moonless night he pulled his heavy cloak about himself and peered out into the gloom. He could not yet be sure but upon the desolate plains before him something was moving, and it did not wish to be discovered.

Upon the cold stone of his vantage high above the fortress-city Baradin called his Dwarvendim warriors to their posts and all peered intently out into the depthless shadows of the night. Until he ordered them to stand down his command would search the darkness, but he knew there was little chance of success. If indeed there was something out there it would remain unknown until the first light of dawn. As had been the case with so many other mornings they would simply have to wait.

It was a matter of some regret for Baradin that he had difficulty remembering how many times he had met the dawn in the same way. Exposed to the bitter cold of the endless winds he and his fellow Dwarvendim would search the Sanhar Wastes below from their high battlements and stand vigilant against the return of the Horde. It was a hard truth of their existence that generations of Dwarvendim had stood upon the same rampart, watching the shadows of night slowly recede from the plains. In this world they were the frontline in a war that knew no end, and the necessity of their duty did not allow a moment's inattention. Too many times their careful searches had resulted in a warning call from the large battlehorn that had been permanently fixed to the side of the Watchtower. Its urgent alarm would raise the city below to arms and always the advancing enemy would be repelled. Survival depended on it.

On this windy morning however, Baradin had to admit that even the air felt different. The expected penetrating cold of the northerly gales, blown for countless miles across the vast tundra of the Sanhar wastelands carried with it a damp mustiness. It was a cold you might expect from a crypt, not from the wastelands. It was probably just his imagination.

As he turned stiffly to the East the twin suns of morning lifted slightly above the horizon. In their light the massive silhouettes of the

Rift Mountains became sharp, the myriad colours of the suns slow rising changing the sky above from ink black to a deep but lightening blue. The plains below were still obscured by darkness, however the first threads of sunlight were beginning to lighten the shadows. With a few moments to spare the First Officer leant against the damp coldness of the battlements and peered down into the gloom of the city below. It would be a few minutes yet before the plains would be exposed enough for a proper search.

In looking down at the ramshackle order of the dwellings crammed along the narrow streets of the city it was hard for Baradin Hedj to consider his people, the Dwarvendim, as anything other than badly paid border guards. Their poverty and reliance on the Kalboreans was evident to any who passed this close to the frontier, the deprivation of their lives a constant reminder of their servitude. It left a knot in his stomach every time he contemplated such squalor for he knew that it had not always been this way.

Many years before the Dwarvendim had been a proud and powerful people, their ancestral home lying far to the South in what had been known as the Stone Kingdoms. In those better times the Dwarvendim had held a place of respect within the Four Nations, their strength and leadership valued by all Men. War had changed that however, a century of violence and treachery reaving them of their nationhood and dispersing them as slaves into the lands of their new masters. The Dwarvendim had become a dispossessed people and their conquerors had not been kind. Known for their abilities as artisans of stone, and for their mastery of Magic and Lore, the Kalborean Union had exploited the Dwarvendim, and by degrees their mastery of such knowledge had dissipated.

So on this particular morning, as the First Officer and his Watch cast keen eyes over the wastelands, the Dwarvendim did not look upon themselves as a sovereign people. In their servitude they had been forced to forget the pride of their ancestry, content instead to fulfil their duty as border guards, languishing in perpetual service to their conquerors, the Kalborean Union.

For generations the unchanging vision of the wastes had been a reminder of the repression they had endured, but in the isolation of this frontier fortress the Dwarvendim had quietly begun to rebuild their strength, gathering the remnants of their scattered people, and with great care beginning to relearn the meaning of pride, and the power of their ancient Lore. One day they would again be strong.

A sharp blast of cold wind brought Baradin away from his idle musing and back to the responsibility of his command. On both sides of the fortress-city the dark masses of the Rift Mountains still cast heavy shadow over the citadel's grey stonework. The plains ahead however, were struggling into the light and something had changed. He could not be sure what it might be but a few minutes more would expose the whole tundra below to the light of day. Calling the remainder of the watch to their stations a dozen pairs of eyes peered out. Apart from the wind no other movement was apparent.

Like disappearing phantoms the shadows retreated from the Sanhar and a deep hush settled on the guards. Exposed now to the bright light of the dawn the vast featureless wastes were gone, the ice-dunes and stunted vegetation covered instead by the seething encampment of a Horde Army. Black as a pool of tar, the multitudes of its Host spread from the far horizon across the plain and up against the foundations of the fortress itself. Tents as numerous as trees in a forest spread in organised lines to the rear. Beasts of burden and creatures of war moved purposefully between enormous engines of destruction. Cohort upon cohort of Horde fighting units fanned out quickly across the few empty spaces left within the seething chaos of the organising army, and from his vantage the First Officer stood aghast, momentarily unable to turn his eyes from the horror of the nightmare unfolding before him. This was going to be no simple border skirmish. The Horde had come again to make war on the fertile lands of Arborell to the south and the fortress city of Maenum would be their first victim.

Half running, half lunging for the battlehorn, the First Officer tried unsuccessfully to wet his dry lips before blowing a long urgent greeting to the quickly rising suns of morning. Low and ominous the note trumpeted down into the waking streets of the city, then rang out in a series of echoes that careered through the many canyons and valleys of the nearby mountains. From somewhere within the vast army before them a trumpet call sounded out in answer. It was a call that heralded the beginning of the end of the Dwarvendim fortress. As the lone trumpeting ended a great shout arose from the multitudes below and as one the Horde army began its attack.



:meshu mar cem iphar pahdthwe; droya'fel:

Imprisoned deep within the dungeons of the fortress Halokim Vesh waited in the shadows, the rusting iron bars of his prison providing him with little reason to care for the battle that raged above. Somewhere upon the stone overhead he could feel huge impacts pounding against the walls of Maenum, sending deep vibrations into the earth, rattling the bars of his cell, and disturbing his fellow prisoners from their restless slumbers. The noise had been a part of his existence for the past three days and it hammered through the stone like a drumbeat. There was nothing that he could do about it however, such affairs he had to leave in the hands of those who had some control over their own destiny. His thoughts were preoccupied elsewhere, by a far more pressing concern that had him marked for death at the hands of a Kalborean executioner. As he sat hunched upon the hard stone floor of his cell, he pondered the vagaries of Fate that had brought him to such an end. In such dark moments he still found it hard to believe that he had been so easily betrayed, and so easily captured.

It had been less than a week since his incarceration and had gone over in his mind a thousand times the circumstances of his arrest. The Faeyen Merchant had been a rich prize, one that in hindsight had been far too tempting a target to be travelling the road alone. In the gloom of a clouded night he had followed the Faeyen onto a secluded trail just south of Baellum. He had bought good information that the Merchant held a full money pouch, one well worth the risk of robbery. In his desperation he had stalked the man, intent on relieving him of his purse and then disappearing into the dense forest that could be found to the west. It had been a simple plan, but when he had made his move he found himself confronted not by a cowering Merchant prepared to give up his coin, but an armed patrol that had been hiding in the undergrowth on the far side of the trail. It had been a trap, and the glint of razor sharp steel from a dozen unsheathed swords had ensured he had nowhere to run.

Given this circumstance a smart man might have throw down his weapon and surrendered. Thievery was a serious crime, but it was one whose punishment could be survived with years of hard labour as its ultimate reward. A smart man might have accepted this turn of Fate but Halokim was not about to give up his freedom lightly. Before he could be overwhelmed he had brought down three of the patrol, and for his trouble had won himself a death sentence for resisting. Little could he know that his melee with the guards would also bring him to

the attention of others.

There had been no trial, just a swift appearance before a Magistrate and the pronouncement of his sentence. In a way his current predicament had only been a matter of time in the making. The life of a Dwarvendim bandit was invariably short, and he had been plying his trade for a good deal longer than most. The Magistrate had felt that he should be made an example of, and had set specific conditions for his execution. As a Dwarvendim he was to be transported to the provincial capital of Das Frontiere and then beheaded in public. An example to all of the consequences of rebelling against the authority of the Kalborean Union. To this point in time the Magistrate's stipulations for his execution had been the only thing that had kept him alive. No-one could be spared to transport him south, and with the battle above growing in both desperation and intensity he could do nothing but wait.

Unable to settle Halokim raised himself to stretch cold bones and aching muscle. His cell was only a few metres square, one of dozens that lined a long corridor. It was a dismal place, without fresh air or sunlight, and provided with few torches to illuminate the torment of its residents. The gloom had been his only companion, and in the shadows he had quickly lost all sense of time as he waited for his transport south. He could not tell what hour of the day it might be, but he felt tired and had not seen food for more than two days. The desperation of his lot had left him without hope and he looked to his bed for some avenue of escape, even if it could provide no more than the nightmares found in sleep. His captors had given him a pile of old straw as a resting place, and in an attempt to find rest he laid down and tried to make himself comfortable.

It was an impossible task. From the many cells that lined the dim passage of this unwelcome prison he could hear snoring, coughing and the cursing of the other inmates. The sounds of battle filtered down through the stone, and the jarring impacts continued unabated as he turned restlessly upon his bed of straw. It was as he lay silently in the dark that he began to hear a new sound, one that carried itself languidly upon the dank air.

Somewhere from the depths of the corridor outside came the low murmur of voices, but he could not distinguish them clearly. They were distant and edged with familiar tones of conspiracy and distrust. After a time these whispers in the dark also faded, and with nothing to do but listen to the despair of his fellow prisoners Halokim Vesh

slowly but surely fell into sleep.

Deep sleep proved elusive however. Before Halokim could submit to the heavy hand of rest he was rudely shaken awake by the rougher hands of the Jailer, Mattok.

"This is the one Milord." In the dank confines of the cell the Jailer's torch sputtered just a finger's length from Halokim's forehead. His face hung above his prisoner, his features shadowed by the light of his brand, the reek of salted fish and old potatoes on his breath.

"A right piece of scum is Vesh. Are you sure this stone-eater is the prisoner you seek?"

Turning away the Jailer fell back and a tall, richly attired man walked forward, bending at the waist to stare curiously into Halokim's upturned eyes. The Dwarvendim could not help but notice he was dressed as a Prefect of the Kalborean LoreMages' Guild.

"My good Jailer," the man replied, his manner almost amused. "This piece of scum will be perfect."

From his position behind the Prefect Mattock moved forward, taking a short truncheon from his belt as he advanced. Halokim had no doubt what was to come and no opportunity to ready himself for the blow. In one swift arc the Jailer's truncheon struck the unprotected face of his hapless prisoner. For Halokim Vesh all the lights went out.



:caadru nar ulaal; ashad; a' dehr caissonim
u gehl avandil durilen:

Through a swirling mist of half-dreams and confusion you struggle for consciousness, your thoughts overwhelmed by pain as a throbbing ache spreads like an infection from your temple and out across your jaw. It is hard to wake even though someone is shaking you violently.

"Come on you lump of filth. Rise and shine. Its time for some talk."

Rough hands have a grip upon your shoulders but you cannot open your eyes, your head enveloped firmly in an agony that will not let you go.

"Give the thief some water." comes another voice.

From within the darkness and fog you hear the scraping sound of a heavy bucket and then a grunt. After a second's pause a flood of cold water showers over your face and shoulders. Gagging and spluttering you try to clear your mouth of the foul liquid. It tastes like sewage.

More awake you attempt to open your eyes. A bright light fills the room and there is the sounds and feel of a cold wind moving across your wet clothing. Even through the pain you sense that you have been taken to a high place, either a tower or a dwelling in the mountains. From the open stone windows of the room a chill wind howls, and on the rise of each bluster you are sure you can make out the tumult of a battle raging in the distance. It is frequently punctuated by the sounds of explosions and the screams of dying warriors.

All about you stand Kalborean soldiers and a number of men dressed in the robes of the LoreMages' Guild. As you attempt to turn your head to look further about the room you find that your arms and legs have been strapped to a heavy wooden table at its centre. Behind the men that surround the table you also see a well muscled man with a leather mask over his face. He hangs back in the shadows, ill defined even in the bright light. In his hands he is holding an efficient looking executioner's scimitar.

From somewhere in the room comes the sound of a familiar voice. It is the Prefect of the LoreMages' Guild.

"You must forgive the rough treatment Vesh. Sometimes it is prudent to move a prisoner without fuss. I was given the impression by the Jailer that you would not have come with us any other way."

In response you strain against your bindings but the effort only serves to underline that you are completely helpless. The Prefect waits for you to stop struggling then leans closer and stares directly into your eyes.

"I have a proposition for you." he whispers.

Lying prostrate upon the table you are completely at the man's mercy but you do not listen to his words. Instead you snort a reply and try to raise your head. The effort sends hammer blows of agony drilling back into your temple, and the back of your skull cracks back down on the hard wood of the table. Spiralling into a white, numbing mist you begin to lapse back into unconsciousness. Another curt command from the Prefect sends a further bucket of putrid water showering over your face. Again the Kalborean speaks.

"Halokim Vesh. We are in need of your services and desire that, for a reasonable reward, you should undertake a journey on behalf of the Kalborean Union."

Through the pain haze you can hear yourself laughing. The effort clears your head enough to speak.

"Milord, I am gratified to learn that I may be of assistance to the

mighty Union, but I must remind you that I am soon to be executed. I am a thief after all, and my services will soon be unavailable."

The Prefect stands even closer now. He has the confidence of someone who knows he will get what he wants.

"It is true that you are a thief Vesh. It is also true that you are a mercenary, an Enemy of the State and only Providence knows what else. It is your current predicament that gives me some confidence you will gladly take on the task that I am about to offer."

Your head is now clearer and you can look straight at the Prefect. At the same time you again test the strength of the bindings that hold you. They are unbreakable.

"What is it you want Kalborean?"

"Ah, I am so glad you asked", The Prefect's tone changes to a more conspiratorial one. "What do you know of the Tellandra?"

You shrug your shoulders. You know much of the histories of the Dwarvendim. Once you even studied the Elder Tongue with some of the best of your peoples remaining scholars, but you don't feel obliged to make the Kalborean's job any easier.

"All right. If this is how it must be." The Prefect's tone becomes harsher.

"Have you ever heard of the ancient fortress known to your people as Stoneholme?"

For a moment you consider not answering the Kalborean. You do not trust any of them, but you cannot think of a time when a Kalborean has ever asked anything of a Dwarvendim. It is too curious a circumstance not to play along.

"Stoneholme? Any Dwarvendim child can tell you something about the old Stone Kingdoms, but what in Arborell has this got to do with me?"

The Prefect pulls a small highly polished dagger from his robes and plays its mirrored blade through a shaft of light. He seems slightly amused as a thousand shards of brilliance dance out from its metal and spread about the room. Then he looks back at you. His voice carries all the menace of a pit of vipers.

"Vesh. The LoreMages' Guild has need of your services. It would seem that the Tellandra, the most potent talisman of your nation has been broken. We need you to go and fix it."

The Prefect's words are staggering. The smooth stone pillar of petrified wood known as the Tellandra had once been the foundation of all magical power wielded by the Dwarvendim LoreMasters. Using

its power the Stone Kingdoms had grown and prospered in the harsh reaches of the Krodestaag Ranges. It was the Tellandra, coupled with the native stonemastery of the Dwarvendim, that had made them a powerful people. For many Dwarvendim the pillar of stonewood was the heart and soul of their nation, and by all accounts it was supposed to be unbreakable.

In waves of understanding the import of the Prefect's words sweep over you. It had been the Kalboreans who had corrupted the potency of the Tellandra and twisted it to their own petty uses. The Dwarvendim had never recovered from the loss. From the look on his face it was clear the Prefect knew you understood. Something was not right though.

"Why should I help the Kalboreans fix something they should never have tampered with in the first place?"

The Kalborean paused for a moment, nodding to someone behind you before replying.

"There are two reasons in fact. The first is that magic extracted from the pillar supports and strengthens the high wall and battlements that protect the city of Maenum. As the potency of the pillar diminishes with each passing day the fortifications that hold back the Hordim become weaker. Soon enough the Horde Army will break their way in and then all your precious Dwarvendim will die."

"The second reason is more immediate. If you do not agree to attempt this journey there will be no further need to keep you alive!"

With a gesture from the Prefect the executioner strides forward and raises his scimitar above his head. In the full light of the day the sword shines as if it is on fire. For a second it hangs there, poised above your neck. It is possible, you surmise, that they may be serious.

"All right" you say rapidly, "Seeing you asked so nicely I'll do it."



:dehr maturi es e' ahda'ma:

In the days that follow your agreement to attempt the restoration of the Tellandra life becomes much easier. Given good food and a dry place to sleep your strength returns quickly, and by the second evening after your interrogation you feel fit to travel. That night, as you are settling down to sleep, the door to your room bursts open. Through the shattered opening strides the Prefect, another LoreMage, and two

rather unruly looking guards. Without indulging in pleasantries the Prefect orders the guards to grab your arms. They are immensely strong and you prove no match for them. Easily they pin you to the wall.

"It seems wise Vesh that I ensure you keep your part of the bargain. Hence this collar is to be placed around your neck. Please don't struggle, it will only expose you to possible injury."

With that the other LoreMage, a tall, gaunt individual, produces a thick white ring of metal from his robes and quickly affixes it around your neck. You try to struggle but only succeed in almost crushing your throat as the metal ring tightens about your neck.

"The collar is unbreakable. If you do not complete your mission and restore the Tellandra to its wholeness before Maenum falls, the collar will tighten and slowly remove your head from your shoulders. I have been told that it is both a time consuming and agonising way to die."

Turning away, the Prefect motions to the guards to release you and then orders the other LoreMage to stay.

"Vesh, this is the Tak Lovar, a Historian of the Guild and Inquisitor of the Kalborean Union. Listen well to what he has to say. It may save your miserable life."

Within moments the room is empty save yourself and the Historian. Curiously the Tak Lovar does not seem the least concerned at being left alone with you. He carefully cleans the dust from a chair and sits, all the while regarding you as if you hold no mysteries for him.

"Be seated Halokim. I have been directed to provide you with information on the history of Stoneholme and of the last Stone King, Morgen Orncryst the Younger. A King most commonly known to your people as the Keeper of the Dragon Windhammer."

Intrigued by the notion of hearing a Kalborean version of an old Dwarvendim folk-tale you make yourself more comfortable.

Sitting back in his chair Lovar takes his time, arranging his robes neatly about his legs before he speaks again. Only when the Historian is finished does he begin his tale.

"Some two centuries before your birth the Dwarvendim Stone Kings began the construction of a vast fortress deep within the ancient granite of the Devkraager Tor, the highest peak of the Krodestaag Ranges. This fortress they named Stoneholme. For many years it served the needs of the Stone Kings as a safe haven from the violence and death of the Sixth Horde War which, as even you would be aware, was being fought between the then Four Nations of Men and the

Armies of the Horde. Men all fought as one in those times trying to stem the onslaught of the Hordim as they slowly advanced from the Sanhar down into the warmer lands of Arborell."

"As sometimes happens when Men fight with courage and purpose they prevailed, and the Horde were forced back across the mountains and valleys of the Great Rift. In a rout they were expelled back into the tundra of the Sanhar Wastes. The combined power of the Four Nations had secured a great victory and peace returned quickly to a land ravaged by war. The great armies, tired of battle, dispersed and returned home. Men and Women once again looked to the future with hope. For all the Nations peace had been won, but it proved to be a peace short-lived, and bitterly held".

"With the uniting force of a common enemy gone, the Four Nations quickly returned to their own natural borders and in time also returned to the petty bickering of diplomacy and the mutual competition of trade. It is no secret that this competition for wealth and power quickly undermined the determination that had previously bound committed allies. Long-held jealousies and mistrust soon found a place in the affairs of Men, but there could be no hostility between nations for the memory of the Horde was still all too fresh."

In the quiet of your room you wait for the Tak Lovar to continue, but instead he hesitates, then moves his right hand carefully inside his robes. When he withdraws it the Historian is holding a small metal sphere, dull of colour but etched with intricate patterns and a line of ancient text that encompasses its diameter. Using his thumb Lovar flicked a lever on its upper surface and you cannot help but gasp aloud as a translucent map of Arborell fills the space between you. Trying not to look too surprised you study the wonder as it shines brightly in the confines of your room.

"From the battlefields of the Great Rift the Faeyen Nation returned to the high grass plateaux of north-western Arborell and to almost complete isolation. Your people followed their Faeyen neighbours west to the rugged mountain retreats of the Stone Kingdoms; seemingly content to be self-reliant and unconcerned by the squabbling of others. My people, the Kalboreans of the Union, went back to what we have always done; trading, adventuring and farming the wide plains that cover the central and eastern lands of Arborell. The NomDruse simply disappeared to the South and have been unheard of since. Not needed as a refuge, Stoneholme soon fell into disuse."

For a moment the Historian sits silently, pondering what he is to say

next. You are surprised at how accurate his retelling has been, but so far he has only given a small part of the story. Clearing his throat the Tak Lovar deactivates the map and continues.

"From all the available records it is certain that for the Dwarvendim these times of peace were good. The financial power of the Stone Kings grew with each passing year, and this increasing wealth did not go unnoticed by the surrounding Nations. In particular it was the bandit gangs that roamed the adjoining plains of Kalborea that posed the greatest danger. Wishing to ensure their wealth safe from any threat Stoneholme was expanded and refurbished into a treasure house of labyrinthine size. As Dwarvendim affluence grew so Stoneholme was cut ever deeper into the mountain. When their work was done the corridors and halls, vaults and treasure troves, had delved to the very heart of the Devkraager Tor. With such a fortress to guard their wealth the Stone Kings rested, apparently well pleased with their efforts."

"It was Morgen Orncryst the Younger, last of the Stone Kings, who extended Stoneholme to its deepest levels. It was Morgen who commissioned the cutting of the final chamber at the foundation of the mountain, a vault secure enough to hold the greatest treasures of the Dwarvendim peoples. In this Deep Vault were to be laid the spoils of all the preceding Stone Kings, the most precious metals and rare stones acquired during centuries of Dwarvendim adventure and commerce in the outside world. Most important of all, this vault was to hold the greatest artefact of the Dwarvendim nation; the pillar of stonewood, the Tellandra."

"Legend has it that in the process of placing this wealth within the Deep Vault a large jewelled egg was brought into Stoneholme; a souvenir taken from the Horde after the final decisive battle that pushed the armies of the Clavern'sigh back into the expanses of the Sanhar Wastes. Unknown to the King or his subjects the egg brought with it a great evil, one that resided unseen in the quiet form of a small winged serpent; a Dragon."

"Thinking his treasure secure Morgen locked the thick metal doors of the treasure room behind him, and returned to the pressing affairs of his Kingdom, unaware of the danger lurking within. In the flickering shadows of the great cavern it would not have taken long for the closeness of Morgen's treasure to entice the small, defenceless serpent from its jewelled egg. In that cold, dark place it grew, drawing energy and comfort from the precious metals that surrounded it."

"To those of us well versed in Dragonlore it is no secret that Dragons covet gold. It sustains and energises them, they will commit any atrocity to acquire it and will stop at nothing to keep it. A Dragon protecting its gold is an evil thing, a beast to be avoided."

"For Morgen and his Kingdom all went well until the Dwarvendim of Arborell fell upon lean times. Conflict between the Kalborean Union and the Faeyen began to severely restrict trade out of the cities of western Arborell. For the Dwarvendim this was an economic disaster. Unable to rely on taxes raised by the steady flow of commerce across his borders Morgen the Younger found it necessary to delve deeply into the wealth stored in the treasure rooms of Stoneholme. In his old age it must have grieved him greatly to see his people's riches being so quickly depleted. The situation however got steadily worse. The conflict between Faeyen and Kalborean grew, small border skirmishes developed into larger confrontations and eventually this tension threatened to embroil all the Nations in a bloody war. In time it did."

"With the whole land again consumed by war, Stoneholme returned to its primary purpose as a refuge for the Dwarvendim people. Within that first year the war raged all over the Stone Kingdoms and the cost of financing the conflict devoured most of the accumulated wealth of the Stone Kings. The very existence of the Dwarvendim as a separate people was under threat. Only the Deep Vault, locked and barred at the heart of Stoneholme for more than twenty years remained untouched. The day soon came, however, when it had to be opened."

"You can imagine the gravity of that day. An aged and despondent Morgen would have descended the long corridors of Stoneholme, walked through the magnificence of the Great Hall and unlocked the first set of doors leading to the Deep Vault. As those huge metal doors swung wide the Stone King would have stepped across a polished marble threshold, and then walked the final one hundred metres to the main doors of Stoneholme's most protected cavern. Understanding the import of opening this final trove the King and his retainers must have been grimly silent. None could have expected what was to happen next."

"Confronting them as the heavy doors of the Deep Vault swung open was an apparition that left Morgen Orncryst, most powerful of the Stone Kings, rigid with fear. Out of the semi-darkness of the unlit treasure room sprang the vast bulk of a full grown Rift Dragon. Raised upon its thick hind legs, its leathery wings extended to their fullest it must have been an awesome sight, standing twenty-five

metres at the shoulder, its skin black and shining like molten glass, its head a nightmare of fang, scale and cruel burning red eyes."

"The few retainers who had accompanied the King fled the room in a blind terror, slamming the great metal doors and locking them securely. It was only then that they realised the King had remained inside; unarmed, aged and vulnerable. For Morgen it was too late. Before he could turn to follow his terrified retainers he was bathed in Dragonfire and consumed."

"With no heir to the throne the reign of the Stone Kings ended. The war between the Nations hammered its way across western Arborell, the Stone Kingdoms were subjugated by Kalborea, then hostilities ended as an even greater threat confronted the Nations of Men."

"In a state of battle weariness the Kalboreans and Faeyen were unprepared for a new assault from the Horde that struck deep into the Union. Unable to withstand the onslaught, the fortifications and armies of the Union collapsed and the creatures of the Horde spread over Arborell like a plague. It was during this dark time of conflict that Stoneholme was evacuated by its conquerors, the last of the Dwarvendim were dispersed to work camps in the mountains of the Krodestaag. The Tellandra was forgotten."

"In time the Horde was again defeated. A series of crushing battles threw them back into the wastelands and this fortress was constructed to stop any further attempts at invasion. From that time to now only small raiding parties have remained to roam the isolated mountain ranges and frontiers, preying on unwary travellers or stealing from small communities. The pillar has remained deep in Stoneholme, its magic now used for the common good by the Kalborean LoreMages but physically unreachable. And so it has remained until now."

For a moment the room falls into silence, then the Tak Lovar looks up from his thoughts and stares straight at you.

"The pillar has been broken, Halokim Vesh. For more than a century it has been used by the Kalboreans as a tool for the benefit of all men but now the Horde or, if it is still alive, that accursed Dragon has somehow succeeded in smashing it. Until it is restored there is no magic, there is no LoreMages' Guild and there is no way of stopping the Horde from destroying Maenum and infesting all of Arborell."

The Tak Lovar stands suddenly and half turns as if he is about to leave.

"I do not envy you Vesh. The quest you are about to undertake is perilous in the extreme and in truth I do not expect you to survive it. It

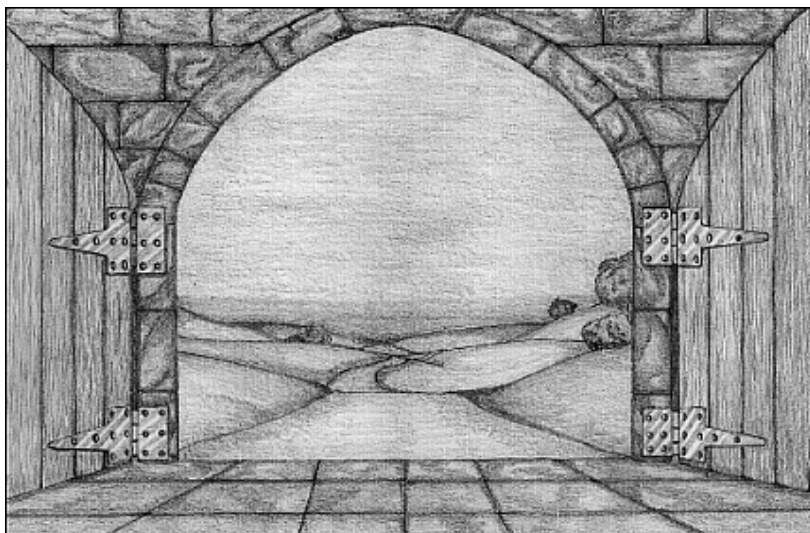
is unknown if the Horde currently infest the ruins of Stoneholme. It is equally unknown if the Dragon, who the Hordim calls Windhammer, is still alive. Legends and myth have conspired to obscure the truth about the mountains in which you are about to travel and I would not go there for any price. Men braver than you have tried you know, and none have returned. The Guild has lost a number of powerful talismans in those attempts. Maybe you will be lucky enough to recover them as well."

The historian stops and looks as if he is considering whether it would be appropriate to wish you luck. He doesn't.

"Your horse and equipment have been gathered. The Horde already tests to the limit the ability of this fortress to defend itself. At first light tomorrow you must leave. Do not fail, Vesh. Remember that you wear the white collar."

You watch as the Tak leaves the room, his robes flowing through your door as he departs. Tomorrow it seems you must begin a most perilous quest. Alone in the light thrown from a solitary candle you stand for a moment and wonder at this strange turn of events. In the quiet you can hear the muffled impacts of the Horde's assault vibrating through the stone. It is then that you realise you have no idea how to restore the Tellandra, and it would seem neither do the Kalboreans. You cannot even say why they chose you.

Turn to section 1.



Sections



1

The morning comes quickly enough. An hour before dawn the thick timbers of your door shudder to the hammering of a mailed fist. In the gloom you raise yourself from your bedding and wait as the door is unlocked. It takes a moment for the beam that secures the door to be withdrawn from its rests, but once open a guard emerges from the dark corridor beyond and throws a backpack onto the floor at your feet.

"It's time Vesh. Pack what you have. Ten minutes is all you've got."

As the guard turns for the door you stand and wipe the sleep from your eyes. You may have only ten minutes but there is little for you to make ready. For a moment you collect your thoughts, pondering the strange turn of events that has saved you from execution. Then you feel the metal collar at your neck and know that it may have only been delayed.

Quickly you pick up the pack and discover that it contains a number of items, and with a few minutes to spare you tip its contents onto your bedding. Apart from the bag you find you have been given a travel cloak, a small eating knife, six ration packs, each tightly wrapped in waterproof paper, a box of flints and a small money pouch containing fifteen rials (silver coins). (Record these items on your character sheet. The money should be included as a part of equipment carried.) It does not seem to be much in the way of equipment, however you return them to the bag and then ready yourself for what is to come.

From the corridor outside you can hear the approach of soldiers, and after getting dressed you are escorted by four armed guards to the cavalry yards that adjoin the fortress' southern gates.

Standing in the centre of the cobbled yard is the Tak Lovar. He is holding the reins of a magnificent Kalborean Courser and it is easily the largest horse you have ever seen. Behind him, half obscured by shadow stands a Dwarvendim armourer. He holds a long sword in one hand and a scabbard and belt in the other. At his right you can see also a table, covered with grey cloth.

"I hope you slept well", he says. Even in the early morning twilight you can see the Tak Lovar has not.

"To get you quickly to the Krodestaag Mountains the High Prefect has allowed the temporary use of one of his finest Coursers. Her name is Pallenten and she will take you as far as the foothills of the Devkraager Tor. From there it will be necessary for you to go on foot. Do not consider this horse as your own, Dwarvendim. Upon finishing her task Pallenten will return here to her rightful master."

The Historian then motions to the Armourer who presents you with the sword and scabbard.

"This sword is known as Than'durion, a blade of some renown within the Union. It is provided to afford you protection upon your journey. Treat it well for it is worth more than you could possibly imagine."

As you buckle the weapon to your side the Historian also gives you a small envelope.

"You will be aware the possession of weapons by Dwarvendim is strictly forbidden except here within this fortress. This pass should prevent any difficulties as you travel south to Stoneholme. Keep it safe and present it if you are challenged. Be mindful also that the sword is a gift from the Kalborean people, a payment for the service you are to provide. If you survive your quest you may keep it as a token of the appreciation some of us feel for what you are about to do."

"And what of equipment for the journey?" you ask, "A sword may protect me on this errand, but it will not keep me hale upon the wild lands."

The Tak Lover nods his head and gestures to the Armourer who folds back the grey covering on the table. Arrayed across its length is an assortment of devices and equipment.

"Here can be found some of the equipment you may need. Choose the items you believe will best serve your cause..."

(You have 50 points that may be used in choosing the equipment you wish to take with you. The following lists all that is arrayed on the table.)

- A thick leather jerkin (25 points)
- A rope and grapple (5 points)
- A basket of Nahla Breads (2 points per loaf taken)
- A compass (5 points)
- A small shovel (5 points)
- A cup and plate (2 points)
- A small bag of flour (2 points)

- A canvas tarpaulin (5 points)
- A wide brimmed hat (2 points)
- A set of spare clothing (10 points)

(If you choose the thick leather jerkin it will afford an armour bonus of +1 to your Combat Value, but its use will deduct -1 from your agility attribute each time you are required to test your agility. You may take as many Nahla Breads as you can afford. Once you have made your choices record these on your character sheet before continuing.)

Carefully you choose the equipment you will take with you and pack it away. From the shadows you sense more than one pair of eyes watching as you prepare to leave, and for you a departure from the grasp of the Kalboreans cannot come soon enough. When you are ready Lovar extends his hand in farewell, shakes yours and quickly turns away. In the silence that follows you climb upon the back of the great horse, and as the Historian disappears into the gloom of the early morning you urge Pallenten forward. The clatter of her hooves upon the hard cobbles of the cavalry yard is the only sound that echoes in the quiet air as you ride through the south gates of Maenum, and then out into the wide open lands of Northern Kalborea.

The Tak Lovar has no further part in this adventure but his story is not yet finished. If you wish to see where his fate may lead it can be uncovered in *The Inquisitor's Lament*, *Honour Amongst Thieves* and *The Shoulders of Emur* companion novellas. For the moment however, the untamed frontier of Kalborea awaits. Turn to section 245.



2

The Jotun stands silently in the semi-darkness and surveys the destruction in the Mess Hall. He smiles ruefully, obviously remembering the night's anarchy. For a moment he is still, then places his keys back in his tunic and slowly makes his way out through the eastern exit and into the darkness beyond.

Waiting in the shadows you do not move for some time, not until you are sure the Jotun has gone and that you are alone. Raising yourself slowly to your feet you ponder whether it may still be a good idea to continue through the northern door.

If you still wish to go through the northern door turn to section 49. If you decide it is more prudent to try the western door instead turn to section 237.

3

Nahla is a powerful regenerative but there is too much chance that it has been poisoned. Believing it too dangerous to try the unknown liquid you replace it carefully on the table and have a closer look at your surroundings. It is as you peer into the half-light of dancing shadows about you that you hear a faint but metallic click in the distance. Dropping immediately to one knee you ready your weapon and concentrate your hearing out into the dark, searching for the source of the noise. Apart from the crackling of the fire you can detect nothing. To your relief no attack comes and slowly you relax, dropping to the floor, your back propped up against the smooth stone of the Mess Hall's western wall. Alone in this wide chamber you must now decide what to do next.

Will you;

Search the Mess Hall for useful articles? If so turn to section 90.

Search the Kitchen for useful articles? If so turn to section 22.

Try the door in the western wall? If so turn to section 237.

Try the door in the northern wall? If so turn to section 136.



4

In the shadows you wait, but there is nothing here. Your goal lies somewhere in either of these two directions. Looking around you see nothing of interest and move on.

Will you go east and try the large metal door? If this is your choice turn to section 201. If you would rather go west and see if the Mess Hall is indeed deserted turn to section 69.

5

The fight with the Hresh is short and bloody. The creature's wounds and the slick greasy surface of the Kitchen's floor allow a quick end to the combat. With its body sprawled on the dirty marble tiles you turn and retrieve the leg of meat.

For a moment you stop and listen for the sounds of any approaching danger but hear nothing except the now subdued crackling of the Mess Hall fire. You decide it will be prudent to sit for a short while in the shadows of the Kitchen and rest. Looking more closely at the meat you see it is fresh and well cooked, and it is not hard to succumb to the temptation of eating it straight away. It tastes good and you finish it feeling much better. (If needed restore 6 extra points to your endurance rating. Remember you cannot exceed your maximum endurance rating though).

After cleaning your hands on a small piece of cloth you pull yourself to your feet and carefully make your way back into the chaos of the main Mess Hall. It is time to move on.

If you have not already done so, will you search the Mess Hall for useful articles? If so turn to section 90. If you would rather try the door in the far western wall turn to section 237. If however, the door in the far northern wall seems a better option turn to section 136.

6

In the half-light of the passageway you follow its reach further into the mountain. Although you have found Morgen's Spear you come to a point where you begin to consider if there is any purpose to going further. In the close confines of the corridor there seems little to be gained, the way ahead appears to go nowhere and for a moment you

pause, thinking carefully on whether you should turn around and go back. In the quiet you turn, then hear something that sounds like snoring. It is deep and muffled but definitely coming from somewhere ahead. Quickly you move forward and find some thirty metres further along another turn in the passage, this time to the east.

What confronts you as you make the corner however, is surprising to say the least. The back of a large tapestry hangs over what should be the exit from the passage. From the way it is hanging it appears that it has been nailed crudely to the wall to cover the hole. A now clear snoring sound emanates from the room beyond and the smell of rancid meat is almost overpowering. Carefully pulling a small part of the tapestry aside a few finger widths you survey the room. It is well lit even though it is difficult to see exactly where the light is coming from. One look tells you that the room is furnished as a soldier's personal quarters. A bed lies in one corner, a set of drawers in the other. There is a heavy weapon and armour rack near the door, and a large wooden chest that appears to provide a double service as a table as well. An encrusted bowl of something like green mud rests upon it, next to a half-eaten loaf of stale bread.

On the bed, in a deep sleep, is the largest Hresh Warrior you have ever seen. Carefully you pull the tapestry together and decide what you should do next.

Will you return down the passage to the Armoury? If you consider this the best course turn to section 147. If you would rather try to sneak through the Hresh's quarters without waking him, turn to section 181. If however, you would rather kill the Hresh while he is asleep and search his room, turn to section 72.

7

Stepping carefully around the debris that covers the floor of the King's Hall you progress steadily northwards. As you move forward it becomes apparent that a number of doors and passageways run from the hall; these can be seen far ahead at the edge of the reach of your dim lantern. Abruptly however, your progress stops at the base of an enormous mound of old tapestries, and by the unexpected sounds of snoring emanating from them.

Edging closer to the sound you see a small Morg fast asleep on the rotting cloth. He is deep in slumber but is cradling a wicked looking

shortsword. You decide it best to try and quietly get past him and continue on.

If you possess the Stealth skill turn to section 418. If you do not, test your luck attribute. If you are successful turn to section 121. If you fail this test turn to section 139

8

Staggering under the load of the Sempaca calf the Hresh struggle to make the stairs. There are eight of the warriors in the hunting band and they seem well pleased with their catch, but it is only a moment before one of the Hordim raises its head and sees you.

To stay where you are will mean a certain death. There are only two options open to you. The first is to make a run for the trees, the second to take your chances in Stoneholme itself. If you believe the trees are a better option turn to section 502. If you would rather make for the entrance to Stoneholme turn to section 519.

9

The lever is very stiff, its workings rusted and jammed by a century of neglect. After some effort however, you are able to fully depress the lever. At first nothing happens, but as you stand waiting you begin to feel a slight vibration in the floor that suggests some ancient mechanism is slowly returning to life. The tremor continues to grow until, with a major grinding sound, the tapestry covering the northern wall is lifted upwards by the movement of a hidden stone door behind. To your surprise you now stand before an entryway to a long stone tunnel.

Quickly gathering as many of the torches as you can reach you move cautiously into the darkness beyond. (Record that you now have 3 torches in your possession. For the purposes of determining your carry load these torches should be recorded as a single item.) Roughly hewn from the rock of the mountain the tunnel is circular in cross-section and very damp. Your torch is constantly in danger of being extinguished by the large amount of water dripping from the roof, however the tunnel presents you with greater difficulties than this. Dirt and rubbish is piled up against the sides of the passage, so much

so that in some places the way ahead is almost blocked. Everywhere about you hangs the smell of death and decay, the stench a sickly fog that clings to your skin like grasping fingers.

Against these piles of refuse you push and climb your way forward, following the passage as it delves further into the mountain. When the way finally becomes clearer you notice also that you are slowly descending, the floor sloping slightly as you continue. Within this dark world of rotting garbage and overpowering stench you struggle onwards, sure that the tunnel is no dead end. It has been delved for a purpose but that purpose remains hidden from you. All you can be sure of is that you are traveling far deeper into the mountain than you would have ever expected. As the angle of the floor steepens you find keeping your footing becomes more and more difficult.

Turn to section 129.

10

The relentless and vicious onslaught of the warrior is too much for you. Unable to pierce its armoured hide you find it impossible to cause it any significant harm. A powerful swing of the huge axe slices deeply into your side and you fall, mortally wounded. Your life slips away as you lay on the stone floor. The Hresh Warrior raises his axe for one final blow and with its fall you descend into oblivion. Perhaps in another life you will have more success.

THE END

11

The pewter mug hits the floor and bounces into the far corner where the liquid drains out onto the dust covered stone. As you do a final sweep of the room, carefully checking that you have missed nothing of importance, you can't help but notice the way the liquid is eating into the bare rock. Only the Fates could know what such a vile concoction must have been doing to the Hordim.

Reaching the door in the northern wall you stand for a moment and listen to the sounds that come from beyond. They seem to be receding so you carefully place your shoulder against its timbers and attempt

to push the door. The door is heavy but unlocked, and it opens easily. Leaving the Armoury behind you enter a further passageway that leads north. Without hesitation you move on.

Turn to section 54.

12

It takes only a short time to reach the end of this passageway, the finely carved walls giving way to the even more ornately carved stonework of another vaulted chamber. This open space serves as a junction for three passages, and the threshold to a single massive door that stands set into its eastern wall. To the north and south corridors reach into darkness and behind you the western passage rings to the sounds of your pursuit. Quickly you take to the northern hall but find it has been blocked by a deliberate collapse of its ceiling. With no way to take in that direction you try the southern passage but find it also has been blocked, a series of large roofing stones having been removed to bring down the ceiling there as well. Behind you the Hordim draw dangerously closer and with nowhere else to go you look then to the doorway.

Made of solid oak and standing over three metres tall it is set within a broad stone arch. Above the doorway is carved the crest of the Dwarvendim noble families and inscribed upon its keystone the words "Royal Library". The door is not locked, but it is stiff from misuse and it takes a moment to prise it open enough to gain entry. Squeezing yourself between the doorway and the stone threshold, you force your way into the library then close the door. On this side of the entrance you find a metal locking bolt and thanking Providence you slide it securely into its seating in the stone arch. Apart from the door's own lock there is also a wide wooden beam that can be placed across the door and then set firmly into two solid metal clamps. You use this to secure the door even further.

Feeling slightly safer with this barrier between yourself and your pursuers you study your new surroundings. The Royal Library is a large circular chamber roughly thirty metres in diameter. Consisting of two levels and capped by a high domed ceiling, the splintered remains of shelves line every wall, all once intended to hold hundreds of books but now dust covered and worm eaten. Above you the ceiling curves upwards, itself a continuous mosaic of polished tiles, representing all the disciplines of learned endeavour pursued by the

old Stone Kingdoms. At the roof's peak a heavy iron chain hangs down, its cobwebbed links supporting a huge rusting chandelier from which the remains of dozens of candles still ooze over their holders. Within this quiet chamber you find also a number of reading desks, though they are damaged and unused. No books appear to have survived the habitation of the Hordim. In their place you find dust and debris now the main feature.

Carefully you do a quick search of the Library but discover to your dismay that there is no way out. The locked door is the only exit from the Library. You are trapped in a dead-end of your own making.

Will you rest for a moment and see what fate may bring? If so turn to section 106. If you would rather re-open the door and see if you can find another way turn to section 65. If however, you think it better to search the room for secret exits turn to section 103.

13

The dead end in the southern passage is only a short distance from the ventilation grill. Dropping your equipment and backpack you search the rock walls for any sign of a secret door. It is a fruitless search, the dead end proving to be just that. Shouldering your pack you head north back up the passage towards the junction.

If you wish to investigate the western passage turn to section 64. If you wish to investigate the eastern passage turn to section 207.

14

Not wishing to risk any further noise in an attempt to force open the door you quickly move back to the junction in the King's Hall.

If you wish to go north, turn to section 7. If you wish to try the eastern door turn to section 57.



15

You are at the northern end of the King's Hall, your lantern is beginning to dim and you need to find an exit. From somewhere in the distance you can hear movement, the ominous sounds of something large moving carefully towards you. You feel altogether too exposed out here in this great Hall.

If you have not already done so, will you;

Enter the first door in the western wall? If so turn to section 173.

Try the second door in the western wall? If so turn to section 77.

Enter the larger door cut into the eastern wall? If so turn to section 58.

Enter the small open room at the end of the hall? If so turn to section 199.

16

Lighter for not having the weight of your backpack or weapons, you sail easily across the slab and land successfully on the other side. Pausing only for a moment to determine if your jump has provoked any unwanted curiosity you shoulder your pack again, pick up your weapons, and move forward up the passage the short distance to the east-west junction.

The lighting in the larger passage is much better and you notice that most of the tapestries and decorations remain in place, unmolested by the Hordim but suffering the effects of age and a lack of care. There is little else to see except for the tracks of many large creatures scattered along the corridor. Carefully you take a position at the edge of the passage and consider where your emergence from the ventilation grill has left you. The corridor here extends to the west and east but you do not have the advantage of the shadows to veil your passing. It is a circumstance that has your hand grasping the hilt of your blade all the firmer. More than anything else you notice that there is a heavy smell of something pungent in the air. Whether it is the mustiness of rotting cloth or the distant hint of ash is too difficult to tell.

Having decided to go east you turn right at the junction and move forward. At your back you hear the clamour of what sounds like fighting from the western passage. You think to yourself that only a fool would venture towards such obvious danger.

Turn to section 212.

17

No sooner do you turn the corner of the passage when the first door opens wide and out steps a Hresh, his body covered in ash and soot, his arms loaded with charcoal. His surprise is as great as your own, and you both stand dumbly for a moment before the creature lets out a great shout and disappears in a cloud of charcoal. When the black ash and dust clears the Hresh has drawn a short sword from its belt. By his side is the Mutan guard, his spear levelled at your throat and a menacing look upon its alien face.

In the confines of the passage you must fight the Hresh and Mutan one after the other. The Hresh has a Combat Value of 16, and an endurance of 14. The Mutan has a CV of 15 and an endurance of 10. If you are victorious turn to section 175. If you die then it is here that your quest ends. With better luck you may succeed in a latter life.

18

Not wishing to burden yourself with any more equipment you decide to try your luck and leave the lantern behind. Peering into the gathering darkness ahead you continue slowly northwards up the hall. You do not go far before you hear the disciplined tramping of heavy boots behind you. It is the unmistakable sound of a large band of creatures moving quickly from the Imperial Entrance, and they are moving directly towards your position in the Hall.

Hampered by the darkness you scramble into the piles of nameless rubbish looking for a hiding spot. As the patrol gets closer you start to sweat, it is well known that all creatures of the Horde can see effectively in the dark. You do not relish the thought of fighting a large group of them under these conditions. It is not your idea of a fair fight.

Just as you believe that you are about to be discovered you find a place of concealment behind a discarded metal drum. The remnants of the drums contents smell putrid of decay but you are glad for the opportunity to hide. Hardly breathing, laying motionless as the band passes, you recognise them as Hresh warriors, the dull green glow of their eyes in the darkness instantly identifiable as they scan every part of the Hall on their patrol. You do not dare move again until the Hresh patrol has passed into the gloom and the sound of their footsteps has gone.

Getting up from the floor you wipe a layer of greasy clinging liquid

from your chest and determine that a light of some sort is necessary. If you come across any of the Hordim again, you think, it would be better that you could at least see them. Using the faint glow of the entranceway far behind, you pick your way back to the pile of lanterns and torches and kneel to pick the lantern up.

Turn to section 71.

19

There can be no doubt that this Hordim will be a difficult foe to overcome. The creature is muscular, well equipped and moves with a fluidity that conveys great agility. He will be a difficult adversary but in these close confines there is a chance that the Shimmera can be used against him.

If you wish to attempt to use the Shimmera against this Hordim test your intuition attribute. If you are successful turn to section 419. If you are unsuccessful this skill cannot help you at this time. It will be instead to your skill of arms that you must look for victory. The Hresh has a combat value of 17 and an endurance of 17. If you defeat the Hresh turn to section 188. If you are defeated by the creature then here your quest ends. Perhaps in another life you will find greater success.



20

The Berserker's attack is furious. Wielding its huge sword it strikes relentlessly, oblivious to its wounds and untiring in its assault. Slowly however, you wear down the ferocity of its attack. You match your skill and intelligence against its mindless aggression and slowly you prevail. Finally your sword pierces its tough skin, the blade disappearing to its hilt in the creature's corporeal body. Staggering backwards the Berserker screams its last breath then falls to the cold floor of the chamber. Within seconds it returns to vapour and is no more.

Fatigue and relief wash over you as you squat limply in the centre of the room. You make a mental note to think twice before opening any more chests in this place. With the Berserker gone, and the Hresh dead only a short distance away you decide to move on. A quick look in the now non-threatening box reveals only a small book written in the ancient language of Haer'al. You place it in your sack and move to the door in the eastern wall. A large metal rod holds the door secure from the inside but it takes only a moment to remove it and open the door.

You have found an ancient spellbook known as the "Teth Ellandra". Although it is scribed in Haer'al rather than one of the common tongues of the Four Nations it should still fetch a decent price in the markets at Das Nephrim. Record this on your character sheet and turn to section 100.

21

As you run for the eastern exit you hear the door at the other end of the Hall splinter and break. Turning towards the noise you see a number of Hresh, Morg and Jotun forcing their way into the meeting hall. They are tearing the door apart with their bare hands. With your heart racing you slam the eastern door shut and notice a heavy locking device secured to its back. Giving thanks to Providence yet again you ram the bolt home. There will be no going back.

Turning to your only possible route of escape you survey the passageway ahead. It is a short tunnel with rough rounded walls and lit by a single flickering lantern. From what you can see it appears to end about 20 metres ahead and runs due east. Taking the lantern from the wall, it is not long before you reach the end of the tunnel and find that it does not end there, but veers sharply to the north for another 100 metres. At this point water is running down the walls in a steady stream. Pools of scum-encrusted liquid lay about the floor, both slippery and difficult to avoid. The musty smell of stagnant water is almost overpowering.

Behind you a succession of loud crashes herald the first attempts of your pursuers to break through the second door. Picking up your pace you half crouch, half run through the passageway. The tunnel ends its run northwards abruptly and then turns west back towards the King's Hall. That is what you believe anyway. Too late however, you see the

raised stones on the floor of the tunnel. As your foot falls heavily on the first of the stones a trigger device snaps in the wall to your right. One of the Horde's traps has been sprung.

Test you agility and luck attribute. If you are successful with both of these tests turn to section 127. If you are not successful with either one of these tests turn to section 101.

22

Moving into the kitchen area of the Mess Hall you recoil in disgust at the absolute filth layering its every surface. Only a eighth the size of the main hall it is covered from floor to roof in mould, rotting food and the scattered remains of the Hordims' fetid carcasses. In some places vegetables have begun to grow in the accumulated scum. In others, eating utensils have been piled high in sticky oozing heaps only slightly distinguishable from the crud that surrounds them. You smile at the thought that the creatures may very well succeed in poisoning themselves, the lack of hygiene seems positively lethal.

From a quick inspection in the half-light of the fire there seems no reason to remain and you turn to go out. It is then that you spy the leg of fresh-looking meat that hangs from the roof in the north-eastern corner of the Kitchen. It is on a hook near the entranceway. The meat appears to be fit for eating, and as you can always use extra provisions you decide to retrieve it. Pulling an unbroken chair over to the corner, you stand on it in the hope that you might reach the hook from which it hangs. As you place your hand on the back of the chair to steady yourself another hand darts out and grabs yours by the forearm. Startled, you jump from the chair. The hand is attached to an old Hresh dressed in a dark leather apron. He is desperately trying to pull himself out of a pile of accumulated refuse and sludge. From the bruising and other wounds about his face it looks as if he has been the victim of a beating, and in the gloom he has not yet realised that you are not one of his compatriots.

Turn to section 73.



23

As you turn around after closing the northern door of the Mess Hall you are confronted by the dark, silent bulk of the Jotun Chieftain, obviously just returned from his errand. Silhouetted in the flickering light of the fireplace he appears enormous and malevolent.

"What are you doing?" the Jotun asks quietly in perfect Dwarvendim, his warhammer balanced lightly in his huge arms.

"If you please master," you respond, "I was sent by the Mutan Yose to attend to the cleaning of the Great Hall". It is a lame attempt at deception, but under the circumstances you really can't think of anything better.

The Jotun's face breaks out in a cruel smile. "Nice try, stone-eater, but this is no place for vehmin like you. Tell me though, are you alone or are there more of your ilk skulking in the shadows?"

You smile back at the giant brute and shrug your shoulders. "I believe that is a question that will have to remain unanswered. Indeed it will be something you will still be wondering about when you die."

The Jotun laughs but there is no humour in it. Any opportunity for talk has passed and instead the huge warrior begins to slowly move towards you. You notice immediately how fluid its movements are, the Jotun both powerful and agile regardless of its enormous size. Raising your weapon you realise this Hordim believes it is about to have a bit of fun; like a cat playing with a mouse before it kills. You have other ideas though. This is not the first time you've been called a stone-eater and it is starting to annoy you considerably. You think that you may very well have to teach this Hordim some manners.

Suddenly the Jotun raises its enormous warhammer above its head and charges towards you. Tables, chairs and other debris are scattered like leaves in the wind as the giant bears down upon you.

You cannot avoid this fight. In this part of the Mess the Shimmera will not work so you must defend yourself with your weapon and a measure of good luck. The Jotun has a combat value of 19 and an endurance rating of 18. If you defeat the Jotun turn to section 89. If you are killed then your quest will end here in the debris and filth of the Mess Hall. Hopefully in a latter life you will be more successful.



24

After a moments thought you decide not to risk pushing the stone. Apart from any other possibility there is the chance that it could well be a trap. You consider it wiser to keep to the passageway and instead make a decision on which way you should now go.

Will you go west towards the Mess Hall? If this is your choice turn to section 69. If you would rather go east towards the large metal door turn instead to section 201.

25

The room is filthy, every exposed surface covered in the thick black soot and no doubt a by-product of the charcoal oven. Quickly you make for the end of the room in the hope that there may be something useful to be found. Amongst the charcoal making equipment you find nothing that will be helpful, but the shelving proves to be much more interesting. Cleaning off each bottle in turn you see that one contains a familiar liquid. It is a small potion of Nahla extract and appears to have no great age to it.

(If you wish to take this vial record it on your character sheet. Nahla extract is a powerful regenerative and this vial has enough liquid for one mouthful. When taken the Nahla will restore all lost endurance points and heal any lingering injury. Nahla extract however, cannot be taken during combat. Its regenerative power overwhelms those who take it for a short time and it is best taken only when you are at rest, or taking a meal.)

The remainder of the bottles prove of little value and after a quick search of the broken furniture you turn back for the door. With nothing more that can be done here you have one last look around the room, then move back out into the hall beyond.

Turn to section 166.

26

For its small size the Morg turns out to be a worthy opponent. Skilfully using the mace in the confined area of the room the creature is able to take you by surprise and pulls your weapon from your hand. Thinking quickly you pull your own pack from your back and throw it

at the creature. To avoid the pack the creature steps back momentarily and this gives you the fraction of a second you need to retrieve your axe. Blow for blow the combat rages across the confined space of the locked room until the Morg, unable to counter your next thrust, takes a fatal wound in the chest. With a shriek of frustration and pain your opponent slips to the floor and expires.

Stepping over the prostrate form you conduct a quick search of the room. Only the chest holds any promise but it is locked and will require some effort to open. Placing a spike of the Morg's mace in the lock you are able to twist and spring the hinges. With a loud crash the lid of the chest flies open and reveals a small quantity of the precious metal Azuril and gems held in cloth pouches. They are heavy, too heavy for you to take them all. You estimate that you can take two pouches, one of Azuril, the other of gemstones. If you wish to take any treasure record this on your character status sheet.

Well pleased with the outcome of your labours you leave the room and move south down the passage.

Turn to section 156.



27

Peering carefully out of the stairway, you see that the steps have terminated before a small alcove which itself opens into a large hall, the largest that you have encountered so far in Stoneholme. You call it a hall but it is more like a cavern, a huge natural space roughly rectangular in shape, with high curving walls that meet to form a massive stone vault overhead. Ornate statues carved in the likeness of Dwarvendim warriors support the walls on all sides. To your surprise the floor is highly polished and cleared of all debris. You estimate it must be a good 200 metres long and at least 100 metres wide. From your knowledge of Stoneholme you are sure that this is what was known in Morgen's time as the Great Hall, and it looks like it is now used as both a meeting place and a training ground by the Hordim.

Your entry point to the Great Hall is on its western side. In the low light you can see one door in the northern wall plus an alcove set deep into the rock on that side. In the southern wall are two doors and in the distance you can see one further door cut into the eastern wall. The entire hall is illuminated by the same dim yellowish glow that you have encountered previously.

Turn to section 55.

28

Even as you jump you know you are going to make it. The distance is great but you time your leap well and in a few anxious heartbeats you sail across the impossibly deep chasm. For all your agility however, you cannot be aware of the unstable ground you are leaping for. Only when you are about to gain the other side do you see the crumbling edge of the passage. In that instant before you hit you know that you must land flat upon the other side and use your hands to grasp a firm hold before the floor of the passage collapses and drags you into the abyss. In this moment of desperation you reach out and hit the edge of the passage.

In a cloud of dust and collapsing earth the ground falls away beneath you but only as far as your waist. With your fingers clawing at the loose earth you gain a purchase and pull yourself quickly from the unstable edge, only to watch as most of the remaining lip of the passage falls away into the darkness. Sweating profusely you prop yourself up against the wall of the tunnel and search the floor for your equipment. The torch sputters quietly in the dust and in its light you quickly find your pack and weapon. Unfortunately you discover that the force of your backpack slamming against the tunnel wall has caused your remaining provisions to fall into the dirt, spoiling most of them. If you had any remaining rations only one remains edible. (Record this on your status sheet. This does not apply to Nahla Bread however. If you have any remaining they have not been affected by the spill.)

With no pursuit behind, and no noise coming from further down the tunnel you rest quietly and consider your immediate dilemma. You cannot go back, the way is blocked by both the rift (which you couldn't jump now even if you wanted to) and the remnants of the Impaler trap. You determine that the only way is forward.

With nothing more than an ache in your chest to show for your ungainly landing you collect your belongings and slowly make your way further down the sloping tunnel. As you move forward the passage narrows, the rough hewn walls closing in on all sides until you cannot go any further. Before you the way is blocked by a small round metal door, locked solid and immovable.

If you have the Brigandry skill, and have in your possession a set of lock-picks, turn to section 457. If you do not have these but do have a large key taken from a sleeping Morg, turn to section 493. If you have none of these skills or items turn to section 422.

29

The chest is heavy but the lock proves inadequate. Two powerful strokes with your weapon's hilt leaves the padlock lying broken and useless on the floor. Pausing for a moment you listen for any sounds from the hall outside that might indicate the approach of an enemy. Hearing nothing you open the chest and peer inside.

Turn to section 184.

30

Having seen enough of the bloodsport you have little choice but to retrace your steps back to the junction in the hallway and investigate the eastern passage. From what you have seen there is no way you can go any further to the west.

Carefully closing the tapestry you turn around and start back along the curving corridor. The number of Jotun in the sleeping quarters has surprised and worried you. Even in the most pessimistic assessment of your chances of completing this mission you never expected such a large number of the giant warriors to be present. Under normal circumstances even one of the brutes would be more than a match. Your need to remain undiscovered has taken on a whole new meaning.

Turn to section 144.

31

Moving towards this door in the southern wall you ponder what dangers might lay beyond it. Although it is small compared with most you have found in Stoneholme, the doorway has an aura of foreboding wrapped about it, a tangible feeling of mistrust and caution that emanates from its position in the wall as you approach. Such a feeling is almost familiar to you. It is the sense of someone holding an important secret but who must be careful of who they divulge it to.

In the immensity of the Great Hall your approach the door and shift uneasily on your feet when you realise that it is you who is under scrutiny. It is not however, a discovery that forces you to pause and make ready for battle. Instead you feel the subtle tendrils of something searching you out, measuring your intentions and trying to determine if you are friend or foe. There can be no doubt in your mind that there is a presence behind the door, watching as you approach and wondering if you should be allowed to enter. When you are no more than a dozen metres from its threshold the oak timbers of its substance change, the strong iron bandings and heavy iron handle melding into something altogether different. By the time you are ready to place a hand upon it the door stands as a puzzle, and one you must solve if you are to pass beyond it.

Now made of an unusual stone, it is highly polished and seamless, your hand sliding across its surface as if it is covered in a fine oil. It has no handles, just a solitary keyhole at its centre. Above this keyhole has been affixed a small brass plaque with a number in Haer'al inscribed upon it. The number reads as

:en'kaad'en:

If you have previously gained possession of a key with this number engraved upon it turn to section 75. What this number is can be found by consulting the number list provided with the First Book of Haer'al. If you have no key, turn to section 195.

32

With your throat parched from the strange heaviness in the air you can see no harm in stopping for a moment and taking some refreshment. Placing your hands on the rim of the fountain you lean

over the spouting water to drink. The cool sweet taste of clean water is immediately soured as you hear the sharp metallic click of a trap mechanism releasing.

The fountain has been rigged as the trigger for a lethal rock-fall device. Lunging backwards from the edge of the fountain you know it will only be quick reflexes that will save you from the tonnes of loose stone that hangs suspended above you. Test your Agility attribute. If you are successful with this test turn to section 583. If you fail this test turn to section 506.

33

Before you stands a huge mound of pulsating earth, forming and reforming its shape as it grows and changes. It is an Elemental, a mindless creature created in a time long past and given life for one purpose only, to act as an instrument of violence and destruction. With what passes for a head the beast looks about the room and then stares directly at you, cold murder in its eyes. For a moment it does nothing, then from its mouth there comes a dire moan that sends shivers down your spine. Stepping back to the door you consider your options and surprisingly this does not take long at all. You have no idea how to fight it, or even if it can be killed, but with nowhere to go you have no choice but to attack.

If you have the Dragonclaw in your possession turn to section 423. If you do not, you must fight the Elemental with the weapon you have at hand. It has a combat value of 19 and an endurance rating of 14. If you defeat the elemental turn to section 63. If the elemental overwhelms you and you are defeated then it is here that your quest ends. In another life the Fates may grant you better luck.

34

Your last attack cuts the life from the huge Hresh. In the cramped confines of the chamber the combat proves short and lethal, a melee of colliding metal that leaves the Hordim grasping at its chest. As you recover your breath the Hresh falls to one knee, then collapses backwards onto the straw bed where it lays still.

The warrior is dead but victory has come at a price. Fatigue runs

along your arms and legs as a dead weight, the exertion of your quest taking its toll on limbs that cry out for rest. But there can be no rest in a place such as this. About you the room is a tangle of broken furniture and the strewn possessions of the Hordim. Looking around you recognise that there is a chance you may find something of value here, and with no time to waste set about searching the room. In the course of your search you find the following items:

- 12 silver rials (coins),
- 1 battle helm,
- 1 finely carved battle shield,
- 1 set of leather and chain mail armour,
- some food, (the equivalent of 2 rations) and
- a large locked chest.

You may take any two of the first five articles on the list if you wish. Make sure you note these on your character sheet if you take any of them. If you choose either the shield, armour or helm, you can add an additional +1 bonus for each to your combat value, but the use of either will also require a -1 reduction for each on all agility tests. If you are currently wearing a thick leather jerkin it will have to be removed before you can wear the armour. If you find the reduction in agility too constraining you can drop any of these items at any time. When you have chosen what you will take you have a closer look at the locked chest.

If you have the skill of Lorecraft turn to section 483. If you do not possess this skill and you wish to open the chest turn to section 29. If you would rather not open the chest and instead make your way out of this room, turn to section 194.

35

"Whether it be by intent or good fortune you now stand before the Oracle of the Elesmenedene, Friend. State your name and purpose if you wish to gain the help that is mine to give."

The mirror asks the question in a soft, feminine voice that seems both fragile and utterly irresistible. Startled by the question you do not answer immediately, but instead move forward and inspect the mirror more closely. It stands as tall as yourself, its frame an ornate scrollwork of twisting vines carved in silver and obsidian, and from its

first words now shines with an intense blue light that fills the chamber. Embraced within this azure glow you notice that its surface is quickly being obscured by a thick swirling mist.

"I am an adventurer from the Dwarvendim fortress of Maenum, sent to this place under duress and with only a single purpose before me. I am here to restore the Tellandra and return its power to its true Masters".

At your words the mirror brightens, its swirling mists forming into a vortex of moving shades and vapours.

"Your quest is welcome here, Halokim Vesh of the Stone Kingdoms. For too long the power of the Tellandra has languished in the hands of those who do not understand it, and like yourself it hungers for release from its servitude. Your presence has been made known to me by those who wish your success and to you I give this knowledge." For a moment the Oracle is silent.

"Listen carefully and heed well what I say," it continues, "for I have been given the task of showing you how to defeat the Dragon Windhammer, and in doing so free the pillar of stonewood".

You raise your eyebrows in surprise but your attention is focused on the mirror as a range of images quickly form upon its misting glass. Within its swirling vapours previous attempts by other adventurers flick swiftly across your view. As you watch a tableau of images form and disappear within the mists, displaying the last moments of countless, luckless warriors and thieves who have stood before Windhammer. To your growing dismay their last moments all end the same way, their fate drawn as hapless victims consumed with Dragonfire, their charred and riven bodies falling ashen upon the steaming floor of the Dragon's lair.

Stunned by the horror of what you see you stand transfixed; a strong urge to give up the quest almost overpowering you. In this moment of faltering courage the soft voice from the mirror pulls you away from the images that swirl before you and back to reality.

"To destroy the beast known as Windhammer you must acquire three items of power. Scattered throughout this fortress can be found these talismans; a gemstone known as the Dragonseye, an axe made of pure magic and a spear, created by the Stone Kings and once the personal property of Morgen Orncryst the Younger. You must have all three when you face the beast or you will surely die".

Turn to section 216.

36

The Hresh has about 8 metres to run before it will be in a position to strike. Turning to the second door as a possible means of escape you place all your strength against it but it will not budge. It is as rusted and decrepit as the door you had to force to gain entry here and it can provide no sanctuary from the advancing Hordim. Even before you take your shoulder from the door you know you have made a fatal error.

Giving up you turn back to face the Hresh. The creature is remarkably quick, bearing down upon you within the space of a few heartbeats. As if acting in slow motion you turn to meet the threat and find the warrior's scimitar already slicing down upon you. In desperation you try to fend off the blow but the strength of the creature is overwhelming. With a massive head wound you fall limply to the floor. The Hresh screams in triumph and it is the last thing you hear as you slip quietly into the cool numbness of approaching death. Here, outside the Custom's House of Stoneholme your quest ends. Perhaps in another life the Fates will provide you with greater success.

THE END

37

For many hours you lay silently in the ventilation shaft watching the activity of the Hordim unfold before you. Unaware of your proximity they pass up and down the corridor, many creatures in an earnest search that continues until finally the activity in the hall begins to diminish. As you watch the larger groups of organised and disciplined soldiers dwindle quickly to smaller patrol groups, and then eventually the corridor is empty.

Afraid of some trick you still do not move for some time, seeing only the occasional guard making a regular pass by your vantage point. It is only when you think it is probably midnight outside that you decide to move.

The rest you have taken while waiting within the shaft was unavoidable but much needed. Add four points to your endurance before continuing, remember though that you cannot exceed your initial endurance value. After adjusting your character sheet turn to section 95.

38

While you stand at the entrance to the room, carefully surveying its contents for any signs of danger, the lantern you are holding darkens, flickers brightly again for a moment and then goes out. In the sudden darkness you shake it quietly, but there is no hope of any further illumination. Its oil reservoir is empty and it can be of no further use to you.

Carefully you place the exhausted lantern to one side then enter the room with the intention of taking a number of the unlit torches from the walls. As you step forward you search with your fingers for the flints you have in your tunic pocket. It is a moment of inattention that may cost you dearly. As you place your foot on the mat that straddles the entrance you hear the loud click of a Horde calling card. In that moment you realise you have found your way into a trap...

Turn quickly to section 164.

39

For a moment you hesitate. The Mess Hall appears deserted, and the metal door stands as a solid barrier that does not appear beyond your skills to unlock. There are two ways forward, but as you consider which way might be best something gives you reason to pause, it is a strong feeling that you may be missing something important here.

Such hunches should be acted upon. Test your Intuition attribute. If you are successful turn to section 233. If you fail this test turn to section 4.

40

The furious attack by the unarmed Morg takes you completely by surprise. With the bright light from the open doorway blinding you the creature makes good use of his only opportunity to strike. Stumbling backwards against the passage wall you raise your sword to defend yourself but the Morg is too quick. The pewter mug he is holding comes crashing down on your head temporarily stunning you.

In the melee that follows the screaming Morg throws you to the ground, and even though you badly wound it with your sword the mug once again finds its mark, hitting you squarely across the temple.

Dazed, you feel yourself pushed against the wall, then wince at the sharp agony of an unseen dagger as it is thrust into your side. With the last of your energy you punch out at the Morg, forcing the creature backwards onto the cold stone. In desperation you try and stand but the dagger remains in your side, buried to the hilt, the wound bleeding freely down your clothing. Staggering to your feet you shake your head at the thought that you have been brought down by a single Morg, but this one has not yet finished with you. Grabbing for the door the Hordim shouts out an alarm, which is answered quickly. Before you can take up your sword again a large number of the creatures crowd into the passage, blades drawn but with no need to come to the Morg's aid. Mortally wounded it will be only a matter of moments before you will be dead.

Collapsing onto the floor, you are surrounded by the Hordim, all whom seem quite impressed that their compatriot has triumphed over you. Laughing and chattering the creatures drag you off to a certain doom. As you pass into the light of the hall your last conscious thought is that you hope they will choke on you. And then all is dark. Here your quest ends. Perhaps in another life you shall find better luck.

THE END

41

With all your remaining strength you try to leap the rune-covered steps in front of you. It is not enough. The steps are an illusion covering a large hole cut in the stairway, and as you topple into the emptiness you desperately grab for any support you can find. A piece of jutting stone offers some respite and you lunge towards it, thanking Providence as you dangle precariously above a bottomless ghostly void. Testing your purchase you look down into the darkness and know that this trap of Neverending Deep may still have you. There appear to be few foot or handholds where you have fallen, and it will take considerable strength and agility to climb out.

To make this climb will require you test both your strength and agility attributes. If you are successful with both tests turn to section 192. If you fail either of these tests turn to section 234. If you possess the talent of Strong Back you shall automatically pass the strength test, however the agility test must still be taken.

42

The passageway continues south for a considerable distance and you follow it carefully. As with previous passages you have journeyed through within this fortress you find here further evidence of the Hordims' destructiveness. On both sides of the hall all of the exits have been collapsed, doorways and passages that must have once led to other parts of Stoneholme no more than piles of debris that spread out across the floor before you. Why it has been done you cannot say, but as you travel further into the mountain you can sense that there is a purpose to it.

With each step forward the heat seems to intensify about you. Thick as a morning fog the heated air wraps itself about your body as you move, carrying upon its oppressive touch the smell of ash and smoke. Breathing heavily in the corrupted air you move forward, unsure as to what might be its source, but sure that it will soon become unbearable.

As you fight against the rising temperature you almost miss another door that stands undamaged in the eastern wall. Inset a metre into the stone it has been cunningly artificed so that it cannot be seen unless you are right upon it. Coming to a halt you press yourself against the wall and peer into the small alcove. The door is the usual wood and iron construction but to your surprise it is slightly ajar, and from within comes the distinct rise and fall of voices. Trying to listen at the door the clarity of the words is distorted by the sound of the furnace building in the corridor ahead. Above the boom and rush of the heat you can just make out the voices of a Dwarvendim conversation.

Do you wish to investigate these voices? If this is your choice turn to section 120. If you cannot afford to dally while the heat builds in the passage and you wish to continue south turn to section 204.

43

The door slams in the faces of the charging Hordim, their bulky forms crashing like a tidal surge against the solid timber and iron of the Library door. In one quick motion you throw home the lock and replace the thick wooden beam in its metal rests. From the outside you hear only an ominous silence.

Then, like thunder out of a clear blue sky the door is hit by some

huge weight, the first impact quickly followed by a second more powerful battering. All at once the room explodes with a barrage of sound, the Hordim hitting the door with everything they have. Before your eyes the entranceway begins to splinter and crack, dust and wood pieces flying about the room as a large crack appears along the full length of the door. Sweating freely and with desperation in your eyes you search the Library for any means of escape.

Turn to section 61.

44

Intrigued by what types of books the Hordim might keep in Stoneholme, especially when everything else seems to have been so ruthlessly and systematically destroyed, you begin looking through them. To your further surprise they prove to be mostly poetry and collections of romantic song. All are written in the curiously ornate style of Old Dwarvendim and judging by the publication dates many are hundreds of years old.

Only one tome holds any real interest for you. Scribed by an ancient hand in the language of Haer'al it is entitled :scria'im nar theodura: It looks almost brand new, and indeed as you hold it in your hands you are hard pressed to find any signs of age on it at all. It is as though the years have not touched it and you cannot help but believe that it is a book of great value and greater power.

While you are flipping through its crisp clean pages you are startled by a rattling noise at the door. Wheeling around you draw your weapon and stand ready for combat, fully expecting a Hordim patrol to charge through the door at any moment. Luckily the fight does not eventuate. The rattling is someone testing the handle. Having shut it behind you the door has locked itself, and after a few attempts at turning the handle you hear some rough Hresh laughter and then the sound of marching feet moving away up the passageway.

With your heart thumping a drumbeat in your ears you slowly relax. Silently you curse your own inattention, the book of magic so engrossing you that you had not noticed the approach of the patrol. In truth if you are to survive in this place they should not have got so close. In one quick motion you close up the book, place it in your pack and make your way back into the passageway. Without any further hesitation you continue south.

It may be worth your while translating the name of this book using the First Book of Haer'al before continuing, but whether you do or not is yours to decide. When you are ready record this book on your status sheet and turn to section 42.

45

The Mutan runs around the corner, spear levelled and ready for combat, but more curious in its demeanour than alarmed. It is an opportunity you cannot let pass. From out of the shadows your weapon descends upon the creature, cutting deeply into its left fore-arm. With a shout of pain and outrage it staggers to one side, dropping its spear as it grabs at its bleeding limb. Quietly you swear at yourself for not finishing the Hordim with the one blow but its survival can only be short-lived. If it raises an alarm you will not find any place safe in this great fortress. Instinctively you kick out with your boot and send the creature skidding across the smooth stone. In a daze the Mutan recovers quickly, any advantage gained by your attack disappearing as it pulls a long-bladed dagger from its clothing. Despite the wound you have inflicted upon the Hordim it turns to face you, and with amazing speed attacks...

The Mutan has a combat value of 15 and an endurance rating of 10. If you are victorious against this creature turn to section 518. If you are defeated by the Mutan guard it will be here that your quest ends. No doubt in another life you will have more success.

46

The stone beneath your feet trembles as the Reaver charges towards you. This will be a fight to the death. Almost before you can prepare yourself the monstrous beast falls upon you.

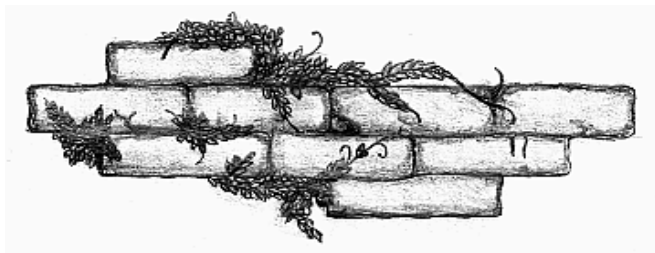
You cannot avoid combat with the Reaver. It has a combat value of 19 and an endurance of 21. If you defeat this awesome creature turn to section 123. If you are devoured by the Reaver your quest ends here in the stifling atmosphere of the Lesser Hall. If it is any consolation you should know that you were very close to finding the object of your quest. In another life you may have better luck.

47

With your hand upon the hilt of your sword you move quickly to the end of the passage, being very careful not to stand in direct line of the portal cut in the doorway. The sounds of violence and revelment seem very near, the uproar coming from beyond the door complemented by a most unpleasant smell that carries itself upon a slight but noticeable breeze. Although hard to discern it seems to be the sour odours of stale beer, rotting meat and a multitude of unwashed and sweating bodies. Just as you are about to reach for the door it suddenly bursts open as a drunk Morg staggers through. In an emaciated hand he holds a large pewter cup, from which a reddish liquid spills down his arm and onto the dry floor of the hall.

For a moment the bright light from behind the Hordim blinds you, and you stagger backwards shouting at the creature to shut the door. The Morg, who is just as surprised to see you, obliges. Drunk and ill-equipped the creature waits for a moment to think about his situation before a blind rage overtakes him. Screaming hysterically he charges at you with no more than the mug in his hand. You raise your sword and combat begins.

The Morg has a combat value of 14 and an endurance rating of 8. If you defeat it turn to section 183. If it kills you, turn to section 40.



48

The first door in the northern wall is more than 60 metres from your entry point in the west wall. Moving quickly towards this exit your footsteps echo loudly on the smooth stone, and you have to remind yourself that remaining undiscovered is the only advantage you have here. For a moment you stop and listen, searching the chamber for any sign that your footfalls have carried to an unfriendly ear. Luckily you are still alone, but it would seem that in this chamber

sound travels exceedingly well indeed. Surrounded by shadows you continue on, but now with greater care. When you reach the door you find it locked solid, with no keyhole or visible locking mechanism. If you are to go forward beyond this door you will need to find a way to open it.

If you possess the skill of Brigandry turn to section 424. If you do not possess this skill test your intuition attribute instead. If you are successful turn to section 150. If you are unsuccessful turn to section 118.

49

The Jotun has left the door unlocked and you have no difficulty gaining access to the passageway that lies beyond. This corridor leads north and as you follow its reach into the mountain you can see evidence of its frequent use by the Hordim. Huge scars have been cut deep into the walls and ceiling, marks no doubt made by the casual blows of passing warhammers and battle-axes. As a testament to the power of these strikes you see also scattered shards of stone and small piles of dust on the floor below each impact point. It is a careless damage that seems to hold no regard for the stone or the Hordims' own weapons.

The passage itself is well lit with the strange yellowish glow you have encountered earlier. Stopping to look more carefully at the way ahead you cannot find the source of the light, there seems to be no specific origin and you have to conclude that it is emanating from the stone itself. You make a mental note to discover how the Horde produce this wonder then move forward all the quicker.

From the Mess Hall door the tunnel extends 80 metres northwards before it ends at a set of large metal-strapped wooden doors. Placing your ear against the door you can hear nothing.

Do you wish to enter? If so turn to section 174. If you can see no benefit in going any further here you will have to return back down the passageway and make for the Mess hall. If this is your choice you turn upon your heel and retreat back to the large chamber. Turn to section 23.

50

The sounds of violent combat are too enticing to ignore. You can feel the blood pounding at your temples as you carefully pull the tapestry aside by a finger's width and peer into the room beyond. What greets you is a vision from your worst nightmares, one that plays itself out before you as a bloody tableau. In what is indeed a large chamber you discover a makeshift sleeping quarters, but all furniture has been pushed aside and a large area laid bare at the room's centre. In this open space more than fifty Jotun warriors are crowded around the walls, and all are shouting and jeering as two giant Chieftains engage in a deadly combat upon the bare ground before them.

Within this melee of noise your attention is drawn completely to the battle, and for a moment you forget the peril that your curiosity has placed you in. The Jotun are huge muscled warriors, their ochre skins slick with the sweat of their exertions and upon the cleared ground they circle each other, testing the reach of their hammers and screaming obscenities as they search out weaknesses in their foe's defences. In the flickering light of a dozen torches the Jotun are towering creatures, four metres tall and with a reach greatly enhanced by the long handles of the enormous warhammers they wield with devastating effect. Armoured only with metal breastplates the Hordim fight with an abandon that is both reckless and merciless. Every blow of their huge warhammers is met with shuddering impacts against steel, rock or bare flesh, and every successful strike is greeted with shouts of bloodlust from the watching warriors. Without question you are witnessing a fight to the death.

As the battle continues you recognise the breast insignia worn by one of the Jotun. The uniform is the same as a number of Hordim you saw searching the corridors as you hid in the ventilation shaft. For whatever reason there is a matter of honour being settled here, and you have no doubt that it will end only when one of the combatants is dead.

Do you wish to stay and see the end of the battle? If you do turn to section 218. If you think it more prudent to depart now turn to section 30.



51

In the formal and elaborate manner of Dwarvendim writing one word stands out from all others and commands your attention. "DRAGON". Intrigued by what it might mean you stop and move closer to get a better view. What you find is a barely discernible line of text written across the stonework. Carefully you sheathe your blade and with a gloved hand clean away the accumulated dust. What you uncover is a message, scrawled roughly over the fine carvings in a dark paint that becomes visible only as you wipe away decades of dust and filth. When you are sure that you have uncovered it all you take a step back and read the following;

"Hail and beware all those who attempt entry to the Deep Vault of Morgen Orncryst. A vile Dragon known as Windhammer now claims possession, and while it lives the treasures of the StoneKings are lost. Be warned Adventurer for deep within its golden prison it waits, coveting its wealth and destroying all who might wish it harm".

"Heed these words well. To destroy the serpent you must have three powerful talismans. A Dragonseye to blind it, a Dragonclaw to maim it and a great spear to kill it. Only with these can the vile serpent be destroyed. With none of them you will surely die".

For a moment you stand and consider the rather dark contents of the message. Such words you have heard before, and indeed in earlier times you would have discounted them as rumour, the product of all the myth and half-truths that has arisen since the fall of the Stone Kingdoms. But as you stand in this desolate passage they are words that underline the danger of your circumstances, and the certainty that the Dragon Windhammer lurks somewhere within this fortress. In the quiet passageway you read through the message one more time and commit its words to memory. When you are sure that you have it all you continue northward.

Turn to section 111.



52

For a moment you stand pondering the strange question. You look about the room for a possible clue to the answer but decide flattery may be the best response.

"With an axe of such power at my side", you reply, "I will strike the beast down and rend the life from its foul form. Your iron blade will part its flesh and it will surely fall".

For a moment the aura surrounding the Dragonclaw falters, its energy withdrawing as if it is considering your answer. In this moment of quiet you shift uneasily, unsure as to what the axe might do if you are wrong.

"No", the axe responds in a deeper voice, "I cannot be used in that way. The death of Windhammer lies beyond my capacity alone for it is a Dragon of uncommon power. To kill such a beast requires other weapons that cannot be found here. No matter your need it is my fate to remain within these walls. If you do not know how I should be used then I must wait for a warrior who does. Go now or you will surely die!"

With that the snow storm erupts again. Ice and snow billows up from the floor with such ferocity that you are forced back against the wall. In the face of the rising gale you know you must escape the room quickly or perish in its cold violence.

Turning for the door you see dimly through the darkness and rushing snow the frozen form of a great Hresh crouched by the doorway, a long scimitar raised as if ready to strike whoever might walk through. As you force your way back out of the chamber you wonder whether the sharp edge of its blade had actually been meant for you.

Turn to section 79.

53

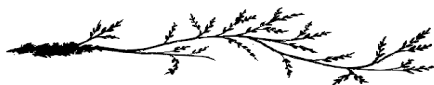
Clutching the Dragonseye tightly in your fist you move out into the Great Hall and take off your pack. In the gloom you kneel against the hard stone and have a closer look at what you have found. The Dragonseye is as big as the palm of your hand, yellow in colour except for a sliver of red that runs through its centre. In the darkness it glimmers with a subdued power, and although you wear gloves to protect your hands you can feel a heat radiating from it as you handle

it. There is no doubt in your mind that you have found something important. It is a magnificent gem, and one that must be put safely away.

Quickly you open your pack, but as you are about to place the gem inside you hear an unusual sound, very much like the rubbing of stone upon stone. Startled by the noise you turn on your heel and draw your weapon, searching the shadows for danger. Nothing appears different; the alcove is empty and the hall is still clear, but there is something close and you sense you should move on immediately. Returning to the job at hand you secure the gem inside your pack, and then replace it back upon your shoulders. It is then that the sound returns, louder and more ominous. You wheel around again and this time stare directly into the face of a nightmare.

Slowly at first, but with increasing speed the two grotesque statues come to life before your eyes. Hideous beasts they are; a good metre taller than yourself, shaped like monstrous bulldogs with long muscular limbs. They wear no armour but are armed with vicious, razor-sharp claws and teeth. Around each of their thick necks is clasped a heavy metal band studded with spikes. You try to run from these Warbeasts but they begin circling your position, testing your courage as they cut off any chance you have of escape. In the centre of the Great Hall you have no choice but to fight them.

These Stone Warbeasts are formidable opponents. Although born of a stonemason's craft these have been animated with a dark power that has given them life. Together they have a combined combat value of 20 and an endurance of 24. If you have a flashcharge in your possession and wish to use it now turn to section 507. If instead you have Nahla Bread and a bottle of beer in your possession and think it may provide help at this time turn to section 541. If you have a small bottle of Nahla extract and believe it may be of greater assistance at this time turn to section 587. If you have none of these items, or you do not wish to use them at this time then these Warbeasts must be fought together as one creature. If you succumb to the power of these beasts it will be here that your quest will end. No doubt in a latter life Providence will afford you better luck, and a stronger sword arm. If however, it is you who is victorious turn to section 559.



54

Leaving the door of the Armoury slightly ajar so that some light will illuminate the darkened hallway ahead you move northward up the passage. The din and clamour of the Hordim ahead is curiously muffled by the the labyrinth of tunnels it has passed through. You know however, that this is deceptive, danger is very near and you find yourself sweating heavily in the cold damp air. Moving up the hallway you find a solid wooden doorway in the western wall that is securely locked. Although there is a handle it has no keyhole or obvious locking mechanism. You decide not to risk making the noise necessary to force it open as it could well bring unwelcome attention to your labours. You leave it securely locked and continue northward.

Turn to section 158.

55

After the exertions of your descent you rest in the darkened alcove for a short time, listening intently for any indication that danger might lurk within the confines of the Great Hall. In the silence you wait but apart from a subtle tremoring in the stone beneath you there is little to be uncovered. With aching limbs, and muscles that still cry out for rest, you haul yourself to your feet and ready your equipment. It is a curious thing but the further you descend into the mountain the more your sense that your are getting closer to the Tellandra firms. You cannot tell if it is just wishful thinking, or indeed the Pillar of Stonewood itself calling to you, but there is a presence about you that you can feel in your bones. It is a rising sense of intangible power, one you cannot see but one that envelopes everything here, and as you look out upon the Great Hall you know it is somewhere ahead.

Hearing only silence however, you move out into the hall and look more closely at the huge cavern. After the close and claustrophobic passageways you have been journeying through the Great Hall comes as a welcome change. From the shadows you wonder at the size of the hall, and the enormous statues that hold the roof upon their wide shoulders. In your people's distant past there must have been great pride held for this majestic achievement, and for a few moments you ponder the effort and artisanship that must have been expended on its artifice. It is a moment of reflection though, that quickly passes as you refocus your thoughts on your quest. Near the entranceway you find a

selection of torches, all of which are ready for use and held loosely within a round metal container.

(You may take as many of these torches as you can carry. Remember however, that each will count as one item to your carry load. If you do not already possess torches they may prove to be very useful as you move further into the mountain. If you decide to take any record these on your status sheet before continuing.)

As you walk out further into the centre of the vast cavern you search your memories for anything that might help you here. From what you can remember the Great Hall had been the court of the last StoneKing, and it had been here that he had heard of the great treachery that had brought down the Dwarvendim, and ultimately thrown them into slavery and destitution. Great decisions had been made and many lives lost in those last dark days of the Stone kingdoms but it is a time in history long past to your people.

For a moment you stand quietly in the midst of the cavern and wonder at all that had been lost, but it is a regret that others must redress for you do not have the time. A sound of falling stone somewhere beyond the Hall pointedly alerts you to how exposed you are. Moving quickly to the nearest wall you consider how you should proceed.

Will you,

Try the nearest door in the north wall? If so turn to section 48.

Try the nearest door in the south wall? If so turn to section 31.

Try the second door in the south wall? If so turn to section 189.

Investigate the alcove in the north wall? If so turn to section 239.

Try the door in the far eastern wall? If so turn to section 161.

56

Tired from a day of successful hunting in the nearby forests the band of Hresh hunters have not yet seen you. Taking advantage of this you scramble up against the western balustrade and survey your situation. Unfortunately there is no way you can return to the safety of the forest. If you stay where you are the Hresh will surely discover you. Grabbing your sword and pack you clamber up the stairs, keeping low to the marble steps to make the best use of the protection afforded by the balustrade. As you reach the top of the steps you can see a depression in the stonework of the platform that looks like it was formed by a partial collapse of the rock beneath it. In there you can

hide.

Behind you the sound of iron-shod feet clumping up the stairs gets steadily louder. Without hesitation you dive into the hole in the stone, thankful for the safety it provides. Crouched in a space between two large broken slabs of polished granite you wait quietly and listen carefully for the approaching hunters. Talking to each other in a harsh guttural Hresh tongue the hunters crest the top of the stairs and shuffle into the darkness of Stoneholme with their load.

As you quickly climb out of the depression you hear the sound of another band of hunters crashing through the brush to your left. Realising this is no place to stay you cautiously enter the dim entranceway.

Turn to section 83.

57

You find the eastern door of the junction closed and partly covered by broken stonework that must have fallen from the ceiling far above. It is blocked also by a number of rotting tapestries that had once hung from the adjoining walls. After pulling most of the debris away from the door you can see a bright light is shining from the base of it. The room or hall on the other side appears to be well lit. Placing your ear against the thick door you listen intently but hear nothing.

Do you still wish to open this door? If so turn to section 109. If not, you make your way north. Turn to section 7.

58

As you approach the eastern door you notice the unusually heavy nature of its construction. The gloom of your surroundings cannot hide that it has been fashioned to withstand considerable force. Made of thick hewn timbers it is bound by heavy metal bands and is fastened with large brass bolts. Although it looks heavy the door moves easily, being unlocked and well oiled. The room beyond is darkly lit, only a small lamp burns on what appears to be an overturned wooden crate. You quickly move inside and raise your lantern for a better look...

Turn to section 117.

59

The long flight of steps continues upwards for some distance before finally ending at a small square landing. Here the northward direction of the passage ends and a further corridor continues on towards the east. With your legs aching from the long climb you are thankful for the level way ahead and eagerly take it. Heading east you notice the corridor here quite different from those you have just left. Whereas the passages behind were neglected and vandalised, you now find yourself in a well made and well tended thoroughfare, the walls lined with coloured and glazed tiling. The light of your own torch flickers against these tiles, the distorted shadows cast by its illumination mirrored as ghostly reflections as you pass down its considerable length. As you carefully move forward you note with increasing apprehension the sounds of the Hordim's revelling getting closer and more identifiable.

Suddenly out of an alcove in the wall ahead a nightmare clad in white leaps towards you, battle axe in hand. With silent but deadly intent it attacks.

Turn to section 221.

60

Surprisingly it only takes one attempt to force the door open. The timbers are strapped with iron but the lock is old and rusted; one push is enough. As pieces of its mechanism fall onto the dust covered floor you can see that the room has remained unused for some time. A thick layer of grime covers every corner of the chamber, and the only object you see of any interest is a small metal chest that sits against the far wall. As you move towards the box you also notice a number of shackles and leg irons hanging from hooks hammered into the walls. The room smells heavily of decay and spattered across the floor are large stains that look disturbingly like blood.

Picking up the box raises a flurry of choking dust, but there is something here that piques your interest. Carefully you wipe its surfaces with the edge of your travel cloak and find that it is not a plain object at all. Beneath the grit and grime you discover a box that has been ornately manufactured, each side a panel of intricate relief carving depicting battle scenes from the old wars. On the lid is a painted scrawl, inscribed as a series of Old Dwarvendim letters,

indistinct in the dark, but which you know roughly translate to mean "Potion of Renewal". Opening the box proves difficult, however the edge of your eating knife provides an effective means to pry the tightly sealed lid from its base. Inside you find a small vial of liquid.

It is a curious thing. In your life you have never heard of a potion of renewal, and it strikes you that this could be a trick, a cunningly placed item designed to poison rather than invigorate. In the darkness you take the vial from its seating and pull the small glass stopper. Carefully you smell the contents and smile. The odour that arises from the bottle is one you recognise. It is Nahla.

All travellers of Arborell are familiar with the recuperative powers of Nahla fruit, but it is a surprise to find it in a liquid form. A quick touch of your tongue to the edge of the stopper confirms that this is indeed what it is. The taste, and the rush of energy that accompanies it is undeniable. Replacing the stopper you think on whether you should keep it. There appears to be enough left of its contents for one swallow, but in its distilled form it could have unusual, and dangerous properties. (It is your decision. If you wish to take this extract with you record it on your status sheet. If not, return it to its box and leave it here.)

After a fruitless search of the remainder of the room you shoulder your backpack, then carefully re-enter the King's Hall.

If you have decided to take the Nahla extract it may be consumed at any time except during combat. Using this potion will restore your endurance points to their maximum value. It can only be used once, and the vial must be discarded when you do. If you have not already done so record this item on your character sheet then turn to section 15.

61

It is only when the beam itself begins to splinter from the battering of the Hordims' weapons that you discover the ventilation grill in the base of the Library's northern wall. Although it is only a forearm wide and the same deep there is a chance that you may just fit. Taking off your backpack you kneel beside the grill and, placing your hands on its cold iron, pull with all your might. It does not move. Glancing back at the door you see its wood disintegrating, splintering apart like dry kindling. As you struggle with the metal grate a huge tattooed arm

forces its way between broken timbers and searches frantically for the wooden beam. In a matter of moments your pursuers will be inside the Library and then you will surely be dead. Turning back to the grill you try pushing it, and find to your relief that with only a small effort it falls inwards. Throwing your pack and sword into the beckoning hole you quickly follow then push the grill back into place with your foot.

Turn to section 168. If you are carrying a shield it must be left behind. Adjust your equipment list and combat value accordingly.

62

As you move closer to the apparition the ferocity of the storm dissipates. The snow and ice settles lightly to ground and as you stand before the marble pillar all becomes quiet. The room is now a blanket of white, a soft glow emanating from the axe lighting all about you. Quickly looking for any sign of the Horde's cunning traps you survey the room. Before the storm you believe the chamber must have been the private quarters of a high ranking Hresh Chieftain. Ornate decorations and tapestries cover the walls, a large comfortable bed lies in one corner. About the room the wind has hurled a large amount of weaponry, equipment and ceremonial clothing. There are all the trappings here of a powerful leader.

Looking back to the axe you appreciate with greater clarity how beautiful it truly is. Standing without any other support on its handle it is made of a pure white material like nothing you have seen. The entire length of the axe's haft is inlaid with fine gold, clear crystal and smaller precious stones. Only the blade of the axe can you recognise as being made of iron, polished and well tempered. It is not the blade however, that you find most interesting. Protruding from the back of the iron blade and set solidly into the unusual white material of the haft is a razor sharp Dragon's talon. Such a weapon you must have. With great care you reach out towards the Dragonclaw to grasp it.

It is then that it speaks.

Turn to section 85.



63

When the combat ends all that remains of the Elemental is a pile of steaming mud, its lifeblood merging quickly with the damp earth. Somehow you know the creature is not dead but it has withdrawn to heal deep wounds and that is good enough for you. To your surprise your weapon cut easily into the body of the warped and twisted earth spirit. Unarmed and too slow to match your quick feint and thrust attacks it fell, collapsing into the smoking mass that now covers a large part of the floor.

Moving back to the door you return to your search for a way out, feeling the edges of the door's metalwork for any possible secret lock. With keen fingers and a knowledge of locks you find what you are looking for at the base of the door. A light touch on the small metal catch and the door lifts cleanly and quickly into the wall above. Stepping over the threshold you find yourself back in the Great Hall.

Turn to section 149.

64

As you move north towards the east-west junction you notice the floor in front of you marked by a rectangle of newly laid stone. It extends across the width of the passage and is remarkable only in that it is cleaner than the surrounding flagstones. Judging by the fresh chisel marks it is either a repair or, more probably, a trap only recently installed. Whatever it is you cannot avoid it.

(If this is the first time you have used this passage you will have to get over this suspicious stonework. If this is not the first time you have walked over this piece of floor you may have been lucky nothing unfortunate has happened to you).

With any hope of furthering your quest laying beyond this ominous piece of stone you must find some way of getting past without stepping on the slab. A quick survey of the passage shows no available rope-holds. Smooth walls and a high vaulted ceiling leave no options for attaching a rope and swinging over. This stonework you must jump, and the leap is at least 4 metres wide.

Throwing your equipment across the slab you retreat a short way down the passage and then, with all the strength you can muster, leap out over the stone.

Test your Strength attribute. If you are successful with this test turn to section 198. If you fail turn to section 110.

65

Without any apparent way to get out of the Library you decide to try your luck and find another passage, one that may provide a different path into the depths of the fortress. To do this however, you will have to risk opening the door then retrace your steps back along the ornately carved corridor, possibly down the stairs to the levels below.

Putting your ear to the door you hear nothing, but the door is thick. There is no way that you can be certain of what may be on the other side. Carefully you lift the wooden beam from its rests and unlock it. With little noise the lock turns, and you pull the door slightly open so that you can peer down the hall. To your surprise the corridor is crowded with heavily breathing Jotun and Hresh warriors. Their surprise is just as great as yours, but a single shout from one of the larger Hordim triggers the group into action. In one smooth motion the Jotun charge the door, bearing down like a falling cliff face upon you. In desperation you try and slam the door once again.

Test your agility and luck attributes. If you are successful with both of these tests turn to section 43. If you fail either of them turn to section 130.

66

After considerable effort you find yourself on the other side of the piles of rubbish that have almost blocked the passage. It appears that most of the debris has been thrown to just this end, the remainder of the way to the north free of mess. Stopping for a moment to catch your breath, you lean against the cold stone and notice a strange smell emanating from further down the tunnel. It is not the smell of mouldy fabric or old timber that assails your nostrils but the awful stench of rotting meat. You have no idea what it is, but you think it probable that when you find the source of the smell you will also find trouble. You will need to advance cautiously.

Forewarned to be on your guard you head north into the gloom and shadows. The light from the Armoury no longer illuminates your way so you have to stop for a moment to ignite a torch that still sits securely in its wall mounting. Unfortunately you can't take it with you, it is too fragile to move. It isn't much but while it burns it should give you some idea of what may be ahead.

The passage is very cold, dust sits loosely on the floor, its thickness muffling the sound of your footsteps as you move steadily but cautiously northward. The piles of rubbish have gone but they have been replaced by huge clinging spider webs that hang in layers in front of you. Each is a thick mat, a new web replacing each one you destroy as you move forward.

In this still cold place the sounds of cruel and violent revelry form a sinister though muffled backdrop to your quiet progress. You pause for a moment, listen to the distorted cries of your enemies somewhere ahead and wonder what the makers of Stoneholme would have thought if they had known what it would become.

Through the dim greyness of dark and web a soft glint of polished metal catches your eye. The pale light of the burning torch has reflected off a curved metallic surface. Lying on the floor roughly 5 metres in front of you is a spear, half submerged in the dust and debris. Moving quickly to your find you kneel and inspect it more closely.

Turn to section 167.

67

The abrupt turn in the passage towards the south jolts you from your thoughts and back to the ever-present dangers at hand. Peering carefully around the corner, and then down towards the south you see that the passage runs about 100 metres in that direction, before again turning to the east. The lighting here is only reflected light from the corridor behind you. Very quickly it disappears into a shadowy gloom ahead. On the left hand side of the passage are two doors; the first about 15 metres from where you stand at the corner, the second some 45 metres further along. Both doors are of sturdy construction and both show signs of frequent use.

As you peer into the dimness of the corridor you notice a Mutan guard standing silently at its end. In the grey shadows of a small alcove recessed into the stone the creature stands, its body still but its eyes possibly roaming the corridor, all its senses on alert. When you first looked down this passage you did not see it but the movement of a glimmering spearhead alerted you to its presence. To proceed any further you will have to remove the Mutan from the passageway, and you will need to do it quietly at that.

Will you try and draw the Mutan up the passage towards you? If you have a small mirror in your possession turn to section 505. If you do not have a mirror turn to section 96. If you think the tall, emaciated creature may be asleep and you want to try to rush him turn to section 137.

68

After a violent battle that taxes you to the limit of your combat skills the Reaver lies dead on the stone floor of the Lesser Hall. Only with a sturdy weapon in your hands did you have any chance of victory against such a powerful beast and the Dragonclaw gave you the edge you needed. Quickly cleaning its blade on a scrap of cloth you strap the weapon to a series of fastenings on your pack. This takes only a moment but you have little time to linger here. From somewhere near you can hear the clatter of heavily shod feet moving your way. Your combat with the Reaver has attracted some unwanted attention.

Turn to section 123.

69

Framed within the flickering shadows cast from the Mess Hall you move westwards down the hallway. Coming to the entryway you peer cautiously round the arched threshold into a scene of chaos. Chairs lay in broken piles, tables and other furniture have been flung in disarray, and everywhere you can see the remains of spilled food and drink. There is a stench of stale beer and rancid flesh that hangs in the air as a fog. To your dismay you see a line of carcasses hung along the western wall, held by large iron hooks and each dripping blood that pools in wide stains upon the floor-stones. Most are the ragged remains of Sempaca and deer, although you do recognise parts of a Kreal and a number of rodents. All hang in various stages of decay and in the pungent confines of the Hall their smell is almost overpowering.

The Mess Hall does however, appear to be deserted. Only the reddish shadows cast by the great fire portray any movement, the space before you open and desolate. Carefully you move out further into the light and survey the Mess with greater care. The hallway

entrance you are standing in is cut into the eastern wall of the chamber. In the north and western walls locked and sturdy doors indicate possible exits, in the south wall an open archway leads into what looks like a kitchen. The Mess Hall itself is very large; perhaps 60 metres north to south and 40 metres east to west. You estimate it could easily accommodate 300 Hordim at a sitting.

In the south western corner of the Mess you notice amongst a collection of crushed chairs a small cupboard, upon which stands a bottle of dark liquid. It is a curiosity for the cupboard is the only piece of furniture that seems to have survived the night's meal intact. Having a parched throat you decide to move over and have a closer look. Carefully you cross the chamber, negotiating the tangles of broken furniture that litter the floor. When you reach the cupboard you are amazed that both it and the bottle have not been smashed by the violence of the revelry that has so effectively destroyed everything else. Tentatively you pick it up and smell its contents. To your surprise you find that it smells of Nahla fruit.

The bottle has no cork or stopper so you cannot take it with you. If you wish to drink from the bottle here before turning your attention to the remainder of the Mess turn to section 209. If you think it will be better to leave it well alone and move on turn to section 3.

70

The open passage runs directly south into the stone of the mountain and you make for it quickly. In the shadows it is difficult to tell exactly how far it extends, but it feels as if it continues on for some distance. With no time to spare you cross over the passage's threshold and disappear into its dark reaches. As you advance you can hear clearly the sounds of a large number of Hordim spreading across the polished stone of the Lesser Hall behind you. Shouted orders and the metallic clanging of weapons against armour sound loudly within the corridor, and a cold sweat embraces you as the realisation grows that there is nowhere here apart from the darkness in which to hide. In the flickering illumination of your torch you stand quietly as the Hordim search but you are not about to make it easy for them. In a heartbeat you have the torch dowsed and you wait in the darkness of the passage for the inevitable pursuit. To your considerable surprise none comes.

For long minutes you linger within the gloom, every sound from the Lesser Hall travelling clearly to where you stand. Your pursuers check the hall carefully but hesitate when approaching the exits. From your position in the darkness you hear footfalls spreading over the length of the cavern but curiously none of the possible exits are investigated. Harsh cries keep all the searching Hordim away from the large double doors and none of the warriors attempt to investigate the south passage. In fact they remain well clear of the entrance. Considering the frantic nature of their search this disturbs you to say the least.

For ten minutes the heavy footfalls echo through the Lesser Hall though none venture close to the open passage. Keeping their distance the Hordim complete their search and then stand quietly. All at once a command rings out and the warriors reform in the centre of the hall, before marching back through the western entrance. Soon all is again quiet, however you dare not move. Fearing a trick some minutes pass before you are sure it is safe to continue your journey, and you do so cautiously. Lighting your torch once again you quietly take a firmer hold on your weapon and carry on southwards.

It is with some relief that you feel the oppressive heat beginning to fall away as you advance along the passage. The more distance you place between yourself and the Lesser Hall the more noticeable the dissipating heat. You can only think that you must be moving away from the source of the suffocating warmth, but find also that it is much easier to breath and you move forward all the quicker because of it. About three hundred metres from the entrance the passage ends at a landing, and a wide spiral staircase that circles upwards and out of sight.

Do you wish to take the stairs? If so turn to section 163. If you would rather return to the Lesser Hall turn to section 74.

71

Shaking the lantern to reassure yourself that it does indeed contain oil, you quickly light it and in its flickering illumination move carefully into the darkness. Within the small sphere of light thrown by the lantern you discover quickly that the Hall lies in ruins. Rough hands have stripped it bare of any furnishings it may once have contained; huge tapestries lay crumpled in rotting piles, and the massive stained-glass mosaics that line the outer walls stand chipped and battered by

the blows of many axes. In the quiet you still feel the power that lives within the fortress, but it is overwhelmed by the more tangible assault on your senses of a blanket of dust and the smell of rot and death.

Carefully stepping around a pile of broken lattice and stonework you move northward. The silence within this giant chamber is nerve-racking, every step you take seems to leave an echoing signature that bounces off the stone walls and trumpets to anything listening exactly where you are. Slowly you step forward, stopping every few seconds to listen for the sounds of approaching feet. It does not take long however, for you to discover a large junction, a crossroads with two joining corridors that trail off to the west and east. Northwards the King's Hall continues on into darkness. To the west, across the rubbish littered floor you can see a large wooden door reinforced with metal bars and studs. To the east there is another similar door.

If you wish to continue north up the King's Hall turn to section 7. If you believe it better to try the western door turn to section 133. If however, there seems greater merit in trying the eastern door turn to section 57.

72

Although it is not a noble deed you dispatch the Hresh quickly and set about searching his room. In the course of your search you find:

- 12 silver rials,
- 1 battle helm
- 1 ornate battle shield,
- 1 set of leather and chain mail armour,
- some food, (equivalent to 2 rations) and
- a large locked chest.

You may take any two of the first 5 articles. Make sure you note these on your character status sheet. If you choose either the shield, armour or helm you should add a +1 armour bonus to your combat value for each taken. If you are currently wearing a thick leather jerkin it will have to be removed before you can wear the armour. Note however, that this heavier protection also brings with it a -1 reduction to your agility during any agility attribute test. This reduction only applies whilst you are wearing the armour, or carrying

the shield. They can be discarded at any time. The last thing you turn your attention to is the large locked chest.

If you have the skill of Lorecraft turn to section 483. If you do not possess this skill and wish to open the chest turn to section 29. If you do not wish to open the chest turn to section 194.

73

The Hresh has been able to gain a strong hold upon your arm, and your efforts to release yourself from its grip forces the wounded creature to stop for a moment and concentrate on your struggling form. Recognition of what you are comes slowly, but when it does its reaction is swift and violent. In its initial confusion it drops your arm and backs away, searching for both an avenue of escape and a weapon with which to fight. With no real weapon at hand it lifts a large scum covered cleaver from the floor and rushes you.

You must fight this Hresh. It has a combat value of 14 and an endurance rating of 10. If you defeat the Hordim turn to section 5. If the chef kills you, then it is here that your quest ends amid the muck and filth. Although it can be no consolation it is probable that in a latter life you may find better luck.

74

The wide spiral staircase is an ornately carved structure that extends upwards far beyond the illumination of your meagre torch. Tired and hungry you look at the reach of its ascent and wonder at the benefits of following its steep incline. It takes only a few moments for you to make your decision. In your heart you know the best course of action will be to return to the Lesser Hall; a long climb up a flight of stairs will no doubt be an exhausting and unprofitable exercise, and one that you are sure will bring you no closer to your goal. The air here is chilled and you can sense that it is towards the source of the heat that you will find the Tellandra.

Before you move on however, you decide that you must rest. Leaning against the lowest pillar of the stairway's balustrade you make yourself comfortable, your intention to relax for a few minutes before resuming your quest. Instead you find the exertion of your

travels laying far more heavily upon you than you had realised and you fall swiftly into sleep. It is a sleep that proves neither peaceful nor recuperative. Nightmares are all your mind can conjure as you lay against the cold stone of the staircase, and it is a rest encumbered with the memories and bloodshed of the past days. To sleep in such a place is dangerous, however Providence is with you even though a short slumber is all you can manage. When you awaken everything is dark. Your torch has gone out and it takes time fumbling within the gloom to locate it and determine whether it can be relit. Luckily it is still usable, and upon lighting it you are able to regain your bearings and then retrace your steps back to the Lesser Hall.

(The rest you have taken was only short but enough to restore 2 points to your endurance level. If you have enough rations to eat some food you can restore a further 6 points to your endurance level as well. Remember you cannot exceed your maximum endurance points).

Upon returning to the Lesser Hall you have two options available to you. The first is to try and open the double doors in the east wall. If this is your chosen course turn to section 153. If you have not previously done so and would rather search the Hall for secret doors turn to section 176

75

Taking your pack from your shoulders you hunt around within its contents, looking for the bunch of keys you found previously. You are sure one had the number "101" inscribed upon it and within a roll of loose clothes you recover what you are searching for. Trying the key in the keyhole you find the lock turns easily and the door swings open. Carefully you peer into the room beyond and find it almost empty. For a moment you consider whether it is worth taking a closer look, but as you step over the threshold you hear in the distance the sound of a large number of iron-shod feet tramping down the stairway entry to the Great Hall. In the chilled air the sounds of movement are clear and imminent. Pulling the key from its lock you quickly close the door behind you, and with your ear pressed firmly against its smooth surface try to hear what might be going on in the hall outside.

Through the thick door it is difficult to discern much but in the quiet you can hear the shouts of the Hordim as they search the chamber. From their agitation you know that they have discovered

you are at large within the fortress but they cannot find you, and your hope is that they will not. Faintly you hear the rattling of locks and handles, and the tramp of warriors running the length of the Hall. It sounds as if the search party is checking that all the doors are secure, methodically moving from one to the next, ensuring their security and then giving each a hard thump just for good measure. The door you hide behind is solid and cannot be opened without the key you possess so the patrol soon passes; a muffled pounding by a mailed fist the only indication the patrol has shown any interest. After a moment the echo of a door slamming in the distance is all that remains of the creatures' passing.

Perspiring freely in the cold quiet of the room, you breathe a sigh of relief and slide down onto the floor. Resting against the door for a moment you turn to look at the room you have entered. To your amazement it is perfectly clean and almost bare, the only items in the room being a free-standing full length mirror in one corner and a flask of liquid perched upon a small column in the other.

Moving over to the mirror you find reflected in its clean glass a sorry sight. Your clothes are torn and marked by blood and filth. Your face is a portrait of dirt and your hair a mat of mud and dust. Although you are not usually one to concern yourself with your appearance you make a firm decision to have a good wash once this quest is over.

As you stand there strangely absorbed by your own image you do not at first see the mirror change, a thin mist forming slowly at the edges of the glass. In the quiet you are not prepared for what happens next, and you cannot help but jump back, reeling with surprise when the mirror speaks...

Turn to section 35.

76

What confronts you on the other side of the doors is a vision of nothingness, a wall of darkness so complete that it appears to have no edges and no substance. Tentatively placing your foot over the threshold you find the floor beyond solid but thickly covered with a fine black ash. For a moment you stand your ground and consider what you should do. At this point of your quest you know that your life means little, any mistake you make a sure path to a quick end. But

there can be no doubt that this is the only way forward. Taking a deep breath you gather your courage and harden your resolve, your foot stirring a small cloud of choking soot as you step over the threshold and move into the darkness beyond.

The heat within the passage is overpowering, but the source of its booming thunder lies very close and you can hear it clearly, breathing like a living thing within the turmoil and deafening noise. In the near distance the sound of some immense furnace roars in the darkness, the air distorting as waves of intense heat rush down the corridor towards you. If truly you are nearing the end of your quest then you will find the Tellandra ahead. There can be no doubt in your mind that a source of great power lies near.

Moving further down the passage you understand why it is so black. Thick ash covers not only the floor but the walls and roof as well. In this strange void your torch throws light about you but illuminates nothing except yourself. Looking back at the entranceway to the Lesser Hall you wonder whether this is truly a good idea. After a moment of indecision you feel the collar at your throat and press on eastwards.

Turn to section 98.

77

The second door in the western side of the King's Hall is locked tight. It is of a solid construction similar to the other doors in the Hall. No light appears from the bottom of the door and upon putting your ear to its wood you can hear no sound of occupation either.

Will you try and break the door in? If so turn to section 113. Or would you rather forget about it and try one of the other doors in the hall? If so turn to section 15.

78

The fight with the Mutan lasts far longer than you would like. The creature is thin and tall, grey-skinned like all of its kind, and proves a worthy opponent that takes considerable skill and effort to dispatch. In the end however, it lies motionless on the stone floor of the study, its fetid lifeblood draining freely into the cracks that run the length of the room. A quick search of the papers on the Mutan's desk reveals

nothing that will be useful to your quest, and the room itself is bare except for a number of boxes containing yellowed parchments and old scrolls. With the heat building ever more oppressive you turn your attention to the Mutan's wondrous talking device. The strange box is small but made of a thick metal that proves far too heavy to move easily. You decide to leave it behind and possibly collect it later; whenever that may be.

With nothing of use to be found you leave the room behind and resume your journey down the south passage.

Turn to section 204.

79

Leaving the door behind you continue south down the passage. At the very limit of the light thrown by your torch you can just make out another large door at its end. A feeling of disquiet passes over you as you move closer and survey its condition. It is rusted and decrepit, a bank of dust resting against its rotting timbers. There is a chance, you muse, that this door has not been opened since the fall of the Stone Kings, and probably for a very good reason. Considering the well kept nature of the hall through which you have just journeyed it is surprising that this end remains so untouched. You know that you must go forward however, the passage behind is blocked by the rockfall and there is no other way out.

Turn to section 223.

80

With the lock released you turn the handle and wait as a series of metal bars withdraw smoothly into the wall from each side of the door. Carefully you push against the smooth wood and wait as it swings noiselessly back into the chamber beyond. Without hesitation you step over the threshold into what proves to be a very small room. Closing the door behind, you turn and survey your surroundings. The chamber is bare except for a single bookcase that spans the entire eastern wall in front of you. To your surprise the shelves are full of old books, and most are in remarkably good condition.

Do you wish to search the bookcase? If you do turn to section 44. If you have no interest in old books turn to section 190.

81

A Pit! Desperately you grasp for a handhold that will keep you from the dark abyss but it is to no avail. Thrust forward by your weight against the door you fall outwards, the strap of your pack caught on your foot as you tumble into the darkness. In that fleeting instant you see a shadow of yourself, thrown against the far wall of a vast circular well more than forty metres wide and lined with huge mortared stones. Into this prodigious space you fall, and it is a drop that no man should survive. But maybe this is not your time to die.

It is only a few seconds before you hit a thin veil of sticky fibres. At high speed you crash through them, then strike a second denser web which turns you end over end as you fall. Slowed by the grasping threads you hit a third thicker web before coming to rest upon a dense mat of accumulated webbing, refuse and centuries of dust. In the darkness you lay spread-eagled against the matted fibres and wonder as to why Fate should spare you from such a deadly fall. Quickly you raise upon one knee and check yourself for injury. Surprisingly you find a bad graze across your shoulder as your only injury. Without a doubt you have been lucky. Where you have landed however, is a question that will bear discovery, but there can be no doubt as to the purpose of the pit.

The air is thick with the heavy mustiness of rotting garbage, and it is a smell that is unmistakable. Whatever its original purpose, this dark enclosed well had once been used as a refuse pit, a disposal point for all the waste and detritus generated by the ancient inhabitants of Stoneholme. All about you rests piles of discarded rubbish, desiccated and dusted from years of lying undisturbed upon the vast network of webs and fibres that you now also find yourself upon. It is a situation that can bode no good.

It is then that your pack hits you. From high above the full weight of your equipment and sword crash through the upper veils, spinning through the air as they arrow straight for your head. With only a split-second to react you lunge away from the falling equipment but you are not fast enough, the edge of the pack striking you in the side before coming to rest within the accumulated grime and food-scrap that surround you.

More relieved than angry you grab for the pack and feel the pain of a long cut in your side as you pull your equipment towards you. (Take one point from your endurance level before continuing.) Carefully you test the strength of where you have landed, however it is clear that

you are in deep trouble. Quickly you pull one of the remaining torches from your pack and light it. What its dim illumination unveils confirms all your worst fears.

Around you is the undulating surface of a huge Arachnari nest. Across the wide expanse of the pit extends a tangled platform of web and detritus, possibly centuries old, and covered with the accumulated waste and filth of whoever may have been using the pit as a refuse dump. At all sides you can see large chunks of the walls that have been torn out, and into the solid stone burrows have been dug that can only be the homes of the large spider-like creatures known to inhabit such hidden domains. Carefully you turn about and survey the extent of the nest you have fallen into. It is huge, the holes numbering in their hundreds. In the flickering light of your torch you draw your sword and hope that the Arachnari have moved on. You are unfortunately not that lucky.

In the absolute quiet of the vast pit the sputtering of your torch stands out as much of a beacon as the light it throws. Within the dancing shadows you begin to see movement, the first tentative signs of a great behemoth struggling to wakefulness. Slowly you see a single creature emerging, pulling itself from its burrow, alerted to a meal that has been a long time in the coming. And for this monster it had been a long time indeed.

For centuries the Arachnari Queen had lain crouched in its hole, feeding on the remnants of garbage thrown from high above. When that food had ceased falling it had fed on its own children until now only it remained. In the quiet dark it nursed a hunger that lived as a constant driving agony in its gut and it could not ignore the smell of blood so close. Something juicy had fallen into its domain and it was not about to let it escape.

In a flurry of dust and falling stone the monstrous Arachnari disgorges itself from its burrow, a huge black armoured spider more than five metres in length, glistening like liquid glass in the reflected light of your torch. With the emergence of the beast you back up, trying to keep your footing as the enormous weight of the moving Arachnari undulates the web. In the darkness you search for some avenue of escape, but there is little enough time, and few options available.

About you the walls are a fractured maze of old spider holes and torn stonework. It is an unstable surface, however it is one you can climb if you think you are quick enough. Below the web you can see

nothing except a long drop into a wide cavern. There is within the dark abyss the reflected ripple of a deep lake, and a possible way out if you choose to jump. With drawn sword you may also stand and fight; and there is always, if you have them, the more dangerous combination of Nahla bread and beer as an option. As the Arachnari Queen advances, you must decide what you should do.

If you wish to fight the Arachnari turn to section 446. If you would rather try and climb out of the nest before the Arachnari can take you, turn to section 443. If you believe that your only option is to jump into the waters below turn to section 473. If none of these choices are acceptable, and you have Nahla bread and beer in your possession, turn to section 458.

82

The look of surprise on the guard's face changes to fear as it flails around in the darkness, desperately trying to regain its feet. Avoiding its weapon is difficult, as it is hysterical with fright, and you are forced to retreat a short way back down the narrow passage, and away from the range of its spear. Although frightened the Mutan struggles to its feet and readies itself for combat. You strike out at the foul creature and as it ducks the blow you rush past it into the opening. Having cut off its only way out you begin combat.

The combat with this Mutan must be swift. It has a combat value of 14 and an endurance rating of 13. If you are victorious turn to section 214. If you are killed by the Mutan then it will be here in the grime and dust of this old passage that your quest will end. Better luck will no doubt be yours in a latter life.

83

Carefully you make your way towards the dark entranceway. Upon its threshold you hesitate for a moment, the huge Warrior-King statues at either side looking down upon you with grim determination as you peer into the gloom. At your back the suns are still bright in the sky and a brisk wind blows from the north-east. Above the sounds of the forest you can hear nothing from inside but there is a strange resonance that flows from the shadows, a feeling of power that gives

you reason to pause, but only for a moment.

Quickly you move forward, your senses alert to any hint of danger. Around you the Imperial Entrance is a tall arching frame to the clear light of day, but that light is quickly and effectively consumed by the darkness that waits ahead. From your limited knowledge of the fortress you know that the entrance opens into the King's Hall, a large ceremonial chamber, however as you stand at its end you realise that nothing you have ever heard has done justice to what confronts you.

As you try and make sense of the vast space that extends into the darkness you realise the difficulty of what lies ahead. The King's Hall is huge on a scale that defies your understanding, and for a short time you can do little but simply stare into its recesses.

Quickly you recognise that the Hall is not one vast chamber but three; a long central avenue bordered on either side by smaller halls, separated by a series of vaulted arches that disappear into the gloom. Each of the arches reaches from the floor as a tree might in the oldest of forests, great branches of stone spreading out high overhead to meet with its neighbour in a wide vault that is almost lost to your sight in the shadows. Between each of the great pillars you can see the remains of intricately carved stone lattices, and against the far walls of the lesser chambers languish the shattered remains of huge stained glass mosaics, now broken by a century of neglect and fierce mistreatment. Within the gloom you can also see doors and arched exits, but most appear blocked, deliberately collapsed by the Hordim for some purpose unknown to you.

In this great space you stand and listen. There is no sound, however there is something moving in the stone and you can sense it keenly. It was for good reason that you were chosen as a novice of the Temple when you were younger. More than most Dwarvendim you have always had the ability to feel the proximity of EarthMagic, and within the King's Hall it is a distant but palpable pulse, one that reverberates through the stone as a heartbeat might in a living thing. Where the source is remains beyond your knowledge, but you know that where the focus of this power resides will be where you will also find the Tellandra.

As you walk carefully into the shadows you realise that finding the Deep Vault is going to be a daunting task. The King's Hall is vast and within its reaches your footsteps ring out on the smooth stone, echoing down into the great silent space as you move forward. Broken furniture and smashed stonework litter the once polished floor, large

drifts of dust and filth make your progress forward slow and not a little frustrating. About 80 metres into the chamber, just as the darkness of the interior becomes almost total, you discover a pile of discarded lanterns and half burnt torches lying against one of the huge pillars. Looking through them you find one lantern half full of oil. You estimate that it holds enough liquid for about one hour of use.

Will you pick up the lantern and continue? If so, turn to section 71. If you do not wish to pick up the lantern turn to section 18.

84

With the click of the activated mechanism still ringing in your ears you jump for your life, trying to avoid a swarm of deadly darts that have shot from the wall at your left. You are too slow. Three of the projectiles hit their target, spinning you with the force of their impact and tearing at your flesh as they cut through your chest. In a spray of blood you fall to the hard floor of the Custom's House and lay still. Upon the cold stone you take your last breaths, your only hope now that in a latter life you will be more fortunate. In this life however, your blood steams in the chilled air and in the darkness your quest ends.

THE END

85

"Who are you, and what is your purpose here." The voice emanates from a rainbow coloured aura that has spread from the axe. It swirls around the blade and talon of the weapon, rising and falling in intensity with each word spoken.

Before a talisman of such obvious power you can see no reason to say anything other than the truth.

"I am an adventurer from the Dwarvendim stronghold of Maenum, here within the walls of Stoneholme on an honourable quest to restore the Pillar of Stonewood to its full glory."

With the speaking of your words the coloured aura disappears but then returns stronger and more brilliant. Expanding out from the axe the brightly coloured light fills the room, spreading in smooth swirling vortices around yourself and then out through the walls themselves.

Within its many whirlpools of colour and light you can vaguely make out the forms of armoured warriors and huge serpents in a desperate and eternal conflict. Pushed up against the cold wall of the room you are transfixed by the enormous battle being portrayed before you.

Again the aura speaks. "To reach such a conduit of power you will first need to kill the vile beast that guards it. How will you use the Dragonclaw to achieve this?"

If you know the Dragonclaw's purpose turn to section 119. If you do not turn to section 52.

86

Repeatedly the Hresh strikes at you with its axe, each time only the quickness of your movements saving you from certain death. Against the force of its weapon your sword has little impact, and as the combat continues your resolve to finish it quickly hardens.

Calling upon your knowledge of the Shimmera you step back from the warrior and lower your arms to your side. In that moment the Hresh is dumbfounded as you let your guard drop, but you remain motionless for only a heartbeat. As the Hordim raises its weapon to deal you a fatal blow you rush at it, stepping quickly to the side as you do so. In that instant the Shimmera takes hold of the Hresh. Caught in a melee of spinning vertigo the creature cannot focus its eyes, and falls to one knee in an attempt to steady itself. It is all the opportunity you require. As the creature swings its axe weakly before it you deal it a lethal blow from your new position at its back. The Hordim is helpless and falls like an uprooted Oak onto the floor, blood welling from a deep wound in its neck. It does not please you to kill in such a manner but you have no choice. The Tellandra is more important than your honour.

Turn to section 108.



87

Peering into the darkness of the passage you can see nothing except that it appears to end only a short distance ahead. Deciding not to go this way you push the bookcase back against the wall then retrieve your pack and equipment. In the silence you listen keenly for the raucous noise of the Hordim and sense that it is receding. With nothing left to do here you move towards the door in the northern wall and test its lock. Thankfully it is unlocked and you find it easy to open. Peering out beyond this new threshold you find a further passageway leading northwards. Leaving the Armoury behind you continue up this new corridor.

Turn to section 54

88

As you reach the centre of the room, the great Hresh jumps from its bed, flushed red with anger and wielding a wicked looking scimitar in its hand. Screaming insults at you in its harsh Hordim tongue it charges. Wheeling around to meet the onslaught you raise your sword, and steel yourself for the giant Hresh's first strike.

You must fight this Hresh Chieftain. This warrior has a combat value of 18 and an endurance rating of 15. Circumstances are right for you to use the Shimmera if you wish. If you wish to do so turn to section 196. If you choose to fight the Hresh and are victorious, turn to section 34. If you are beaten by the creature then your quest ends here. As you drop to the floor your last thoughts will be that you shall return, and this Hresh will not be so lucky next time.

89

The combat with the huge Jotun is violent and hard won. Never have you met a warrior of such size and skill. The warhammer flashes through the air like lightning, its impact against the floor and ceiling of the Hall echoing like thunder through the stone. You know this battle will alert the Hordim to your presence and you fight hard to end the battle quickly.

It is only your speed and skill that finally wears down your opponent to the point that, bloodied and grievously wounded, he falls heavily upon a pile of broken tables and lays still. You however, have

not emerged from the fight unscathed. You have been dealt a heavy glancing blow to your left shoulder which will require time to heal. (Until you next can rest and take food your combat value will be reduced by 2 points. Only after rest will you be able to resume your full battle readiness.)

Slumping against the cool stone of the northern wall you try to stem the steady flow of blood from your shoulder. In the quiet that follows the combat you can hear in the distance the clatter of many heavily shod feet and the slamming of doors. A harsh voice cries out and shouts mingle with the nearing Hordim. The alarm has been raised and you must get away from the Mess Hall at once. The western door seems to be the best way out.

Turn to section 237.

90

Picking your way carefully through the debris of the Mess Hall you search for anything that may be useful to your quest. Apart from discarded eating utensils and the odd rusted coin there is little to be found. As you are unable to move much of the furniture without making a lot of unwelcome noise, your search is limited to what is readily visible. By the time you reach the centre of the hall you realise there is not much prospect of finding anything of value. The carcasses lining the western wall give off a fetid, offensive odour and you decide to make your way to the northern end of the hall and the two doors that provide the only exit.

Will you try the western door? If this is your choice turn to section 237. If you would rather try the northern door turn to section 136.

91

In that instant of realisation it is instinct that saves you. Without thinking you drop to the floor, spreading your arms wide, and flattening yourself against the cold stone. Flying only a hair's-breadth above you the metal darts slash across your clothing, clattering into the opposite wall of the chamber before falling to the ground bent and broken. In the ensuing silence you do not move. The Hordim are notorious for the cunning artifice they apply to their traps, and you cannot be sure that this one is finished with you. Upon the flagstones

you wait, unwilling to get to your feet until you can sense it is safe to do so. It is a fortunate thing that you do.

Suddenly out of the wall ahead of you another volley of metal darts fire out, spewing from small openings in the stone, and again grazing your clothing as they shoot across the room and bury themselves in the door. It is only then that you feel beneath your hands a vibration falter and then stop, as if a great pressure has been fully released from within the stone. With a deep exhalation of breath you know this trap has done all it can.

Breathing heavily from the shock of the close call you raise yourself to your feet, and brush the dust and filth from your clothing. Looking around, you find your lantern on its side but luckily it is still operable. Pausing for only a moment to relight it, you then move more carefully towards the boxes in the northern corner of the room. Opening them reveals nothing of any value. However in the bottom of one of the boxes you find a torn piece of parchment, scrawled in an ancient script of the Dwarvendim. As best as you can make out it says "gael'qirion" and it is a word well known to all your people. In the Elder Tongue it translates as "Windhammer"; one of the many names given to the most feared of all beasts, Dragons. For a moment you wonder at who might have written it, but there is little time to waste so you place the parchment in your pocket and move on.

Stepping over the body of the dead Hresh you walk back out into the cavernous interior of the King's Hall.

If you would like to head north turn to section 7. If you believe it better to try the eastern door, go to section 57.

92

After a short time lingering in the passageway you consider it safe to move on into the hallway beyond. Cautiously peering out into the light you see the corridor runs both east and west. To the east the hall ends at a large metal door, to the west the hall leads straight into what looks like a large Mess Hall. Although you see no creatures in view there are obviously many out of sight at the southern end of the chamber, and they are making a great deal of noise. The sounds of drinking, laughing and fighting are all punctuated by the harsher screaming and shouting of the Hordim. This is the noise that has served as an unsettling backdrop to your journey through Stoneholme. It is coming clearly from this large eating hall.

You notice however, that the tone of the noise has diminished, the frightening energy of the revelry dwindling. The creatures within the room are drunk and getting drunker as you wait. Sinister shadows flicker and march across the far wall of the Mess, projected by a large fire somewhere in the room. From within these shadows you can identify the shapes of large Hresh and Jotun warriors as they finish their violent carousing, and in turn stagger out of the Mess through some unseen exit.

As you wait in the darkness of the passageway there comes a commanding bellow from a Jotun that is answered by all those remaining in the Mess Hall. Quickly the sounds of revelry diminish until, without warning, the strange yellowish light is gone, replaced only by the flickering shadows of the single fire that sputters and crackles out of sight.

At this point do you wish to go east and investigate the large metal door? If this seems the best path turn to section 201. If however, you would rather go west and determine if the mess hall is deserted turn to section 69. If it seems more prudent to stay where you are and consider more carefully what you should do turn to section 39.



93

In the flickering glow of your lantern you find yourself at a junction of the King's Hall and a side passage to the east. Ahead of you, at the edge of the light, you can just make out two doors in the western wall and one door further north in the eastern wall. A small anteroom or chamber appears to make up the end of the King's Hall itself.

Considerable noise is coming from the small eastward passage. The sound of cursing and the movement of heavy stones from within its depths sounds out clearly in the still cold air. As you listen you are certain you can hear at least four distinct voices, and the owners of each resonate loud and ponderous in the darkness. If you are not mistaken they are Jotun, and as you consider whether there is any

merit in investigating what they are doing you hear one of the Hordim moving through the shadows towards you. Exposed upon the open expanse of the chamber you decide that there is now a greater merit to be found in finding a place to hide.

Quickly you find a hiding place behind a pile of fractured stone and douse your lantern. Within the dark you wait, watching the even darker opening to the eastern passage and it is not long before a glow appears, framing its edges in an unusual yellow light. As you watch the glow expands, filling the hall and sending long shadows across the breadth of the chamber. With one hand on your sword you hold your breath as a face appears from the gloom, and then a hand holding a small sphere of blue stone. From the stone emanates the yellow light and as the Jotun emerges fully into the King's Hall the sphere erupts with even greater brilliance, sending shafts of light into all corners of the vast space. Very quickly you realise you may not be as well hidden as you might have hoped.

Carefully you find a vantage deeper in the shadows of the stone-pile and watch the Jotun. The Hordim is looking for something, and as you wait for him to find it you get a good look at the creature. It stands more than three metres tall, and is covered in the dust and sweat of its labours. Although grey-tinged from the grime that layers its skin you can tell that it is ochre-coloured, and owns a long tail of white hair that spreads from the back of its head out across its shoulders. Apart from a pair of ragged breaches it is wearing little, but you notice that its right arm is covered from shoulder to wrist in an ornate and complicated series of tattoos. Your skin goes cold as you watch, wondering if the Jotun will notice the bootprints you have left in the dust, and which now provide a clear trail to your hiding place. Thankfully Providence is with you.

From deep within the passage a loud voice calls out. Immediately the Jotun turns and sniffs at the air, but whatever the command it is more urgent than the Hordim's need to remain in the King's Hall. Swiftly the Hordim disappears back into the passage, the yellow light narrowing to a shaft of long shadows before fading from view. For a few moments you wait, then when you are sure the enormous creature has gone you light your lantern and turn quickly northwards. There can be no safe passage to the east so you must look instead to the exits ahead for a way deeper into the mountain.

About ten metres further ahead you find the going becomes much easier. The last 50 metres or so of the King's Hall appears well used,

there is little debris covering the floor and the floor-stones show recent wear from the scraping and rubbing of iron-shod feet. As you move further along you can see more clearly the two doors that are set into the western wall, the larger single door in the eastern wall and the small open room at the Hall's end.

Will you?

Enter the first door in the western wall. If so, turn to section 173.

Enter the second door in the western wall. If so, turn to section 77.

Enter the larger door in the eastern wall. If so, turn to section 58.

Enter the small open chamber at the end of the hall. If this is your choice turn to section 199.

94

The trap you have released is an impaler, one of the cruellest mechanisms ever devised by the Horde. The floor splinters and erupts about you, huge iron spikes driving their way upwards through the solid rock. Desperately you try to jump for a safe area on the floor against the far wall, but you are too late. The spikes grow like stalagmites from the stonework and you are caught squarely on one of them. With your body pierced by the huge spike you fall quickly into unconsciousness, your lifeblood spilling in an ever widening pool on the broken and ruptured floor. Here your quest ends. May you have better luck in another life.

THE END

95

The long wait in the confines of the ventilation shaft has left you stiff and in need of movement. With the corridor now empty you consider how best to escape from your place of concealment. A strong iron grill covers the only way out and it is securely grouted into the stone wall.

Rummaging through your pack you pull out your small eating knife and slowly begin to pick at the mortar surrounding the grill. Luckily the knife cuts easily into the gritty substance, and it takes little noise or effort to prise it away from between the hard stone and the metal grill. The job does take time however, made no easier by the

awkwardness of the cramped conditions within which you must work. Your persistence is eventually rewarded as the grill loosens enough that you can push it out into the corridor beyond.

Pulling yourself from the hole you slowly stand, the cramps and stiffness of the wait quickly leaving you as you rub down your back and legs. It is a few minutes before you have the flexibility to reach back into the shaft to retrieve your backpack and weapons. Pausing only for a moment to replace the grill back in its seating you shoulder your pack, grab your weapon tightly by its hilt and continue your quest.

Turn to section 172.

96

Knowing that it will be important to dispatch the Mutan before it can raise an alarm, you formulate a plan to draw it up the corridor towards you. It is impossible though, to know how much the Hordim can see in these dim passages. In your tutoring at the Temple of the Suns you learned much about the Mutan of the Clavern'sigh, but those eleven Beings have little in common with the much more numerous Mutan that make up their homelands in the cold northern wastes. You know very little of their capabilities, and with nothing else to measure them by, you have to assume that this can see as little as you can. With luck you will be able to use this to your advantage.

Quietly you roll up the sleeves of your right arm and begin gesturing for the Mutan to come quickly. You keep your body hidden beyond the turn in the passage, only your bare arm waving insistently in the shadows. The Mutan spies your simple ruse immediately, lowers its spear, and runs up the passageway towards you. Quickly you move back into the gloom and lay in wait for the creature's arrival.

Test your luck attribute. If you are successful turn to section 159. If you fail this test turn to section 45.

97

The sounds of pursuit are now getting very close. Heavy shod boots thud dully on the stonework, and you can hear the cursing and movement of large creatures echoing up the stairs in the darkness

behind you. As you are concentrating on your pursuers you do not notice immediately the change in the stone ahead. Four of the steps are ornately carved with runes and pictograms, quite different from the roughly hewn steps above and below them. At the last moment you notice the difference and come to a grinding halt at their edge.

If you possess the skill of Lorecraft turn to section 425. If you do not you will have to jump beyond these steps, and quickly too. Test your Agility attribute. If you are successful turn to section 217. If you fail this test turn to section 41.

98

Trying not to disturb too much of the fine ash you tread carefully. As careful as you are however, you cannot stop clouds of the choking particles billowing into the air with each wave of heat that races down the passage. Soon your way back has been obscured by the dark swirling mist about you. Embraced within the heat and roiling ash your breathing becomes laboured, and you are forced to tie a piece of cloth about your face to filter what is now a choking haze. Determined as you are to find an end to your quest this path proves wearying, the heat and soot an overwhelming assault that threatens far more than just slowing your progress. If the way ahead does not clear soon you are going to suffocate.

Turn to section 187.

99

Struggling forward against a gale force wind that now sweeps down the passage you lurch towards the red circle. No longer an ill-defined point of light, the glow has taken on the distant shape of a large arched doorway that heralds the entrance to a much larger cavern. Battling against the wind you reach the end of the passage and look out into the space beyond. With your arms up to shield your face from the heat you squint into a vision of inferno.

Turn to section 157.

100

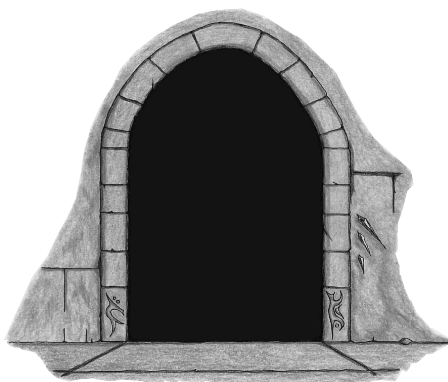
Closing the door behind, you look down a long passageway to the south and see what must be the Armoury. Its door is slightly ajar as if someone, or something has hurriedly passed through. Light streams from the doorway, illuminating the length of the passage and providing a clear view of the way forward. To the north the hall is deserted, the clamour of the Hordim somewhere ahead an ominous reminder of the perils that still lay before you. With the object of your quest somewhere ahead it takes only a moment to decide your next move. Having no need to return to the Armoury you decide to continue northward, up the passage and ever closer to the enemy.

Turn to section 158.

101

The trap you have set off is a cruel device known as a falling wall. Seeing the signs and hearing the trigger device was not enough, you leap forward in an attempt to evade a mass of plummeting rock and debris but it is too late. A large section of the northern wall collapses forward crushing the life from your body. Here, in this damp, musty passageway your quest ends. Perhaps in another life you will succeed. Perhaps not.

THE END



102

Like a living avalanche Windhammer charges forward. Beneath your feet the floor trembles, breaking and splintering as each of its steps slam down upon the rock. Overcome with a maddened rage the Dragon thunders to a halt before you and rears up upon its hind legs. From its throat a deep rushing sound begins to build, gurgling and screaming to what will be a fiery crescendo. Standing there in the red glow of a thousand fires you are dwarfed by its huge bulk. But you stand determined. Amongst the molten Azuril and flowing lava the combat between you and the Dragon begins.

To restore the Tellandra you must first defeat Windhammer. The Dragon's combat value and endurance rating have been given in the previous section. Battle the Dragon as described. If you defeat the beast turn to section 500 . If the Dragon wins your charred bones will be added to its collection of failed but valiant warriors. In another life you may have better luck.

103

It does not seem logical that there would only be one exit from such a room. Carefully you search the old bookcases and rotting furniture for any sign of levers or hidden panels. You find none. Out in the hallway you can hear the muffled sounds of your pursuers and you know time is short. If there is a way out you must find it quickly.

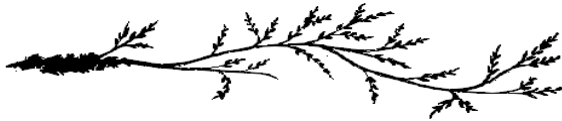
It is as you are searching the northern wall again that you find a small ventilation grill. Only a forearm wide and the same deep it is not very big, but you may just fit. Dropping to your knees you grab the cold iron of the grill and pull with all the strength you possess. Slowly the stonework surrounding the grill gives way and the metal bends and parts from its surrounds. Not stopping for anything you throw your weapons and backpack into the beckoning hole and then follow them into the darkness. Behind you the door of the library begins to shudder under the repeated impacts of many heavy hammers...

Turn to section 168. If you have a shield in your possession you will not be able to take it with you. Adjust your character sheet before continuing.

104

With the passageway blocked at your back you move cautiously forward, torch held high to illuminate as much of the way ahead as possible. Your back and legs ache from the pummelling they received during the rockfall but you thank Providence again that you survived. The passageway is now getting much colder. The faint chill you noticed before is quickly becoming an icy hand that clutches at you, finding its way into your torn clothing, numbing your skin and stiffening your muscles. Stopping for a second you take your travel cloak from your pack and fix it to your shoulders. With each step you take forward the cold intensifies. By the time you reach the end of the passage it is so cold you have no doubt that prolonged exposure will be dangerous. Some 50 metres from the debris of the rockfall the passage turns south. In the eastern wall of this southern passage is a door.

Do you wish to try the door? If so, turn to section 235. If you wish to continue on down the passage turn to section 79.



105

The mug hits the old bookcase with a clearly hollow thud before it bounces back onto the stone floor. Curious as to why such an unexpected noise should arise from the mug's impact you decide to have a closer look. Using your sword as a lever you find you can pry the wooden shelving a fingers width from the wall. With a good hold on the woodwork you need all your strength to pull the bookcase away from its fastening. After some puffing and grunting one corner stands far enough from the stone for you to be able to see behind. To your surprise the bookcase covers an entryway to a small passage which extends westwards into the mountain. Putting a little more effort into the job you force the bookcase far enough away from the wall so that you might enter.

Do you wish to go down this passage? If so, turn to section 177. If not, turn to section 87.

106

Fatigue weighs heavily upon you, the exertions of your journey leaving you now drained and looking for rest. After the long ascent that has brought you to this Library you can only hope that your pursuers have given up the chase, but in the back of your thoughts you know that this is not their way. Turning back to the door you place your ear against its timbers and strain to hear anything that may be happening in the outer hallway. You can hear nothing but that is not surprising, the door must be at least as thick as your hand is long. Relaxing only slightly you sit down atop one of the old reading desks and eat a little food. (If you have any, eat one ration and return 6 points to your endurance level). The food is welcome but the labours of your quest finally catch up with you and with nowhere else to go you lay down and fall into sleep.

Just as you seem to have escaped to a place where there are no Hordim you are startled back to wakefulness by a tremendous impact against the Library door.

Turn to section 185.

107

With Pallenten gone your progress will be slower, but the way ahead is clear and for that you are grateful. The gale of the night has faded and in the rising light of the twin suns morning has given way to clear blue skies, and a soft breeze that ruffles the grasses of the wide plain as you travel.

Ahead is the DevKraager Tor, no longer a cloud-wrapped mirage on the horizon it has grown into a snow-capped giant that dominates the landscape and makes all else about it appear insignificant. Stopping for a moment you look around for a high point on the plain that you can climb. Experience has taught you that it always pays to know what is ahead, and a nearby nest of weather-worn boulders will provide the best opportunity for you to survey your surroundings. It is a haphazardly piled formation of stones that takes some care to climb, but it is much higher than the surrounding plain. From this vantage point you can see all the way to the foothills, and a careful inspection of the way forward shows you will need to veer south-east around the base of the mountain to reach where you believe the entrance to Stoneholme lies. Such a route should take all day to journey on foot

and you will have to run to do it.

Deciding that this will be your best course of action you carefully search the plains looking for any sign of trouble. It is fortunate that you do. Off to the east, you estimate some four kilometres distant, you spy a large group of around fifty creatures moving to the south. There is no doubt in your mind that they are Hordim. Few people live in these wild places and all animal life seems to have fled. Such a large group can only have come from across the Rift Mountains far away to the north. From what you have seen on your travels it appears that many Hordim have somehow made it across that great barrier and have started to infiltrate south. You will need to be very careful. Alone and out in the open you will be easy prey for a band of patrolling Hresh or Jotun.

After tightening your pack on your shoulders you clamber back down to the grassy base of the boulders and strike out directly south towards the foothills of the DevKraager Tor. At a steady run it is not long before you leave the plain behind and encounter a series of lightly rolling hills. As you travel south each hill rises slightly higher than the last and these, in turn, give way to a series of steeper foothills that hide many deep gullies and small streams. At first the trees about you are thinly scattered and in places nothing more than low brush, but as you go further south and ascend higher into the foothills these trees close into a thickly wooded alpine forest. In the cold of this season most of the trees have lost their foliage, the ground littered with drifts of brown and yellowed leaves, broken in places by patches of green moss and hardy stunted grasses. Looking above you see that the last traces of cloud have slipped to the east leaving a bright blue canopy overhead. At least you will not need to concern yourself with the possibility of bad weather on this last leg of your journey to Stoneholme.

Finding your way through the trees is not difficult. You are able to use a number of animal trails and old wagon tracks that lead in the general direction of the mountain. There is something amiss though. For all the forest that is about you it is very difficult to hear any sound of its inhabitants. No animal stirs or ground bird scatters as you pass. It is unnaturally quiet and quite unnerving.

The morning passes slowly as you make your way over what seem to be an endless procession of hills and vales. It is midday before you encounter the solid wall of a cliff face and determine you can go no further to the south. With the suns overhead it seems a good time for a

meal. Lunch must be a simple affair though. It is too close to Stoneholme for fires so some raw vegetables and a strip of dried meat will have to suffice, but the day is fresh and cool, the weather has remained fine. All things considered, you feel tired but thankful that this part of your journey has remained uneventful. (This simple meal is the equivalent of one ration, return six points to your endurance level if needed and record the eating of one ration on your character sheet.)

The early afternoon is spent negotiating the rocky base of the mountain. Its weathered face is cracked and broken, strewn about with rockfalls and flows of gravel that trickle down from the cliffs above. The forest has grown thickly in places up to its base, and you have to make a number of wide detours to get around falls of rock that have bought down large areas of surrounding timber.

Your persistence pays off. Some two hours into your circumnavigation of the mountain, and just as you are making a particularly difficult detour around an enormous tangle of fallen branches, you are confronted by the impassable obstacle of a huge stone platform about ten metres high. It extends from the side of the mountain out into the surrounding trees. Although the stones are worn, and vines and other creeping plants have broken into its smoothly chiselled joints, you know it is Dwarvendim-made and exactly what you are looking for. Retreating to the forest you move carefully around the platform's edge, and then out into the trees to find a spot from which you can properly consider what you have discovered. Amongst a clump of small pines and low brush you find a hiding place from which you can survey the stone platform better.

Through the thick bushes you peer out at the massive entrance to the fortress of Stoneholme. Although showing the harsh effects of time the entrance is awe-inspiring. Shaped as a huge archway carved into the rock, the immense stone images of two Dwarvendim warrior-kings have been sculpted, arms raised as if they are holding the bulk of the mountain aloft. Under these two images the open cavern that is the entryway is black, the light of day swallowed completely by the darkness of its interior. From the entrance a wide polished stone platform spreads out from the cliff face for more than 50 metres, at each corner stands a large statue of a Dwarvendim warrior. A long flight of white marble stairs rise from the green grass of a large clearing at its base and reaches upwards to the stone platform. In times past this marble staircase would have met a road heading to the

east, but this has long since disappeared. Gleaming white balustrades border the platform and stairs on all sides.

Leaning back against a sturdy trunk you relax for a moment, taking in the rough grandeur of the stone entrance and the dense forest that surrounds it. Within this dark treasure-house lies unknown danger, it seems a pity to squander the remains of such a fine day by attempting to enter, but you know you must.

You decide it is a good idea to eat. Your travel around the base of the mountain has been tiring so a meal will restore some of your energy. A rest prior to entering the fortress is also necessary. (Withdraw one ration from your pack. The rest will restore all endurance points you may have lost on your quest so far). Upon finishing your meal and resting sufficiently, you pack away your equipment and, by keeping to the edge of the clearing, make your way to the stone platform and the base of the marble stairs.

You must move quickly inside. Turn to section 197.



108

After a desperate battle that leaves the meeting hall in ruins the Hresh warrior lies limp upon the flagstones. In the quiet that follows the fight you take a moment to rest, and hope that you do not meet too many more of these creatures in Stoneholme. It is as you ponder the Hordim's lifeless form that you spy, at the very edge of your vision, a small creature's hand slowly grab the edge of the door in the eastern wall and quietly try to close it. Someone has been watching the combat!

Not wishing to be trapped within the meeting room you lunge for the door and succeed in thrusting your sword between the closing

door and the door-jam. A squeal of frustration erupts from the darkness and you hear running footsteps disappear down what must be a long passageway on the other side of the door.

With every passing second you realise your situation is becoming more difficult, the creature that has scurried away will no doubt be raising an alarm. As you move to the eastern doorway you see for the first time a large map hanging from the northern wall. It is a detailed map of Stoneholme outlining the tunnels, corridors and rooms of the whole underground complex. A smile slowly spreads across your face as you realise how much this map will aid your quest. The smile is short lived however. A commotion is growing out in the King's Hall, the sounds of swords being drawn from metal scabbards is overshadowed by the raucous laugh of a Jotun Warrior. Real trouble will soon be arriving.

You must move quickly inside. Turn to section 197. If you wish to stay and pull down the map, turn to section 143. If you think it more prudent to make a timely exit through the eastern door turn to section 21.

109

Hearing nothing from the other side you decide to try your weight against the door. Slowly the door creaks open to reveal a brightly lit and well maintained hallway. As you look down the hall you notice that the walls and floor have only recently been swept, and the torches that line both sides are fresh and burning well. You can also see in the general organisation of the area that it is the home of disciplined soldiers.

Quietly moving into the hall you find that it ends in a room about 20 metres square. This room has another wooden door in its eastern wall. Although you cannot see all the room from your position in the hall it appears to be furnished as a meeting room and dining area. Three large tables of heavy wood beams have been placed end on end to form one long flat surface; chairs have been neatly placed all around. You notice 18 chairs, of which one has been left askew such as you would expect if someone had left in a hurry...

Suddenly you are startled by a heavy thud from behind. Wheeling around you come face to face with a huge fresh warrior resplendent in dull grey battle armour and wielding a heavy battle axe.

Purposefully it slams the door to the King's Hall closed and advances towards you. The razor sharp edges of its axe glint in the light of a dozen flickering torches.

This is a combat you cannot avoid. Turn to section 171.

110

In the quiet corridor you leap out across the slab, but as your feet leave the safety of the floor you know you will not make it. The forced confinement of the ventilation shaft still has a lingering hold upon your legs, the stiffness not yet gone, your strength failing you as you jump. Landing heavily upon the slab you roll and then half leap again to try and gain the safety of the other side. It is however too late. Your suspicion that the new stonework is some diabolical trap wrought by the Horde is proven correct. The instant you land on the slab a foul greenish gas spews from many holes in both sides of the passage. It is a roiling cloud that clings like grasping fingers to your skin, and there can be no escape from its deadly purpose. The gas does its work quickly, your body stiffens, wracked with pain and uncontrollable spasms. As you hit the floor of the passageway and slide limply into the corridor beyond you are already dead. Here your quest ends. Perhaps in another life Providence will grant you better luck.

THE END

111

The ornately carved passageway heads north for some distance and you move forward carefully, checking each footfall for any sign of a trap or other device. Some time passes as you make your way down the passage, a lone figure framed in the darkness by the light of your flickering torch. It lights only a small area around you, and it is difficult to judge how far you have travelled, but the air is noticeably colder in this part of Stoneholme and it gets colder as you move further along the hallway. Small pools of water well up from the floor and rivulets of moisture run down the passage walls into shallow drainage ditches. Above all the cold and wet holds the smell of ash and in these close confines results in a peculiar heavy feeling that permeates the air.

Just as you are beginning to wonder if the passage will ever come to an end it veers sharply to the east. As you look down this new corridor there is very little that can be seen. It is difficult to tell how far it extends, the light from your torch reaching into dim flickering shadows only a short distance ahead, but as you peer into the darkness you can sense that danger is close at hand. Moving forward cautiously you can hear faintly the sounds of singing wafting down the passage. It is so indistinct that it is difficult to tell from where it originates. Intent on trying to identify the sounds you stop and concentrate hard in the quiet corridor, but the singing ends before you have a chance to fathom exactly where it may be coming from. Unsure of its origin you take a firmer hold on the hilt of your weapon and go forward with greater care. No more than 30 metres into this eastern passage you come across a most welcome sight. In the northern wall there has been set a water fountain, its cool fresh liquid spraying upward from a life-size statue of a Dwarvendim girl holding a small fish.

If you wish to take a drink from the fountain turn to section 32. If you would much rather leave it turn to section 145.

112

In the space of a heartbeat the floor falls away beneath you. Opening as a long slit in the ground the loose dust that covers the floor disappears as a wide slab of stone swings away. Instinctively you jump forward, lunging for the edges of the pit but you are a fraction too slow. In a flurry of desiccated earth and tangling roots you hit the side of the trap, grabbing for whatever purchase you can find upon its crumbling face as you fall into the pit's open maw. Desperately you dig your hands into the loose earth, sliding downwards until your left hand gains a hold upon the long dead remains of an old vine. Showered in earth and debris you reach out with your right hand and gain a further purchase upon the vine, but your situation is precarious, the difference between life and death only the strength of the hold you have on the withered piece of vegetation.

Looking down you can see the pit reaching into darkness, but within the gloom you can also hear the muffled squeak of a multitude of rats below. There is far more than just a drop here to worry about. Above you the way is just as perilous. You have fallen almost fifteen

metres into the hole, and the way back to solid ground looms above you as a morass of crumbled earth and loose vegetation. You have only one way forward and it must be up. It is not going to be an easy climb.

It will take all the strength you have to pull yourself out of this pit. Test your strength attribute. If you are successful turn to section 574. If you fail this test turn to section 508. If however, you have the Strong Back talent this task will be easily overcome without the need for a strength test. If you have this talent turn immediately to section 574.

113

The door is strongly built but you decide to test your strength against it nonetheless. Quickly you check up and down the hall, searching for any sign of danger. All you can see are shadows and an empty gloom that could hide anything. Carefully you place your shoulder to the door and push hard.

Test your Strength attribute. If you are successful turn to section 60. If you fail this test the door proves too strong for you. If this is the outcome turn to section 15.

114

As you move further down the passage the sounds of combat become more distinct and more menacing. There is none of the frantic clatter you would expect from a match of sword on sword or shield upon shield. This is a heavier, more brutal fight between combatants using metal-edged warhammers. Such a fight you have only heard about, and you advance more quickly to determine what it is all about, and who is in battle.

After only a short distance the passage no longer runs straight but begins to turn southwards in a long curving arc. As you progress further the light improves markedly and the floor shows very recent use. It is while you are studying the floor that you run into a heavy tapestry spread across the passageway. Hung by large iron nails hammered into the walls and ceiling it is a makeshift doorway to a larger chamber beyond.

Retiring a few steps you draw your weapon and await the attack

you are sure must come. Nothing happens. Alone in the corridor you pause, then frown as you wonder what the cause of the melee might be. All you can be sure of is that there are Hordim on the other side of the tapestry, and at least for the moment they are unaware of your presence.

If you wish to pull aside the tapestry and investigate, turn to section 50. If you do not wish to be that adventurous turn to section 182.

115

Your conversation with the Oracle has left you well prepared for the use of these weapons. Placing the Dragonseye in your tunic pocket you bend forward to pick up the axe. To your surprise both the axe and spear rise from the stone floor and float smoothly into your hands. As your fingers close around the ornate handle of the Dragonclaw a surge of energy rushes down your arm and into your body. In the darkness of the passage your whole being radiates power, the magic of the axe surging through your body, melding into the bone and sinew. Suddenly you feel that anything is possible. All fatigue and injury has disappeared, the heat and smell of the cavern has gone. Now it is time to confront the Dragon Windhammer.

Turn to section 242.



116

Spurring Pallenten forward you draw your sword, and holding it before you charge down the hill into the mass of scorched buildings and panicked villagers. Through the clouds of smoke and strewn belongings you begin a search for any of the raiding party that may remain in the village. Between two burning houses, still scrabbling through a chest of stolen possessions you find a Hresh warrior. The Hordim is muscular, dark grey against the backdrop of the buildings, and clad in a loose fitting leather uniform edged with an orange trim. In its hand is a long curved scimitar. It sees you immediately and

turns, ready for combat. For a moment the warrior hesitates as it sizes you up, but then a wicked smile creases its heavy face and it attacks.

The Hresh has a combat value of 15 and an endurance of 16. The lighting here will not allow the use of the Shimmera and it is upon your martial skills that you must now rely. If you kill the creature turn to section 252. If it is you who is killed then it is here that your quest will end. In another life you may have better luck.

117

The sight you encounter is chilling. Spread on the floor of the small room is the dismembered remains of a Sempaca calf, and crouched over it is a large Jotun and a smaller Morg warrior. Both are intent on preparing parts of the carcass for cooking and haven't noticed your quiet entry into the room. Reacting instinctively to the scene, you reel backwards as the Morg turns in your direction and shouts to its companion. For a moment you are transfixed by the danger that you have stumbled upon, but the slow rise of the enormous Jotun drags you back to the reality of your immediate survival.

With your back to the closed door you have nowhere to run, so you pull your sword from its sheathe and stand your ground. The Morg is well armed and clothed in leather armour. The Jotun is searching for his own weapon and allows the Morg to attack first. The creature charges at you, a short stabbing spear held tightly in its gnarled hands.

You must combat the Morg first. If you defeat it the Jotun will attack immediately. If you do not defeat either of these warriors then your quest will end here. The Morg warrior has a combat value of 13 and an endurance of 6. The Jotun has a combat value of 17 and an endurance of 18. If you defeat the Jotun turn to section 179.

118

Attempting to make as little noise as possible you place your back against the door and push with all the strength you can muster. The door does not budge. It seems to be locked solidly from the other side, and has been designed so that no obvious access can be gained from the Great Hall. Having failed at your first attempt you then try to lever

the door open with your weapon, but it is immovable and you risk damaging its blade. For a moment you consider what might lie beyond this barrier, but the door is solidly locked and you can see no obvious way to open it. After a quick, but unsuccessful search of the wall surrounding the door you give up, and with no further time to waste decide to try another of the exits from the Great Hall.

If you have not already done so will you?

Investigate the alcove further along the northern wall? If this is your choice turn to section 239.

Try and open the first door in the southern wall? If you would rather do this turn to section 31.

Open the second door in the southern wall? If so turn to section 189.

Try and open the door in the eastern wall? Turn to section 161.

119

For a moment you ponder the magical weapon's question. You are reasonably sure as to what the great axe's purpose is and with confidence reply.

"With a weapon such as you I must disable the Dragon known as Windhammer so that it might then be put to the spear and destroyed".

Silently the axe stands, a moment of pause ensuing within which the epic battle of man against serpent disappears and the room again falls quiet. Wondering what it is you have said wrong you wait, fully expecting some retaliation for your error, but it is only a moment within which the great axe marshals all the power at its command. Against your face a faint breeze begins to rise, then slowly but with building strength the snow and ice that lay about the room swirls and eddies, until everything before you disappears in the bluster and gale of another snowstorm. Forced back by the now shrieking winds you can only stand against the wall, held fast and unable to move.

Within the centre of the swirling blizzard the aura bursts once again from the Dragonclaw, growing brighter as the weapon moves back and forth upon its haft, trying to break free of some unseen fastening. For a moment it falters but then lifts from the pillar and slowly floats towards you. Hesitantly you grasp the handle, feeling its fine balance and smooth craftsmanship. As your hand closes around the haft all movement in the room ceases, the snow settling in drifts upon the ground, the winds dissipating into the cold air. Placing the

Dragonclaw in your belt you turn for the door and are confronted by a chilling sight. Behind the door, frozen and unmoving, a great Hresh stands, its scimitar raised as if to strike whoever might walk through the door. As you make your way back into the passage you can only wonder whether the edge of the Hresh's blade had been meant for you.

Add the Dragonclaw to your character sheet and turn to section 79.

120

With the door already ajar you force your way through, intent on surprising the occupants. Kicking the door violently inwards you leap into the centre of a room roughly 15 metres square. In the left hand corner a studious looking but startled Mutan sits at a desk, a huge pile of papers in front of it. In the other corner resides a small box, above which hovers the vaporous image of a Dwarvendim LoreMaster in his ceremonial robes. He stands life-size but translucent in the corner's shadows, and although you do not understand why, appears to be delivering a lecture to the Mutan. Unsure of what is happening you move forward to question the Maturi, but then stop again. Clearly you see that it is a recording of some type, contained within the box and obviously the source of the voices you heard from the hallway. Without thinking of your immediate peril you watch the image, amazed by its cunning artifice.

The Mutan recovers from its initial surprise quickly. You do not. The LoreMaster is reciting the history of the Stone Kings and it is a wonder the like of which you could not have thought possible. Taken aback by what you have found you stand transfixed by the apparition as the Mutan explodes into action. In one smooth, fluid movement the Hordim draws a mean looking scimitar from a metal wall fitting and jumps the desk towards you. It is the sound of metal sliding along metal that alerts you to your immediate danger. Even as you turn to face the Mutan it is already moving, the creature's weapon raised to strike.

The Mutan will kill you with one stroke of its sword if you do not defend yourself successfully from this first blow. If you do the battle will continue until one of you falls. The Mutan has a combat value of 15 and an endurance of 13. If you win this combat turn to section 78.

If you are either struck down by the Mutan's first blow, or are subsequently killed during the battle, it will be here that your quest will end. If this is your fate then perhaps in a latter life you will find better luck.

121

The Morg is in a deep sleep, and it proves easy to move around the pile of rotting fabric upon which it rests. You tread carefully and the snoring remains loud and even. It is an easy decision to leave the Morg at rest and continue on. As you move further north up the centre of the King's Hall the piles of rubbish and debris become more difficult to find a path around. Mounds of mould-covered cloth and tangled stacks of old furniture and ornamentation litter the floor. The Hordim seem to have spent considerable effort in tearing down anything that reminds them of the previous owners of this great fortress. It takes some time to get far enough away from the sleeping Morg that you can relax your guard and concentrate more on your surroundings.

With the light cast by your meagre lantern it proves difficult to see much of either side of the hall. The way ahead disappears into the gloom, the darkness of your path obscured even further by the rotting tapestries and furnishings that have been piled across your way. After much struggle you do, however, find yourself near the end of the hall. You are now a good 200 metres from the sleeping creature.

Turn to section 93.

122

Making your way outside you call Pallenten and mount. You wave farewell and turn to the east as the Maturi Len gestures you to go quickly. Looking around the deserted village you see nothing, but high in the trees at the forest's edge you can make out the indistinct forms of three large ravens perched within their branches. For a moment you watch the birds, but they seem as innocuous as the trees themselves, and you wonder if there is really any danger here. It is an uncertainty you decide you do not wish to test.

Prodding Pallenten lightly with your heels the great horse starts forward and quickly clears the village. Leaving the collection of

ramshackle buildings behind you rejoin the track eastward. As was the case with your ascent, the trail winds back down through the surrounding forest as a series of shallow declines, the wagon ruts the only indication that a road existed here at all. There are signs however, that this path was once more than the dilapidated track it has become.



Protruding from the wet earth you can see the remnants of stone cobbles and a distance marker so worn that it is illegible. Once Kal Arbor must have been a thriving community, this road a vital link to the produce markets of Baellum and Miller's Crossing. You are sure that something happened to change all that, but if there was anywhere in Arborell that an old man might pass unnoticed it was surely in such a place.

As Pallenten followed the rough track you find yourself pondering the memories that your meeting with the Maturi has unearthed. It has been a long time since you have had any need to think on your studies at the Temple. In fact you had only been young, barely nine years old when you had been taken from Truvo farm and deposited at the doorstep of the Temple in Das Frontiere. Why you had been placed there had proven a mystery you could never uncover, but under the guidance of the Maturi you had begun to understand the relationship that existed between EarthMagic and the Dwarvendim who used it. In those early years you had found friends and safety, but it had been short-lived and the hard years that had followed had shrouded most of it from your memory. They had been happy times that you had almost forgotten.

As you travel you wonder at the unusual circumstance of seeing the Maturi, and consider more closely his words on the restoration of the Tellandra. At least in this you have found a solid guide to the completion of your mission to Stoneholme. Now you need only survive long enough to utter the words.

After a while the trees start to thin about you, the trail emerging from the embrace of the forest and cutting a more direct path towards the main road. As you ride you keep a keen eye out for the birds, but see no indication that they have followed you. If they are indeed emissaries of the Kalboreans you are sure that you will see them again. When you reach open ground you urge Pallenten to the gallop and it is just before mid-morning that you reach the fork to Baellum and the road south.

Turn to section 236.

123

The Reaver's blood steams upon the hot stone floor but you have no time left to wonder at your deliverance from its razor sharp claws. An urgent shout echoes from the western passage behind you and then the unmistakable pounding rhythm of troops running in your direction. The tumult of combat has brought down unwanted company and you cannot remain here. With the Reaver dead at your feet you must find a place to hide quickly. Dowsing your torch you survey the hall for a possible exit.

There are only a few ways out of this hall. Will you investigate the open passage in the south wall? If this is your choice turn to section 70. If you would rather try and open the large double doors at the eastern end of the Hall turn to section 153. If you believe it best to search the Hall for secret doors turn to section 176.

124

Crossing the open space to the stairs is too exposed to be safe from discovery. Keeping to the edges of the clearing and out of sight of any hidden, watchful eyes you move to the stone face of the mountain, just to the left of the Imperial Entrance. The gleaming sun-bleached white balustrade affords excellent cover as you climb the curving stairs to the entranceway. Crouching low, you move forward and soon stand in the shadows of the massive statues silently guarding the entrance. From somewhere behind you, possibly at the edge of the clearing, the sounds of creatures moving through the bushes alerts you to possible danger. You must move inside quickly.

Turn to section 83.

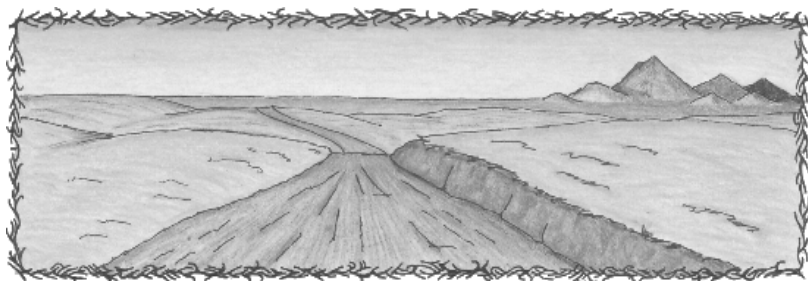
125

The Morg warriors fight well, but with Pallenten's help you survive. Stabbing out at random the Morg repeatedly rush at you then retreat, testing your defences and cutting at your arms and legs. The swiftness of their attacks prove difficult to counter, and it is only the thickness of your cloak that prevents any serious injury. Only when the last of the creatures crumple to the soggy earth is it over. Sweating in the cool of the night both yourself and Pallenten struggle for breath as the exertion of the battle takes its toll. Driving your sword into the wet earth you squat against the side of one of the great stones and rest. (If you wish you may eat one of your rations now as well).

With your head resting against your folded arms you do not at first notice the change in the weather. Clouds have again begun to crowd the sky, and in the darkness the crumpled mounds of dead Morg disappear completely into the gloom of the night. From the north a stiff wind rises, throwing leaves and other debris about the stones. After the rain the gust is cold and damp and soon grows into a full strength gale. Rushing through the gaps between the stones the wind moans and howls. In the complete dark of your surroundings it is too ghostly a song. It is time to leave.

Grabbing Pallenten's reins you haul yourself onto her broad back and ride out of the circle of monoliths. Now you must travel south into the foothills surrounding the rugged Krodestaag Mountains. You know the dead Morg will not be alone. Usually they travel in larger raiding groups and it will be prudent to put distance between yourself and the stones before resting. Turning Pallenten towards the dark hills to the south you begin the next stage of your journey.

Turn to section 244.



126

Leaning forward to gain a better view of the Jotun's tattoos, you place your weight against the broken table and then fall awkwardly as it collapses onto the stone floor. The crash of the old table cannot go unnoticed and it brings with it an immediate change in the Hordim. The casual demeanour of the Jotun Chieftain disappears as he realises your presence. With one fluid movement his warhammer is in his hands and he confronts you, unsure if you are a fool alone, or part of a larger party. To your surprise the Hordim speaks, although he has nothing to say that can ease the growing feeling that you are about to die.

"Well vehmin, what a surprise," he says quietly. "Tell me, are you alone, or are there more of your ilk skulking in the shadows?"

You hold your weapon before the Hordim and wonder why his kind always refer to Men as vehmin. You are sure that it is a derogative of some type and you consider asking the brute what it means, but instead decide that bravado is the better option.

"Whether I am alone is for me to know, and for you to still be wondering upon as you die."

The Jotun laughs and moves purposefully towards you, the look on his face leaving no doubt that he has finished talking. For you there is no help at hand. You cannot reach the western door and the tangled piles of rubbish and furniture behind you hinder any escape that way. Raising his hammer the Jotun screams abuse, a stream of insults and curses that follow him as he charges towards you.

You must fight this creature but in this part of the hall there is a chance the Shimmera may aid you. If you wish to try and use the Shimmera test your Intuition attribute. If you are successful turn to section 427. If you are unsuccessful, turn to section 466. If you do not wish to attempt the use of this skill then it will be upon your skill at arms that you must rely. The Jotun has a combat value of 19 and an endurance of 18. If you win this battle you will have to leave the warrior's bloodied body behind and get out of the Mess hall quickly, turn to section 237. If you are defeated then it will be here that your quest ends. Do not be disheartened however, for at another time you may find better luck.



127

The sound of the trigger device releasing was enough. You leap forward to avoid the crushing weight of a falling wall trap and it is only your agility and momentum that carries you to safety. Falling heavily onto the floor of the passageway it takes a short time for you to regain your feet. Looking back you are shocked as you survey the damage that has been done. Behind you the passageway is blocked by a mass of rock and other debris; dust obscures your view of the passage but it appears to now be impassable. At least something good has come of this, you think ruefully.

Picking up your scattered weapons and lantern you dust yourself down and move carefully towards an opening that leads back out into the King's Hall.

Turn to section 93.

128

The Hordim is dead, a victim of your cold determination to complete your mission, but even in death it vexes you. The Mutan's blood is fetid beyond belief, the thick liquid burning into the stone as it wells up and drains away through cracks in the floor. Immediately you realise your own weapon is at risk and turn to see it also beginning to smoke ominously from the effects of the Hordim's vital fluids. Quickly you grab a piece of the creature's clothing and wipe the remnants of its blood from Than'durion's iron blade. It is not a moment too soon for you save the sword from any further damage, though you cannot save it from the lingering odour the blood has left upon its metal. It is only as you work to remove the last traces of the Hordim from your sword that you feel the true cost of your labours working upon you.

After the long climb you have just completed the ferocity of this combat has left you exhausted. For a few moments you must rest. Breathing heavily you place your back against the cold stone of the passage and try and regain your strength. Over the sounds of your own laboured breathing you can hear clearly the carousing of the Hordim, and it is a terrifying melee indeed. Intermingled with shouting and swearing you can hear the dull impacts of a fight between large creatures, furniture being thrown and in the background of it all a steady chant that rises and falls to the music of

a set of reed flutes. It is altogether too disturbing a backdrop to your progress, but there is something else here and it gives you reason to pause and try to identify it. The passage may be filled with the sounds of the Hordim ahead but there is a vibration beneath you, an unmistakable tremor that runs through the stone that is difficult to define. As you rest you try and determine what it is, however even the stone affinity of a Dwarvendim cannot make out its origin. After a few moments you reconcile yourself to the certainty that if it is a harbinger of danger you will know about it soon enough.

When you feel better able to move you take the time to kneel before the body of the Mutan and inspect its grotesque form. One look is enough. Its lifeless, black eyes chill you to the bone and you quickly throw its bloodied cloak over its head.

(If your sword has previously been damaged you may re-sheath it in favour of the Mutan's axe. If this is your choice record this new weapon on your character status sheet and add three points to your combat value. This will replace most of those points lost when your sword was damaged.)

The corridor remains empty but regardless of your fatigue you cannot afford to linger here for there is too great a chance of discovery. Quickly you ready yourself, then leave the dead Hordim behind as you continue eastwards down the passage. Some 20 metres further to the east the corridor turns abruptly northwards. A further 30 metres to the north this passage intersects with another larger hallway, leading both to the east and west. It is like the hall you have just passed through in that it is well lit and well kept. Here the hall is wider, with high vaulted ceilings. Rich tapestries line the walls, hiding the smooth cut rock behind. The floors are swept and relatively clean and a strange yellow light illuminates every corner. You retreat momentarily to the comparative safety of the darker passage to the south and ponder your next move.

Turn to section 228.

129

Your progress northwards down the long sloping tunnel turns quickly from an exercise in negotiating mounds of festering garbage to a more exhausting process of simply remaining on your feet. The angle of the floor has steepened to the point that it is hard to maintain

a firm footing, and you are forced to use handholds in the roughly hewn walls to stop yourself overbalancing and tumbling down the incline.

After a hard 20 minutes struggle you come abruptly to a deep ravine that cuts through the tunnel. The rift is a good 4 metres wide, and you can only just see the passage continuing on the other side. It opens as nothing more than a dark smudge at the very edge of the light thrown by your torch. Below, in the darkness of the rift's depths you can hear the sound of rushing water. It is a distant rumbling murmur, one that emanates from the dark shadows below before being carried into the reaches of the gloom overhead. For a short time you stand at the lip of the abyss and consider the limited options that now present themselves to you. The tunnel behind is blocked. Your only possible way is forward across the divide.

Taking a step back, you undo your backpack and hurl it across to the other side. With a sigh of relief you see it fall inside the tunnel opening opposite and disappear into its darkness. Next goes the torch and shortly after your weapon. After a moment's contemplation you take a few further paces back, and then running for all your worth attempt to leap the chasm.

Test your strength and agility attributes. If you pass both of these tests turn to section 28. If you fail either one of these tests turn to section 428.

130

Alas, too late you slam the door. The combined weight of a dozen Hordim crash into the door's timbers, catapulting you across the room and into the rotting remnants of an old bookcase. With the door smashed and broken at their feet the room is soon crowded with many creatures, weapons crashing in wild abandon, a bloodlust in their eyes.

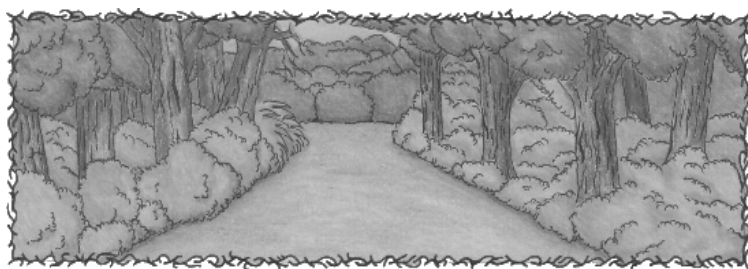
Pulling your weapon from your belt you stand your ground, knowing that with nowhere to run it will be here that you will surely die.

Your position is hopeless but you will not go down without a fight. Do you have Morgen's Spear? If you do turn to section 248. If you have not yet found this artefact turn to section 203.

131

The rain does not stop until nightfall. The deluge has put out all the burning houses in the village, turning all about you into a morass of mud and ashen destruction. In the shadows of the evening you can see villagers slowly moving through the debris that was once their village. Shuffling about in a state of shock, they search for belongings and anything that may have survived the inferno. Standing in the damp shelter of the old barn you feel sympathy for the plight of the hapless villagers but wonder at the confidence of the attack.

The raid followed the normal process of a Horde rampage, though to pillage such a large village as Melem's Fork, and to do it in broad daylight, seems very bold indeed. News of the great battle to the north must have reached even these isolated Hordim bands roaming the mountains to the south-west, bolstering their courage and giving new purpose to their attacks. And that was the other thing that bothered you. If they did know, how could they have found out so quickly? There was probably a lot more to this war than just the siege at Maenum. Still, it has been said around more than one campfire that the Horde has a cunning way of surprising the nations of Men. You resolve to be far more careful as you journey closer to the Devkraager Tor.



As the sky darkens to night the rain finally stops and you prepare to continue your journey. The villagers have all gathered in the few houses that still remain intact, and in the gloom their dwellings flicker with the shaded illumination of candles and small fires. Although it would be best to stay and help there seems little that you can do for them, and even less that they can provide to you in the way of provisions or feed. All you can do is move on. Pallenten is as eager as you to be away so you repack your equipment, pull your cloak closer about you, and head quietly out into the cool night air.

The Ring of Stones lies a few hours journey to the west. There you will find a good camp-site and fresh water for Pallenten. In the dark of the night the road is your only safe route. Turn to section 257.

132

The door to the Custom's House proves difficult to open. Your initial attempts to force it ajar fail, and in the close confines of the passage it will be impossible to pry it open without the chance of bringing further unwanted attention upon yourself. Quickly you see though why the door has defied your attempts. A closer inspection of its hinges show them to be rusted solid. You do find that the screws that hold the hinges in place can be undone and this is a task that requires little effort. Taking your eating knife from your pack you quickly remove the screws, and with one careful push the door leans inward, hanging precariously from its lock.

Holding your lantern above your head you peer into the room. It is one large space, empty of furniture and containing nothing more than a few wooden boxes stacked in one corner. Within this chamber there is little else to be found except a thick decorative mat at its centre.

Carefully stepping over the fallen door you walk into the room and begin a search of its minimal contents. As you move towards the pile of boxes you step warily on the mat. At that moment you know you have made a mistake, a loud click echoing from behind the northern wall, and in that moment a wicked trap springs into action. From the northern wall a line of razor-sharp metal darts shoot from blow-holes in the stone, cutting the air straight towards you.

Test your Agility attribute. If you are successful turn to section 91. If you are not successful with this test turn to section 84.

133

Negotiating the piles of rubbish that litter the floor of the King's Hall proves difficult. Eventually however, you reach your objective and stand before the imposing facade of a carved stone entranceway enclosing a heavy wooden door. For a moment you listen carefully for any clue of approaching patrols, but all is still silent, the vast space about you empty and cloaked in shadows. For a moment you consider the large doorway, and shiver at the cold that now searches its way

through your clothing. The air here is musty, the smell of decay fetid and heavy upon the chill. Sure that you are indeed alone you try the door and find its hinges and locks corroded and stiff. Looking about once again you apply pressure to the handle and find that it also is rusted solid and will not move.

Pulling back you consider what you should do, though it appears there is no way that you can quietly coax the door open. In the end you are forced to put your shoulder against its thick timbers and push. It is on your second attempt that the lock shatters and the door swings open noisily.

With more pushing and shoving the door opens wider and you find yourself in a short corridor, at the end of which is another wooden door similar to the one you have just opened. Resting your lantern upon an upturned chair you move forward, carefully studying the curious lettering that extends around the arch of this second door.

After wiping away a century of dust you find it is an Old Dwarvendim script, and it reads as the equivalent of "Custom's House". The walls of the passage are also covered in relief carvings and long lines of script, all exhorting the power and wealth of the Stone kingdoms. It is a curiosity that you study for a short time until you feel the hairs raise on the back of your neck, a gust of air moving noticeably behind you. Slowly your hand falls to the hilt of your sword. As your fingers close around your weapon, the door to the King's Hall slams shut and a huge Hresh warrior stands menacingly before you, a long curved sword resting loosely in its hand. It would seem that the Hall outside was not as empty as you might have hoped. Shouting at you in a harsh low voice the Hordim charges, its scimitar ready to deal you a lethal blow.

Will you fight the Hresh? If so, turn to section 19. Or will you instead try the second door for a means of escape? If so, turn to section 36.



134

Not wishing to foul your blade on these thick clinging strands you pull the stick from the ground. It is a bad idea. Without warning the floor opens beneath your feet revealing a gaping black pit. You have only a second to save yourself.

Test your agility attribute. If you are successful with this test turn to section 215. If you fail turn to section 112.

135

"Sire, wait!" The boy is running towards you, waving his hands wildly above his head. His sudden appearance is surprising to say the least and in response Pallenten snorts loudly, her gait skittish at the child's approach. A quick survey of the rise shows no other person near, nor any sign of how he got here. You know that such a young child should not be alone on the frontier, and you think for a moment that your first task on this journey may be the safe return of the boy to his home. It is a delay you would rather not have to make up for later.

"What it is you want boy? I'm in a hurry." There is something unsettling about the child. As if sensing your own unease Pallenten half rears backwards as the boy approaches.

"Please Sire, are you Halokim Vesh?"

Surprised that the boy should know your name you reply, "Yes, but how do you know this?"

"I have been sent by my master, the Maturi Len, to ask that you experience the hospitality of his house prior to continuing on your journey south." The boy hesitates for a moment as if he is listening to another unseen presence.

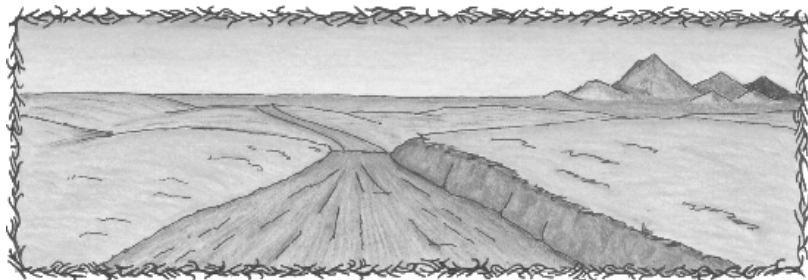
"He says that it will be to your benefit to do so".

The child appears unusually calm as you fight for control of Pallenten. The great horse rears up, as if about to strike out with one of its enormous hooves. It is just as you fear the boy will be trampled that you see him smile, then quickly disappear into a wisp of vapour. In an instant he is gone. Again Pallenten rears up and you are forced to fight the reins for control. Out of the air above you comes a soft, gradually fading voice. "If you wish to talk with the Maturi Len take the west fork to Kal Arbor. There you shall find him."

Spurring Pallenten on you ride quickly down the hill. Your horse seems eager to leave the rise and you have to admit you are of a like

mind. It is at the bottom of the incline that you encounter the fork in the road leading to Kal Arbor.

If you wish to take this fork to the west turn to section 227. If you have no time for what might be a dangerous diversion turn to section 232.



136

As you are carefully navigating your way around the broken tables and chairs you hear above the crackle of the fire the heavy steps of someone approaching. Although only faint at first, the footsteps grow steadily louder, then quite suddenly stop. Moving quickly behind an upturned table you crouch in the shadows, waiting for some sound that will indicate where the creature is. Presently you hear the jiggling of a set of keys, the metallic grating of a key in an old lock, and the click of its mechanism as the lock's barrel turns. Before long the northern door opens and a large creature walks casually into the Mess, swinging a set of keys in his hand and looking purposefully about the room.

Through a small hole in the table you survey your new enemy. He is a Jotun, immense even in the dim light. More than 3 metres high, the warrior stands heavily armoured and carries an enormous warhammer. Even in this poor light you can see he has the distinctive weathered face of a Tundra dweller and that his right arm has been heavily tattooed. From his dress and demeanour you can guess that this Hordim is an officer of some sort, or perhaps even a Chieftain. To fight such a creature alone could mean a quick and violent death.

Test your Luck attribute. If you are successful turn to section 2. If you fail this test turn to section 126.

137

From your position at the end of the corridor you watch the Mutan guard for some time. Standing in the shadows of the alcove it is difficult to tell whether it is asleep on its feet or simply diligent in its duty.

After a wait that seems far too long you decide to take it by surprise and rush it. Placing your pack noiselessly on the ground you prepare your weapon, and with blood pounding in your ears you turn the corner and charge. What confronts you is not what you expect.

Turn to section 17.

138

As you advance down the passage you become more certain that the way ahead is inhabited. The sounds of music and raucous laughter are now becoming more identifiable, growing both distinct and menacing as you move forward. Hidden within the shadows you can hear clearly the low beat of a large drum, and a bedlam of wild shouting mingled with what can only be the whining gabber of Morgs. As you grip Than'durion all the tighter you know that to be discovered in such a place will surely mean a violent and hideous end.

As your eyes adjust further to the low gloom of the passage, you can see with more clarity just how hideous that end may well be. If the rich tapestries that once covered the high walls of the King's Hall had ever found a place hanging in this dismal entryway they are now gone. Instead the hapless victims of the Horde now adorn the walls, skeletal and limp, empty eyeless faces peering down at your cautious progress.

Some 200 metres down this westward passage the way veers north again. The muffled sounds of Stoneholme's inhabitants are now much louder. You decide to move forward with even greater care.

Turning the corner northward you can see a large door at the end of a short passage. Light is streaming from beneath the door and from a large square portal cut into it at shoulder height. The sounds of laughter, shouting and fighting are now very close.

Turn to section 47.



139

Using all your concentration to step carefully and quietly around the pile of tapestries, you do not notice the line of old spear shafts resting precariously against a pile of fallen stonework. Although it is your intention to move northwards as quickly as possible, a large bust of Morgen Orncryst causes you to deviate slightly from your chosen passage around the rotting fabric. It is as you negotiate this new obstacle that you back into the thin wooden shafts. In a line the spears collapse onto the floor, clattering loudly as they bounce on the stonework. From the pile of tapestries the sounds of snoring cease immediately. In a flurry of torn fabric the Morg springs up from the pile, snuffling and wheezing as it tries to awaken properly, its small form a mere silhouette within the darkness that surrounds your lantern.

When the Morg recognises that you are not of the Horde his eyes widen. Leaping from his sleeping place the creature crouches low on the marble of the Hall, a smirk spreading slowly across its face. He does not attack immediately though. In the gloom this diminutive foe takes on a fighting stance, awaiting your next move.

Slowly you lower your lantern to the floor and take the time to size up your opponent. He is small, even as Morgs are measured, but he does not appear to be afraid at all. He wears no armour nor does he carry a shield, his only protection his sword which flicks from side to side. It is a stand-off that can have only one outcome. Before you can make any further move the Hordim attacks, his sword raised high, a look of blood-lust and hatred etched across his countenance.

Avoiding this combat is impossible. If you wish to attempt the use of the Shimmera to defeat the Morg test your Intuition attribute now. If you are successful turn to section 503. If you are unsuccessful, or you do not wish to use the Shimmera, then you must fight this diminutive foe. Follow the combat sequence until one of you falls. Your opponent has a combat value of 13 and an endurance of 6. If you win this combat turn to section 148. If you are defeated then your quest will end here in the dirt and debris of the King's Hall.

140

There can be no doubt that something moves beyond this door, and for a moment you consider the long winding steps you have just

climbed. Near exhaustion, the decision is easy. Wishing no further aggravation at this time you decide to leave whatever might reside within in peace. Taking a deep breath you begin the long descent down the staircase.

The way back proves as tiring as the ascent, but it is completed without incident. Upon retracing your steps back to Lesser Hall you find it empty, however there are distant sounds of movement in the air. For now caution must be foremost in your mind.

Stepping out into the Lesser hall you consider your options. If you have not already done so you can try the double doors in the east wall. If this is your choice turn to section 153. If you believe there is a chance that there may be other hidden exits from this hall turn to section 176.

141

The tunnel appears long but is blocked ahead by thick banks of spider webs, layered in centuries of dust. You try to move the first veil of web, and for your trouble are showered with grit and the dry husks of a myriad dead insects.

Will you use your weapon to clear a path through the webs? If so turn to section 213. Perhaps you would rather pull the stick from the ground and use it instead? If this is your preferred course turn to section 134.

142

In the solitude of the passageway you look more carefully at the high arch and confirm your suspicion that you are standing before something truly ancient. Worn and faded by time unrecorded the archway is etched with long lines of text, flowing about its edges as a vine might tangle itself about a mighty tree. Most of the inscriptions are beyond reading, their fine carving lost to the wear of the ages, but one area survives and you recognise the text as the Elder Tongue, although the lettering is of a type unfamiliar to you.

Carefully you brush away layers of dust and grime that cover the stonework and read slowly the inscription as it winds its way up the archway;

:ephad mar u narm se'we oera'dim: ne'esal durim u
 bariathim duel'eth dehr... a' et mar'shuil phenath u
 glaash durilem ahn u enkath:

For a short time you consider the meaning of the text. In the Common English the inscription translates as;

**"Here can walk no Hordim. Within these walls
 resides the... and it will not suffer them to pass."**

It appears to be a warning to the Hordim and you take a small measure of comfort from that, but it must have been written many centuries before the coming of Men into the world. You wonder at how the arch was discovered, and why those who bricked it shut thought it necessary to do so. All in all it is a mystery to you, and one that becomes more compelling as you inspect the arch further.

Following the edges of the arch you can see no further legible script, however carved deeply into the keystone at its highest reach is a small glyph, a number in the Elder Tongue representing 555. You smile as you recognise it for amongst your people it is known also as a marker of a point of no return, and a powerful warning for any who see it to go no further.

In the half-light of the passageway you press at the stone door and find it immovable. A closer look at its more recent construction shows no lock or any identifiable hinges. If it truly was meant to be moved you can see no evidence of it, yet there is something about the arch that holds your attention.

If the builders of Stoneholme had wished none to enter they would have simply filled in the archway. The existence of a door seems inconsistent with that aim and it gives you enough reason to spend a small amount of time trying to find a way in.

In the shadows you step back and consider the entire archway. There are no locks or handles, and it has been your experience that such doors always have a less obvious method for entry. A quick check shows no secret latches of any type, and in the absence of any straightforward answer you scratch at your chin and consider if it would indeed be better to simply move on. But then you look again to the keystone and the number inscribed upon it.

Thinking back to your days at the Temple you try and remember

the Haer'al for 555 and it comes to you slowly, a mix of old memories both indistinct and random, but you do remember.

:se'kaad'se'kel'se:

In the gloom you whisper the words, and stumble at their long forgotten pronunciation. At the third attempt however, they sound clearly in the corridor and as you watch become a twisting focus of energy that whips at the ground before you, sending small tendrils of swirling dust and grit spiralling around the archway. To your surprise the utterance of the number has started something, and you have no idea what it might be.

As you watch the arch itself begins to change, the wear and damage of untold millennia falling away from it as its stone finds a new strength. Before your eyes the brickwork of the Dwarvendim becomes faint and then dissolves away, leaving in its wake the threshold to a long, dark stairway. Carefully you move closer, feeling a residue of power radiating from the walls and arch as you approach. About you the air is alive with energy and as you peer into the staircase you begin to notice something far more potent.



**:enlin u tellra mar voemaak viis hoewch
nuulmargen:**

From somewhere far below a rushing wind blows out of the archway, warm and heavy with the smell of ash. As you search the dark stairwell for a hint as to what might be below you begin to sense the low resonance of a sound something like a heartbeat, drumming at the stone and sending faint vibrations of power ebbing through the air about you. There is no way to know what it is that resides below but you can sense that it holds an enormous energy at its command, and that it is constrained only by the solid rock of the mountain itself.

In the vague half-memories of your youth you recognise something about this power but the wisps of image and emotion they conjure are too vague to bring to any clarity. The archway is open however, and you must now make a choice.

If you wish to take these stairs and see where they may lead turn to section 555. If you can see no reason to do so and wish to keep to the passage southwards turn to section 156.

143

The map turns out to be a large hanging tapestry of woven cotton and silver thread. A quick inspection shows you that it is securely fastened to the wall and there will be little chance that you can pull it down.

Out in the King's Hall the sounds of soldiers preparing for battle grows more ominous, you can hear that a second Jotun has joined the party outside. They seem to be arguing over who will kill you. Moving to the wrecked furniture that litters the floor, you pull up one of the thick wooden tables and jam it against the door. You are only just in time. Splintering on its hinges the door is hammered by the blow of a heavy object. From outside the door you hear shouting and cursing as the single blow is joined by a multitude of others. The door shudders and grinds as its wood is slowly torn from its metal hinges and strapping. It is time to go.

Turn to section 21.

144

Finding your way back to the junction proves straightforward. Without stopping you move past the southerly passage and continue on east into the better illuminated corridor beyond. As you move forward you find the eastern passage extending for some distance before you and it widens quickly into a far more spacious thoroughfare. The corridor is wide and open, the floor covered in a thin layer of dust and grime that muffles your footfalls as you advance. On both sides the remains of exits and other hallways tumble into the passage; all collapsed and blocked by the Hordim.

For a moment you stop and consider one of the exits. It is a high arch, some ten metres in width at its widest point, but now a tangle of broken stone and smashed earth. At some time in the past the Hordim had pulled out the keystones above from their settings, bringing the facing stones of the corridor beyond crashing down behind them. There seems little purpose to the vandalism, you can only guess at what might lay beyond the rubble, but the Hordim have effectively turned the corridor into one long hall without exit or turn. In this place there is only one way forward.

Carefully you move on, following the passage further into the east. About you old rotting tapestries hang ragged upon the walls but there

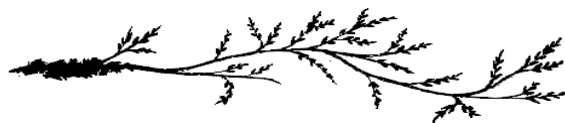
is little to hinder your way forward. Apart from the tumble of stone that spreads from each broken exit the floor is clear of debris, and the same dim yellowish light radiates from its unknown source illuminating your way ahead. There is a noticeable change here however, and it becomes more obvious as you venture further east. In this quiet place a strong smell hangs in the air. At first you thought it might have been the heavy, musty smell of damp rotting fabric, but the further you go the more identifiable the odour becomes. It is the smell of ash and charcoal and it permeates everything.

Soon you begin to see a distinct mist in the air, a fine miasma of something that hangs upon the damp atmosphere, slowly circulating from somewhere ahead. Focusing your thoughts on what you know about Dragonlore you search for a connection between the winged serpents and this heavy odorous smell. While deep in thought it occurs to you that a large serpent trapped deep underground would need more than just gold to sustain it. Those Dragons that dwell far from the realms of daylight require burnt wood to survive. At once you see why there are so many of the Hordim infesting the remains of this old fortress. For a purpose known only to themselves they are feeding the Dragon, keeping it alive, giving it the one thing it needs to sustain itself in the darkness. No wonder there is very little wooden furniture left in the fortress. It has all been converted into charcoal as food for the Dragon.

Whether this is the case however, is something yet to be uncovered and it is a mystery that can bode no good. Dragonlore is a subject best left to those who understand it, and the motivations of the Hordim can be as unfathomable as Dragons themselves. Whatever the purposes of the Hordim here you have an uncomfortable feeling that you will find out soon enough, and it will not be to your advantage.

For some time you move forward, the floor sloping in a shallow decline as the passage reaches ever deeper into the mountain. It is at the end of this corridor that you are forced to a halt, your thoughts interrupted by an abrupt southerly turn in the passage ahead.

Turn to section 67.



145

Not wishing to risk the chance that the water may be poisoned you decide to leave it and move further down the passage. In truth you could do with the refreshment but there is nothing in Stoneholme that can be considered safe, and reluctantly you make your way forward. As you move deeper into the corridor your torch sputters for a second, water from the ceiling dripping down upon it, almost putting it out. For a moment you are distracted, and in that moment of inattention you do not see the thin blue line of light stretching across the passageway. Before you can stop yourself your boot cuts the beam and triggers a carefully laid trap.

With almost no time to react you lunge forward as tonnes of boulders, dust and filth shower down from the ceiling above, completely blocking the passage and smothering you in its embrace. When the dust settles the only sound that fills the hall is the clatter of small stones and debris rolling down the sides of the rockpile. Then all is silent.

Test your luck and agility attributes. If you are successful with both of these tests turn to section 211. If you fail either one of them then it is here that your quest ends, crushed beneath a pile of stone from which you cannot escape. In a latter life you will no doubt be more successful.

146

Brilliantly blue in its ornate flask, the liquid looks and smells exotic. Attached to the neck of the flask is a small handwritten label. In Common Dwarvendim script it reads, "Nahla Extract. Made by an Alchemist of the Faeyen. Can be used once when needed". Turning over the card you find no further instructions, just a short warning that under certain circumstances the extract can be unstable and highly explosive.

(You can place this potion in your pack if you wish. If you would like to take it, record this acquisition on your character sheet. Please note that one drink of this extract will restore all lost endurance points up the maximum allowed for the character. It is a powerful regenerative and cannot be taken any time except when at rest. It does however, come with the disadvantage that it has the propensity to explode when knocked forcefully. If you do not wish to take it, place it very carefully back on its plinth).

Moving back to the door you listen intently for any sign of movement in the Great Hall beyond. There is nothing so you walk back out into the larger chamber.

If you have not already done so do you wish to;

Try the first door in the northern wall? If so turn to section 48.

Investigate the alcove in the northern wall? If so turn to section 239.

Try the other door in the southern wall? If so turn to section 189.

Try the door in the eastern wall at the other end of the hall? If so turn to section 161.

147

Although it takes some time you retrace your steps back down the hidden passageway, then push your way past the bookcase and move back into the Armoury. The sinister sounds of the Hordim music and the mocking tones of their laughter fills this large hall, the flickering shadows cast by the wall torches your only greeting as you look to the exit ahead. Moving quietly to the northern door you find it unlocked and it opens easily.

Having a quick look round the Armoury for the last time you steel your nerves, ready your sword and carefully swing the door open.

Turn to section 54.

148

With astounding speed the Morg strikes at you. Again and again it cuts and thrusts trying to breach your defences but its speed proves no match for your swordsmanship. Blocking all of its attacks you wear it down until, with a quick feint and thrust, you pin the Morg to the ground with your sword. Blood wells thickly from the Hordim's heaving chest and with a single, final shudder it dies. Quickly silence returns to the King's Hall, and in the quiet you drag the Morg's body over to the tapestries and hide the corpse away beneath them.

For a moment you listen, searching the corners of the vast hall for any sign that you may have been discovered. There is no alarm nor challenge and in the shadows you recover your lantern and press on northwards.

Before you the hall reaches into the gloom, its high arches and

ornately carved pillars a forest of stone that you journey within. For some time you follow the hall northwards, the many corridors and passages that line the outer halls all blocked, their ceilings collapsed, any exit from the King's Hall sealed by tonnes of fallen stone and broken masonry. Carefully you find a path deeper into the mountain and it is with a small measure of surprise that you soon find yourself at another junction, and a series of doors that have escaped the attention of the Hordim.

Turn to section 93.

149

Stepping back out into the hall you move quickly away from the door, happy to put as much distance as possible between yourself and the creature. It appears you have emerged on the eastern side of the Great Hall, from one of the many doors you noticed when you first entered this vast chamber. When you are some 6 metres from the exit to the Elemental's prison its metal door slides back down and locks firmly.

Now that you are back in the Great Hall will you,
Investigate the alcove in the northern wall? If so turn to section 239.
Try the nearest door in the southern wall? If so turn to section 189.
Try the farthest door in the southern wall? If so turn to section 31.

150

Not wishing to make too much noise in the cold stillness of the Great Hall, you place your back against the door and push with all your remaining strength. The door does not move. It seems to be locked solidly from the other side, and jammed in such a way that using it to exit the Great Hall appears impossible. Taking your weapon from your belt you next try to lever the door open, but it proves just as immovable. With no lock to pick, and no observable way to open the door, it seems that you will have to approach opening it from a different angle.

Stepping back for a moment you consider your problem. There is no obvious way to open the door but somebody must use it. There are fresh scrape marks on the floor where many heavily-shod boots have rubbed against the stonework. Taking a hunch you feel around the

stone bordering the exit and find what you are looking for near the floor. A light touch upon a hinged piece of stone causes a number of bars and latches within the wall to slide away, and to your relief the door disappears up into the rock above.

Quickly stepping over the threshold you walk into the passageway beyond. The passage is dark but you can see that it runs some way ahead to the north. Just within the doorway is another metal bin, within which is a number of old torches. Taking one of these, you light it and in its feeble illumination make your way into the gloom.

Record the use of this torch on your character sheet and then turn to section 210.

151

The smell of the Mutan's blood is fetid beyond belief, its action as corrosive as any acid you have encountered. In the gloom you see your weapon smoking, its metal sheen disappearing beneath the smouldering liquid's relentless attack. In fear of it doing damage you quickly attempt to remove the blood but it proves a stubborn adversary. It is a thick, clinging mess and in desperation you tear off a piece of the Mutan's tunic, trying to wipe it away but succeeding only in spreading it further along the blade. It is not until you sluice the metal with some of your drinking water that the corrosive fluid falls away. Luckily the damage has been minimal, the edge of your weapon still keen. After making sure none of the liquid remains you stand at the corner and decide your next move.

Will you try the door of the first room. If so, turn to section 247. If you wish to continue down the passage to the second doorway you should turn to section 229.

152

The moment you open the thick iron-strapped door your sense of smell is assailed by the heavy odours of sulphur and ash. It is so strong that you can taste it in your mouth and it clings to your clothing like a thick fog. Crossing over the threshold into the passage you feel the temperature rise markedly as you shut the door behind you. In this new space the heat wraps about you and quickly becomes oppressive as it floods the hall in waves. In the background you can

hear what sounds like a furnace being fanned by enormous bellows. Perspiring freely you move down the hall, your weapon ready in your hand. The passage heads south, and it reaches some 150 metres before you find a door set in the eastern wall to your left. Placing your ear against its heavy timbers you can hear nothing but the distant pounding of that great furnace.

Do you wish to open the door? If you do turn to section 178. If you wish to continue your quest south down the passage turn to section 42.

153

Standing more than 3 men high the double doors that bar your way to the east are massive. Made of solid timber bound by thick iron bars, the wood is highly polished and slick to the touch. In the stone surrounding the doors there has been carved an ornate but gruesome story of the last day of Morgen Orncryst. As a flowing scroll of tragedy you read the legend of the last StoneKing, and know that you are about to play a part in taking back all that the Dragon has stolen. In truth you now know that Windhammer is no myth. Upon the keystone above both doors is a carved relief of a large winged serpent. The Dwarvendim script below the keystone is characteristically direct. If you enter, it says, you will die.

A quick test shows the doors to be securely locked and they are too large to simply try and force open. The distant sounds of yet another approaching patrol spurs you on to search for some method of entry and Providence is with you for it proves easy to find. Behind a pile of discarded bones, and about one arm's-length from the door there rests a small metal plate inset into the wall. Pushing the plate lightly you hear the sounds of weights and pulleys begin to move within the walls. Slowly and ponderously the massive doors swing open.

Turn to section 76.



154

The risk of trouble in Das Frontiere is too great. Guardsmen like those you have encountered in Miller's Crossing are common enough throughout the Kalborean Union and the provincial capital has far more than its fair share. Turning Pallenten to the west you urge her forward and the great horse quickens her gait further. You estimate that at her current rate of travel you should reach Melem's Fork by late afternoon. As you ride the road joins with another from the south-east, and from this point onwards becomes uneven and heavily rutted. Recent rain has left the dirt track soft and easily damaged, but Pallenten seems to take the changed conditions in her stride and does not falter as she pounds away the leagues towards Melem's Fork.

With the great horse set on her way you use the opportunity to survey the horizon for possible trouble. All about is clear but on high you notice something unsettling. Above you dark clouds are beginning to crowd the sky. The horizon to the north and west have disappeared within the mist and gloom of an approaching storm. Although the weather front is still some distance away it will cross your path before evening. Such storms can be murderous affairs, it will be prudent to find shelter before it hits. This is not your most pressing concern though. Directly above you, at the very edge of your sight, you can just make out a number of large birds circling. This seems innocent enough and under other circumstances would be unremarkable, however these birds have been with you for some time now, always directly overhead and always high enough that you cannot identify exactly what they are. A feeling of being watched has been with you for most of your journey and these birds do nothing to lessen your growing sense of unease.

With one eye on these unwelcome sentinels you ride swiftly for Melem's Fork, Pallenten a dark arrow moving effortlessly along the uneven roadway. It is an isolated stretch of road, one that you have travelled often, and one that holds many memories for you. One in particular looms large in your mind, and inevitably confronts you on this darkening afternoon as a large signpost, and a well tended cobbled pathway that disappears southwards into an area of woodland. You have no time to waste, but you cannot continue of your journey without coming to a halt before the name that rests upon the weathered sign. The signpost and path are well-known to you, and even with the imminent reality of your quest before you the memories of this place bring you to a stop.

Some half a league to the south stands the Truvo Farm, one of the few successful farming enterprises that can be found in this region of the frontier, and foundation of the only happy childhood memories you possess. At the age of four you had been indentured as a child labourer to the Truvo family, and rather than a life of hard work had found yourself brought into a world of care and ease that had been unknown to you. In this place you had remained until taken five years later to the Temple of the Suns in Das Frontiere. Within the boundaries of Truvo Farm you had found comfort and education, and strangely very little work. Why you were taken from the familiarity of the Farm to the discipline of the Temple you cannot say, but in an eventful life the strongest memories you hold close came from the attention and care given by the Truvos. As you sit upon your horse those same memories come flooding back.

For a moment you consider whether there is time to ride down to the farm, but you know it is a reunion that must be left for easier circumstances. Looking to the north you see a rushing wall of cloud, towering in great white buttresses but founded upon a dark veil of shadowed mist and rain. Even your horse feels the sudden change in the air, and the strengthening urgency in the winds that swirl through the trees about you. The stormfront is moving purposefully towards you and the first rumblings of thunder can be heard, muffled by distance but a sure sign of the weather to come. If it is to continue in your direction you must reach Melem's Fork before it hits. Reluctantly you turn Pallenten to the main road once again and urge her forward.

Onwards Pallenten gallops, without sign of fatigue or falter she pounds away at the leagues. Grassy fields pass you by, interspersed with isolated copses of trees and exposed piles of large boulders. Every so often you see a small farmhouse nestled inside a group of trees, a shelter needed in these places as ferocious winds can hit the plains here without warning. Very little of your fellow humankind can be seen though, and the remainder of your journey to Melem's Fork passes quickly and without incident.

As you had hoped you reach your destination by mid afternoon. Pulling Pallenten to a halt atop a slight rise you look down towards the small farming community. It is in a state of complete chaos. Smoke billows freely from a number of buildings and men and women are running about frantically between them. At the far edge of the village you can see a group of creatures moving to the south-west. It is a Hordim raiding party making off with its plunder.

Do you wish to help the villagers fend off the Hordim. If you do, turn to section 116. If you would rather avoid any confrontation with the Horde at this time turn to section 258.

155

With the sounds of pursuit gathering in the Mess Hall you hasten along this new passage. It is only short and leads roughly westward. After some 20 metres the corridor turns sharply to the north, and once again you find you must climb a steep staircase that ascends high into the interior of the mountain. The steps disappear into the dark ahead and their surprisingly uneven cut makes it difficult to climb quickly.

As you ascend you notice the rough nature of the stairway and wonder as to why it should be so. You are a curious man and even though you have every reason to hasten you take the time to look more carefully at the rock about you. This is not how Dwarvendim build in stone and you are sure that this stairway is a part of the original fortress. It takes only a short time to determine why the stairs are in such poor condition.

At some time in the construction of the stairway the Dwarvendim engineers had struck a vein of soft rock, easy to delve but unstable, and no doubt unsuitable for the purpose. To counter this the engineers had reinforced the surfaces of the ascending hall by lining it with thick slabs of a much harder stone. For some purpose that you cannot fathom the Hordim have stripped this hard stone from the stairway, leaving the softer rock to erode and fall away. For whatever reason the stairs are now worn, the steps uneven and degraded, and as you struggle upwards your ascent is all the harder for it.

The way forward is a fatiguing climb that quickly takes its toll upon you, one that leaves you aching to find a place to hide and rest. Breathing heavily you search what you can of the dark stairway, but do not find any recess or fissure where you might conceal yourself. Looking back down the flight of stairs your plight becomes more urgent as you hear the distinct sounds of heavily armoured soldiers running up the stairs below. In the cold air you listen carefully and you cannot doubt that both Jotun and Hresh warriors are after you. You drop the idea of resting and instead harden your resolve to climb the stairs all the faster.

Turn to section 97.

156

Time is pressing and you have precious little of it left to you. Your gut feeling is that the object of your quest lies somewhere in the passages ahead, and rather than spend time uncovering what might lay beyond the stone door you move on quickly.

Some 40 metres from the second door the passage turns sharply to the east and then descends steeply into the heart of the mountain. Upon a wide landing you find yourself at the threshold to a staircase; a long flight of stairs that disappears into darkness far below. For a moment you hesitate and consider if you should find another way, but the stairs go deep into the mountain and you know the closer you delve to the root of the Devkraager Tor the more likely it is that you will find the Deep Vault. There is only one way that will take you to your quest's end, and that is down.

Well used, and cluttered by centuries of neglect the stairs provide a treacherous footing. In the half-light you are forced to pick your way carefully, keeping to those parts of the steps that allow for a safer, more stable passage. What is more concerning however, is the sign of recent movement on the stairway. Amongst the dust and debris is a clear trail, one that winds its way down the steps before you, and one that could only have been made by the footfalls of many creatures wearing upon the ancient stone.

After a short time you take a moment to rest, sip some water (If needed restore one point to your endurance level for the drink.) and consider the precarious circumstances that you now find yourself within. The staircase is huge, a wide arched ceiling reaching across the stairs, supported upon cracked and broken walls that descend into darkness before you. Within this enormous space however, there are no exits, nor places to hide if a patrol might happen your way. If you are to remain unnoticed in this place you will have to find the bottom of these stairs quickly.

Once you have rested you put away your water flask and then continue into the beckoning gloom below.

Turn to section 230.



157

Before you extends a massive cavern, hewn as rough stone and bathed in a deep red light. The floor is 3 metres below the level of the entranceway you are standing in, and from this vantage you can see large pools of molten Azuril and silver on the floor below. Within these pools conglomerations of precious stones float precariously, long ago destroyed by the heat, but fused together like glistening crystal islands. Spouting from vents in the northern wall are fountains of molten rock that wend their way in rivers to a huge hole in the centre of the cavern. Most of the Deep Vault is obscured by steam and a thick fog of sulphurous gas that bubbles noisily from a number of vents in the floor. It is a vision of the underworld come to life and one that, if you had a choice, you would have no wish to enter.

The noise and heat is temporarily forgotten however, as you marvel at the sight of untold quantities of liquid treasure. Whatever the contents of this treasure house had once been, it had long ago been reduced by the heat and flames to a molten mess that lays in great pools about the floor, and in places disappears into cracks in its surface. You consider that to recover such a treasure will prove very difficult indeed. Turning away from the heat for a moment you see that the archway you are standing in once held two large doors similar to those at the other end of the passage. Now all that remains are the limp reminders of some melted iron bands and a few shards of charred timber. When you turn back into the cavern you are startled by unexpected movement. Something is climbing out of the cavern's central pit.

Turn to section 191.

158

The light of the Armoury is soon left far behind as you quickly but carefully move up the dimming hallway. At first the floor is level and easy to navigate, but this soon gives way to a flight of stairs that climb upwards at a wearingly steep angle. Looking up you cannot see where the stairs end. The little illumination available does not penetrate very far, however you are sure that you have a long climb ahead of you.

Quickly you light one of your torches and begin your ascent. The first five minutes are easy enough, the stairs well crafted and without apparent danger, but the continued exertion of the seemingly endless steps quickly begins to take its toll. It is just as you are thinking about

stopping to rest that you notice a blue light shining in a needle-thin beam across the step directly in front of you. Bending down to inspect this curious apparition you wonder as to its purpose. It does not appear to be particularly dangerous but you cannot assume that everything here is as it appears. For a moment you ponder what you should do.

If you feel this strange light is no danger you should continue on your way up the stairs by turning to section 231. If you possess the skill of Lorecraft turn to section 430. If you do not possess this skill but do have a small bag of flour, turn to section 482. If you have neither Lorecraft or a bag of flour, but would rather test the blue light with the point of your sword before moving on, turn to section 200.

159

Lurking in the half light of the passageway you wait for the creature to appear. From out of the distance the steady crump, crump, crump of its footfalls gets louder and more menacing as it approaches. Almost before you are ready the Mutan runs around the corner of the passage, its spear levelled and ready for action. It is not ready however, for the single blow that descends upon its head, cleanly splitting its grey-toned skull from forehead to neck bone. With a look of complete surprise on its cleaved face it falls to the floor, its spear clattering by its side. Quickly the stone about the Mutan flows with the Hordim's blood, and in the passageway you step backwards as the bubbling liquid eats vigorously into the floor-stones.

For a moment you watch as the corrosive blood dissolves away through the gaps in the floor. In the semi-darkness you wonder at how the creature survives with such a toxic mixture running through its veins, but as you ponder this you realise more than just the flagstones are at risk.

Turn to section 151.

160

The arch of red light draws you forward, your energy almost gone, your resolve to continue almost spent. Staggering onward, your concentration is now focused on each breath you take and each faltering step. Such is your fatigue that you do not notice at first that

the passage has widened. Almost at once the air becomes clearer and your breathing becomes less laboured. Looking around you can see that the way ahead extends for another three hundred metres before it ends at an exit lit by red flame. In this wider passage the choking dust has been replaced by a hot wind, the noise and smell of a great furnace pushing away all else.

Leaning against the steaming rock of the passage wall you feel some of your strength returning. After clearing your eyes and wiping away much of the grit that has clung to your face you can see the remainder of the passage ahead. The red fire is some distance away but it illuminates the passage with its hot glow. The blackness behind you roils and billows with seething waves of soot and ash. The furnace ahead overpowers your senses with its noise and stench. Surely you have found yourself on a journey to Hallen'draal itself for which there can be no way back. For a moment you halt your advance; it is time to consider your situation.

It is while you are pondering how much you value the completion of your quest that you notice the large metal plate attached to the eastern wall of the passage.

Do you wish to have a closer look at this plate? If so turn to section 222. If you wish to journey forward turn to section 99.



161

The door in the far eastern side of the Great Hall takes a few minutes to reach. Not wishing to stride out across the wide stone floor you edge carefully around the southern wall and then up the eastern side. The door itself sits within an ornately carved archway, and on first inspection appears to be made of a highly polished grey stone. As you touch it and test its strength with your open palm you realise it is actually made of an unusual metal, slick to the touch and seamless in manufacture it is unlike anything you have encountered before. The door is firmly set into the archway and there appear to be no handles or keyholes that may indicate how it is to be opened. With all your

strength you try to push and then lift the door, but it is impossible to get a good grip upon it. Checking the surrounding arch for any sign of secret locks or trigger releases proves to be fruitless. You find nothing and as far as you can tell the door is immovable. Deciding you should waste no further time going this way you turn back to the Great Hall and look for another way out.

If you have not already done so;

Will you try the alcove in the northern wall? If so turn to section 239.

Perhaps the door in the northern wall is more inviting? If so turn to section 48.

The door in the southern wall nearest the stairs looks interesting. If that is the way you wish to go turn to section 31.

If the door in the southern wall farthest from the stairs appears best turn to section 189.

162

Cautiously you press the stone into the wall. Deep within the rock beneath your feet there comes the slight rumbling vibration of ancient mechanisms slowly grinding into action. Almost by magic a thin slit of darkness appears in the stone wall before you. It is just wide enough for you to squeeze through but you have to take off your pack and weapons to do so. Throwing them into the gloom beyond you slip through and then search the dust covered floor to retrieve them. As soon as you are beyond its threshold the secret door closes silently behind you. It is pitch black. Using your weapon as a prod, you move forward carefully, feeling out every centimetre of the way ahead. Even though it is too dark to see you can feel the slight shift of the air around you. It appears that the tunnel extends far into the distance, though how far you cannot judge.

Minutes turn into hours as you make your way slowly down the dark passage. Sweating heavily you wait with each step you take for the tell-tale click of a trap mechanism, or the harsh call of some creature of the Horde heralding that you have been discovered. As time passes however, the passage becomes less threatening. It is only narrow and there is not much leeway for getting lost in the darkness. To the touch the walls on either side feel roughly hewn and with each step you take there comes a thin cloud of choking dust that slows your progress even further.

After what seems an eternity of dry dust and darkness as black as a Dreyadim's pit you come abruptly to the end of the passage. Feeling around the edges of the wall you can sense the same slight breeze blowing from thin cracks in the stonework. The air here is slightly different though. On the breeze there is the distinct smell of ash, as if someone or something is burning wood nearby. With this new situation to ponder, you straighten up in the passage and think about your next move. The rock before you appears solid, and there seems to be no lever or other mechanism that will move it. You are at a loss as to what to do next.

Fate however, decides to take the choice of your next move from you. Throwing your pack up onto your left shoulder it catches upon a lever protruding high on that side of the passage. Instantly the wall before you drops into the floor revealing a large opening into a passage beyond. Straight into the hole you have opened topples a Mutan sentry, caught completely off guard and probably asleep against the wall. It is as surprised as you are.

Turn to section 82.

163

You take to the steps at the run but your path up the staircase quickly proves tiring, the stairs a spiralling ascent that takes you high into the upper reaches of the Devkraager Tor. Loaded with equipment, and weighed down by the miscellaneous articles you have found on your quest you soon have need to rest. It seems as if the staircase extends upwards forever, and within the gloom you know you can go no further. Placing your pack and weapon on the stairs you squat against the rock face abutting the stairway, your intention to rest and take some food. In the cool darkness it does not take long for the exertions of your travels to place a heavy hand upon you. Exhausted from the rigours of your quest you relax and in doing so feel the heavier hand of exhaustion taking hold of you. Although you try to fight it there is little you can do as you fall inexorably into sleep.

The rest you take can only short but will be enough to restore 3 points to your endurance. If you have any food remaining you can also eat some now as well. Once you have recorded these details on your character sheet turn to section 206.

164

The stonework under the mat jerks upwards, toppling you straight into the centre of the room as a deep resonating vibration begins to shake the floor beneath you. Regaining your feet your jump instinctively to the side, hoping to avoid any nasty little surprises that may have been left by the Hordim.

Test your Agility attribute. If you fail this test turn to section 94. If you are successful turn to section 170.

165

Without all the talismans required to destroy the Dragon you will need to rely more upon your strength and skill than the protection afforded by other items you might have found on your quest. If you have possession of only some of the talismans they can still be used, and they will aid you in your battle with the beast.

Record the following values on your character status sheet before you continue. If you have the gem known as the Dragonseye increase your combat value by 5. The gem will emit an intense beam of light when near the serpent which will blind it and aid your attack. If you have the axe known as the Dragonclaw increase your combat value by 5. If you have Morgen's Spear then you must increase your combat value by a further 5 as well.

If you have none of the talismans of power take the time to eat a meal. If you have any Nahla extract in your possession take it now. If you have a book of protective spells entitled "Words of Protection" use it now. The only spell of use in the book will reduce the maximum amount of endurance points you should take from your endurance to two points with each attack round the Dragon wins. If you are fortunate enough to have a Shieldstone, and know the ancient Word that will activate it, say the Word now. For the course of this battle it will ensure that the Dragon cannot harm you unless it wins a combat round by more than four points.

If you have come into possession of the "Teth Ellandra" during your journey through Stoneholme then its power will be triggered by its proximity to the Tellandra. For the duration of your combat with the Dragon your endurance rating can be raised by an additional five points if needed.

All this should be recorded on your status sheet before you continue. Upon doing this turn to section 238.

166

Leaving the first door closed you move carefully down the passage. The corridor is bare of any furnishing but as you move forward you find the floor scattered with fallen stone and drifts of ash. Within this morass of grit and soot a pool of water spreads as a dirty stain across the floor-stones, mingled dark and wet upon the grimy flooring. Quickly you find its source is a trickle of liquid, flowing intermittently from a long crack in the wall at the right of the passage. For a moment you stop and let some wet the tips of your fingers. One smell tells you the water is poisonous and quickly you wipe it away on your cloak.

As you dry your hand a sudden noise brings you to the alert. From somewhere ahead you can hear sounds of movement, muffled by distance but distinct in the cold air. It is as if someone has dropped a heavy load, or perhaps it is the echoes of a fall of stone in some unknown passage, but it is definitely movement. Regardless of its source you draw your weapon and listen intently, searching the musty air for some hint that danger is approaching. For some moments you wait but the noise is not repeated. Exposed and alone within this great fortress you cannot relax, and with weapon in hand you move forward, making for the doorway ahead.

Turn to section 229.

167

Picking up the spear you realise that you have found something important. All of 3 metres long it sits perfectly balanced in your hand. Intricate carvings and scrollwork run down its entire length, its razor sharp tip meant for something more than mere flesh and bone. It feels almost weightless. You decide this is a weapon you must keep, but how to carry such a thing through the confines of Stoneholme?

"If only it were smaller..." you whisper quietly, pondering your dilemma. Before your words can find the quiet of the shadows the spear's edges begin to glow brightly, lighting up the surrounding darkness with a soft bluish glow. In amazement you watch as the spear quickly shrinks to only a forearm's length, telescoping neatly into its own haft.

Shaking your head in disbelief you place this new wonder with your other equipment, thankful that you may come out of this adventure with at least something to show for it. Shouldering your pack you

unsheathe Than'durion and cautiously make your way forward again.

You have found Morgen's Spear, a weapon of great history and greater renown. This item should be recorded as an artefact and does not need to be counted as a part of your carry load. Record this on your character sheet then turn to section 6.

168

With your pack and weapons ahead of you, you push blindly into the darkness of the ventilation shaft. On all sides the rough stone presses against you, your progress slow and hard as you edge your way forward. For a good hour you struggle within the confines of the shaft, aware that the Hordim may come after you and in such a place you would have no opportunity to defend yourself. It is a hard path but eventually you reach its end and are stopped abruptly by another iron grill.

It is with considerable difficulty that you push your way past your weapons and pack and peer out through the metal grating into the corridor beyond. In the half light of the passageway you see a swarm of activity that is no doubt generated by your discovery and escape. Heavily armed Hresh warriors crowd the passage in front of you, Jotun lumber by in both directions, their armour chinking rhythmically as great warhammers swing like small toys from their leather belts. Judging by the amount of movement the Hordim are in a deep frenzy of bloodlust and excitement soured with frustration for they cannot find you. For your part nothing can be done. Lying in the ventilation shaft you can only lay still and wait.

Turn to section 37.

169

As the Reaver charges the ground shudders under its armoured claws, and in the face of the beast's advance you stand your ground. Weapon in hand you brace yourself, watching as the monstrosity closes the distance between you. It is in those fateful moments that you feel a strange uneasiness, one that grows into a circle of heat radiating through the tough weave of your pack and out across your shoulders. Quickly throwing the pack to the stone floor, you see the Dragonclaw beginning to glow brightly in the darkness. As you stoop

to pick it up it bursts into life, sending brilliant shafts of light arcing from its blade out across the length and breadth of the Lesser Hall. Grabbing the axe's handle in both hands you feel its power extend down your arms and through your body. Alive with energy you face the Reaver.

In the gloom of the Lesser Hall more arcs of concentrated brilliance flash out at the creature, stopping it dead in its tracks. Before this unexpected assault the beast begins to back up, the incandescent blade blinding it from its quarry, but only for a moment. Keeping its distance the Reaver begins a wide circle around you. In the brightness of the axe's energy you can see the multiple eyes of your foe searching for an opportunity to attack. It comes all too quickly.

The Reaver has been dazzled by the light of the Dragonclaw but is a formidable foe nonetheless. In this battle the creature has a combat value of 18 and an endurance of 18. As you are under the effects of the Dragonclaw you must increase your combat value by 5 points while you are using it. Make a note of this increase on your character sheet. If you defeat the Reaver turn to section 68. If however, you are devoured by this monster your quest will end here in the oppressive heat of the Lesser Hall. In another life you may have more success.

170

The trap you have activated is an Impaler, one of the crueller killing mechanisms devised by the Horde. In a tremoring rush the ground about you erupts and splinters as huge metal spikes force their way up through the floor at your feet. With no time to think you jump for safety, leaping for the only unbroken piece of floor you see at the base of the far wall.

Landing heavily in the corner you roll up against the hard stone, and fight desperately to avoid being tossed back into the deadly forest of spikes by the wildly disintegrating floor stones. Sweat streams down your face as you try to maintain your balance; the sound of crushing stone a deafening crescendo that batters your senses and almost numbs you into unconsciousness. In this melee of fracturing rock the room fills with choking dust and quickly you are reduced to crouching in the corner, covered by your travel cloak and helpless against the power of the Impaler.

After an eternity of noise, sound and lethal danger the room falls

silent. Cautiously you peer from beneath your cloak and then stand to find yourself confronted by the effects of the trap. A multitude of deadly metal spikes now block any exit you may have had back into the King's Hall. You are alive but you are trapped.

Enclosed within the hidden recess of the corner you brush dust and grit from your shoulders and wonder at what you should now do. In the absolute dark you slump back against the wall and consider the good fortune that has saved you from falling victim to this device. With hindsight however, all the signs should have told you of the danger lurking here, you just didn't see them. The dangers posed by this device are not yet finished with you though.

As you wait in the dark you begin to hear the sound of voices approaching. From some distance you hear the footfalls of a group of armed Hresh, their armour clanking in the gloom as they make for your position. Alerted by the triggering of the Impaler the Hordim have come to view the results of their handiwork. Hiding within the shadows you can see only the green eyes of the Hresh as they survey the mess that was the anteroom. Trying not to breathe, you huddle behind the nearest of the spikes hoping you will not be noticed. After a number of sharp exchanges between the soldiers and a round of laughter they continue on their way, sure in the knowledge that whoever sprung the trap is now dead. Your breathing returns as the Hordim disappear back into the inky darkness to the south.

Searching the wall nearest to the north face of the stone you reach out and take one of the torches that has remained undamaged. You listen intently for any hint of the Hordim and then, as sure as you can be that they have gone, you light the torch and survey your surroundings. The spikes have certainly blocked any exit from the room, only the narrow strip of unbroken stone upon which you stand still survives. In the flickering light of your torch you notice a slight projection in the tapestry hanging from the northern wall, about 4 metres from your position. Although huge slabs of upturned stone project across the narrow ledge of unbroken floor you push them aside and are able to reach it. Upon closer inspection you find that the projection is a small metal lever hidden behind the heavy cloth. It is connected to a mechanism buried in the wall. The Dwarvendim word for "refuse" is neatly inscribed above the lever. With nowhere else to go you decide to pull it.

Turn to section 9.

171

The Hresh Warrior does not falter as it charges towards you. Its first blow you are able to deflect, the huge axe crashing into the wall near your shoulder, but you feel the strength in its attack and know it will be a hard fight. You accept without hesitation that this will be a battle to the death.

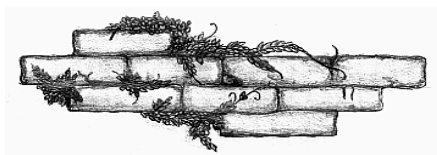
This Hresh has a combat value of 17 and an endurance rating of 14. If after two rounds of combat you are still alive you may attempt to use the Shimmera. If this is your choice test your intuition attribute. If you are successful turn to section 86. If you are unsuccessful then it must be upon your skill at arms that you will have to rely. If you must continue the combat, and have both the luck and skill needed to defeat the Hresh, turn to section 108. If it is you who falls, turn to section 10.

172

Still feeling stiff from your confinement in the shaft it takes a minute to get moving. Looking around you find that the ventilation shaft has opened into a passage that runs roughly north to south, and which intersects with a much larger corridor to the north. Although it is dark the passage to the south appears to stop against a solid rock wall that closes off any further travel in that direction. With only one direction to take you wait in the shadows for a moment and consider your options. From here you can see that the larger corridor ahead extends both west and east. From the west you can hear the muffled, distant sounds of Hordim in argument. To the east you can hear nothing, but in that direction the passage does appear to be better illuminated.

If you wish to go south and search for secret doors turn to section 13. If you would rather go west and investigate the noises in that direction turn to section 64.

If you prefer to take the more lighted passage to the east turn to section 207.



173

With the floor at this end of the King's Hall relatively clear it does not take long to reach your objective. Standing before the first door set into the western wall you find that it is broken and rusted, having been forced at some time in the past and then left slightly ajar. Smooth polished stone and an absence of dust on the floor indicates that the passage beyond is well used. Indeed as you stand quietly before the doorway you can hear faintly in the distance the sounds of harsh music and cruel laughter. Somewhere ahead there is a large group of Hordim and common-sense tells you that it would be better that you do not come to the attention of any of them.

As you stand at the entrance to this dark passage, considering whether it will be prudent to go any further, your lantern dims for a moment then flickers out. Without this faltering illumination the hall disappears into a shadowless void, one that engulfs you completely, leaving only old fears of the dark to work upon your resolve. In the complete darkness of this great hall it feels as if the mountain has closed around you, and that if you do not run for the light of day it will surely smother you. Against these unaccustomed terrors you fight a quiet battle as the dank air echoes to bouts of distorted laughter, but it is a battle that is fleeting and one you know you must win.

Shaking off the feeling with a nervous shrug you begin to see at the end of the western passage before you a dull glow. The light grows more distinct as your eyes begin to adjust better to the gloom, and quickly you determine that your options have narrowed considerably. Looking around the deserted hall you realise that this is the only illumination you can find, and whether it is a good idea or not you have no choice but to go forward and investigate the source. Stepping through the doorway you put aside the now useless lantern, draw Than'durion then move slowly westwards along the passage.

Turn to section 138.

174

The large doors are not locked, and it is easy to open them and gain access to what appears to be a large room. After the brightness of the hallway the room is dimly lit and it takes a while for your eyes to adjust to the new light. It is only as your vision sharpens that you realise the trouble you have walked into. Before you sleep more than two dozen Jotun warriors, arrayed upon a series of large wooden cots.

About them in orderly rows stand weapon racks and a series of iron-strapped chests. You have stumbled upon a barrack room, one where thankfully there are no Hordim awake. All are deep in slumber and you have no wish to awaken any of them.

Moving silently you shut the doors and turn back into the brightly lit hallway. With your heart pounding you hurry back down the passage and step across the threshold back into the Mess Hall.

Turn to section 23.

175

The battle is swift and bloody. When it is finished you stand over the reaved bodies of the Mutan and Hresh, somewhat the worse for wear but still alive. A quick search of their clothing reveals nothing of value. Their weapons are inferior to those you already possess and they have little in the way of equipment that you can use. As you are about to move away a glimmer of reflected light catches your eye. Near the doorway you see a small set of keys, unremarkable except for one key marked with the number "101". You consider quickly whether to pocket these and then move forward.

If you wish to keep the keys record them on your character status sheet. If you wish to investigate the room from which the Hresh made its untimely exit turn to section 247. If you would like to move further south down the passage turn to section 229.

176

The body of the Reaver lays as a dark mound in the centre of the hall but the dead monster is no longer your greatest concern. From somewhere in the distance you can hear the clamour of another approaching patrol and you are far too exposed. It is time to get out of this place. The large double doors in the eastern wall appear locked and your only chance of evading the patrol must lie in finding a place to hide.

It is said that all the main halls of Stoneholme hold secret doors and passages, and with little time to spare you begin to survey the walls for a possible way out. It is as you are searching the hall that you notice again in the dim light of your torch the slight, billowing motion of the tapestry. It is the same movement you noted just prior to your combat with the Reaver. Intrigued by what might be causing it

you decide to quickly investigate the other side of the hanging. There is a slight chance that the rotting cloth may conceal a hidden exit from the hall.

Getting behind the tapestry proves difficult, the edges of the hanging having been fixed with iron fastenings and weighed down to keep it straight, but once you are behind it proves also to be an effective hiding place. It is not a moment too soon for the patrol bursts into the hall just as you disappear behind the heavy cloth. Standing silently in the darkness you can hear the patrol pass quickly into the hall and examine the lifeless form of the Reaver. From your vantage you wait and hear shouted commands, and the frantic too and fro of a search that ends with someone testing the large double doors in the east wall. In truth you wait anxiously, for the Hordim are not stupid and you have not found the least obvious of hiding places. All it will take is for one of them to run the edge of their scimitars along the tapestry and you will be discovered.

As with so many things however, fate plays its part and this time to your advantage. From the western passageway a great rumbling tumult erupts, the distinct sounds of collapsing stone echoing down the passage as a thundering vibration that shakes the wall behind you. In the Lesser Hall the Hordim do not react with alarm, instead a few laugh but then an urgent shout brings them all to a standstill. Something has happened, and you can only assume that one of their attempts at bringing down a passageway has gone awry. Whatever the reason it works in your favour. In a flurry of orders and organising troops the Hordim reform and move on, leaving the hall silent once again.

When you are sure it is again safe to move, you edge along the back of the tapestry until you stumble across a small alcove inset into the stonework. It looks like the entrance to an old disused tunnel, roughly delved and unfinished, but one worked for a purpose. Quickly you come to the view that this tunnel was not dug by the builders of Stoneholme, and you wonder quietly as to the identity of its maker and the reason for its delving. As you look around there are few clues to be found that might answer these questions, but it is another way ahead and you take it carefully. Taking up your torch you light it and illuminate the tunnel ahead. The first thing you notice is a stick, about an arm's length long, protruding from the centre of the floor some 5 metres ahead.

Turn to section 141

177

With the light of the Armoury shining through the small entrance you advance quickly into the hidden passage. Whereas the Armoury was stripped bare of all its contents, this new corridor is crammed with old broken ornaments and smashed furniture. The first 10 metres proves easy enough, but as you move further into the darkness your progress becomes slower. The debris forms a tangled mess that forces you to pick your way very carefully through the accumulated layers of rubbish. The passage looks like it would normally be quite wide, but it is so cluttered it becomes necessary to push large objects aside, just to make any headway. It is as you are forcing a particularly large wardrobe out of the way that you become conscious of the fact that you are making far too much noise to remain undiscovered. Stopping for a moment, you take a rest and decide that if the way ahead becomes any more difficult you should return down the corridor, back to the Armoury. After travelling westwards for another 20 metres the passageway turns abruptly northwards.

Turn to section 66.

178

You try the door but it is locked. Before you the corridor reaches out into the distance but this exit has piqued your interest. Upon the upper lintel of the stone framing that surrounds the door there was once a name carved, but as you inspect it more closely you can see that it has been deliberately chiselled out. As you run your fingers over the vandalised stone you wonder what might have prompted the vandal responsible to do so. It is just a small question but one that gives reason to think that there may be something of value, or a secret worth hiding, on the other side.

Embraced within the overwhelming heat of the passageway you stand for a short time and consider the lock that confronts you. It is of a standard Dwarvendim make but it is strong and well maintained. If you are to find a way beyond it you will need either skill or the right equipment.

If you have the Skill of Brigandry turn to section 511. If you do not have this skill but have come into possession of a set of lock-picks in your travels turn to section 565. If you have neither this skill nor the lock-picks turn to section 539.

179

After only a few moments of desperate combat the Morg warrior and the Jotun lay motionless on the cold stone. In the gloom you catch your breath, the exertion of the fight a blanket of fatigue that masks the pain inflicted upon you. The Hordim did not go down easily, and you have suffered a number of minor injuries that will require tending before you can continue. After checking that the door is locked, you settle down against the northern wall and consider your situation. You have no doubt that enough noise has been made to alert any nearby Hordim to the battle, and possibly to your presence here. The rock is thick however, and there may be a chance the combat went unnoticed. Placing your ear against the door you hear nothing outside, but this is not surprising, the door must be at least as thick as your outstretched hand. After the battle you have just fought you decide to take the opportunity to rest for a while.

The room is dimly lit, but you can see it has been roughly cut from the rock and appears to be a recent addition to the fortress. There is no furniture here save for the upturned crate which supports the dead creatures' lamp. A quick search of the bodies of the Morg and Jotun provide only a few useful articles. From the clothing of the Jotun you find 2 silver coins and what looks like a small digging implement similar to a spade. The Morg has a variety of weapons, all of which are useless to you, and a suit of leather armour that is too small. On the floor next to the body of the Morg you find something of greater interest however. It is a short length of aged wood, carved with columns of worn lettering, and bound at one end by a tight clasp of woven red-dyed hair. In the shadows you look at it more closely and see small animal skulls fused into its wood, forming an unnatural circle of bone at its opposite end. It is an unusual but strangely familiar object.

If you wish to take any of these items record them on your status sheet. If you decide to take the strange length of wood and you possess the skill of Lorecraft, turn to section 426. If you decide to take the wood but do not possess this skill, turn to section 452. If you choose to leave the thing behind and continue with your quest turn to section 439.



180

It takes some time to retrace your steps back to the Lesser Hall, the climb down no less arduous than the ascent. Years of neglect have left the stone steps worn and cracked, their footing sometimes unsafe as you follow the long curve of the stairway back to the threshold of the Lesser Hall. Peering out from the darkened passage you search the chamber, careful to uncover any sign that Hordim may still remain within the huge space. Thankfully it is empty, as gloomy and as silent as when you first found it. From the obscurity of the passage you decide your next move.

If you have not already done so will you try the double doors in the east wall? If this is your choice turn to section 153. If you believe that there might be value in searching the hall for other exits turn to section 176.

181

Pulling the tapestry carefully aside you quietly enter the Hresh's sleeping quarters, the rise and fall of its breathing matched by your careful footfalls across the floor...

If you possess the skill of Stealth turn to section 205. If you do not possess this skill then only a measure of luck will see you through the Hresh's quarters. Test your Luck attribute. If you are successful turn to section 205. If you are unsuccessful with this test turn to section 88.

182

You have no doubt that there is little good that can come from lingering here. From the sounds that grow louder you can have little doubt that a large gathering of Hordim resides upon the other side of the thick tapestry. There are Jotun close and you would be hard pressed to deal with one of them, let alone a multitude. It is a circumstance you do not wish to confront. With the muffled jeers and shouts of the Hordim echoing in the close passageway you wheel around and retrace your steps back down the long curving hall.

Turn to section 144.

183

The Morg's drunken state makes it no match for your swordsmanship. After blocking its first blow with the side of your blade you quickly dispatch it in a short but bloody melee, one that leaves the small Hordim prostrate upon the cold stone, its mug rolling noisily across the floor.

Quickly moving to the open door you peer around the threshold into a long, wide hall beyond. It is well lit, its walls adorned with a range of intricate carvings, all inlaid in coloured glass as if trying to reproduce on a smaller scale the large stained-glass murals found in the King's Hall. Most of these images depict the making of weapons, though one wall in particular has been dedicated to a long illustration of the battle at Pallah'dem Fields for which the Dwarvendim found great glory. From its layout you think the hall was most probably once an Armoury. Now however, it is stripped bare. Covered in a thin layer of dust the room is empty except for a large, heavy bookcase that rests against the western wall.

Opening the door fully you move slowly into the chamber, your bloodied weapon ready for any further surprises. Looking more carefully you see that the room is no longer in use as anything other than a thoroughfare. The walls are all well lit with torches, but any furniture that would have filled such a space has been destroyed, only wood splinters and some scattered sawdust betraying its emptiness. The bookcase is the only identifiable piece of furniture left in the room, and it is a curious thing that it should find a place here when all else has perished. You wonder for a moment why it should remain but then start towards the only way out, a door in the northern wall.

As you move towards the centre of the room you notice you have the dead Morg's pewter mug in your hand. To stop its clatter you had picked it up, though you have no intention of keeping it. Looking closer you find it has the residue of some of the foul liquid still adhering to its inner cup, and grimacing you throw it to the floor.

Test your Luck attribute. If you are successful turn to section 105. If you are unsuccessful turn to section 11.

184

The chest appears as black as night inside, a dark void from which no light escapes. Carefully you peer further into the box and sense something moving within its dim recesses. Startled by what you have

found you step back and feel a chill run down your spine as the quiet of the Hresh's quarters is broken by a soft, cold laugh. It carries through the room as a mocking jeer that rises from the darkness within, full of malice and hatred. Unsure of what you have found you move forward, intent on slamming the lid and locking it tight once again.

As you reach for the chest you recoil as a spectral hand emerges from its interior, grasping at the edges of the box as if it is trying to pull itself out. As you watch a thick mist fills the chamber, the shadows within its roiling vapours defining something grotesque and alien that is struggling into being, its now visible shape gaining in size and substance. Horrified by the apparition that is materialising before you, you move towards the door and await a possible attack. It comes quickly.

The ghostly form solidifies into the flesh and bone of a Berserker, a mindless creature designed for the defence of magic artefacts. The Berserker is fully two and a half metres tall, protected only by a loincloth and armed with a vicious sword as long as its arm. The creature's glowing red eyes widen as it notices your presence, then in a howling rush raises its sword and charges.

The Berserker has a combat value of 18 and an endurance rating of 15. If you are victorious over the Berserker turn to section 20. If you are defeated by the Berserker then it is here that your journey ends. Hopefully if this proves to be your fate you will find more success in a later life.

185

Like a detonation a monstrous hammer blow resounds through the Library. This impact is quickly followed by many others, the door vibrating to each shattering hit. Like a storm rising to full fury the blows increase in violence, dust and loose stone falling from the arch surrounding the entranceway. Fully awake you jump to your feet as the door splinters and cracks under these dreadful impacts. First one and then the other hinges on the door tear and split until only the wooden beam holds the Hordim out.

Perspiring freely you search desperately for some way to escape, some hope of avoiding the creatures outside. If you do not you know this room will be your tomb.

Turn to section 61.

186

With sweat and blood obscuring your vision you look around the room and survey the carnage. The bodies of six Jotun lie tangled and dismembered at your feet, their remains spread haphazardly over every corner of the old Library. Totally exhausted you slump down on one knee, your weapon nicked and scarred by the battle. Breathing heavily, your mind races trying to work out some method of escape. The Hordim will not take long to return and when they do you cannot afford to still be here.

Regaining your feet you pace the edges of the room and it is then that you spy the ventilation grill in the base of the northern wall. With all your remaining energy you pull the cold iron grate from the wall, and with the shouting and cursing of the returning Hordim in your ears you throw your equipment in and dive after it, only stopping to place a piece of rotting old timber over your exit. Fatigued beyond care you crawl down the long shaft grateful that you have lived to fight another day.

Turn to section 168.

187

Staggering forward against the effects of the ash and heat you are becoming desperate. The air is thick with the smell of sulphur and a heavy layer of black filth is settling upon you. You dare not open your mouth for what you may breathe in.

Through the swirling veils of soot and ash the blackness is almost complete. Looking about you find it difficult to keep a clear sense of direction, then your torch sputters and fails, completely smothered by the choking ash. Now you are in deep trouble however there is no way you can stop. Moving forward you feel your way by touch alone, one hand outstretched before you, the other holding the cloth firmly over your mouth and nose. You are not sure but you think that in the distance there may be a dull red glow.

When the passage turns to the north you are unaware of it until you walk into the wall at the turn. Unable to see the change in direction you hit the hard stone and fall backwards, a thick cloud of ash rising from your stumble. Choking in great spasms you almost pass out, but somehow manage to regain your sense of direction and lurch northwards. Now you are fighting for breath with every heave of

your lungs. What keeps you going is the dull red glow that, with the turning of the passage, has become a distinct arch of light. Fighting for breath, and with nowhere else to go you stagger towards it.

Turn to section 160.

188

The Hresh Hunter is a formidable opponent but proves no match for your skill with a sword. In the confined area of the chamber you are able to find a gap in its defences, and after a brutal fight bring it down with one final deadly thrust to its chest.

After recovering your breath you search the body for any useful items and find that its leather armour is not a bad fit. If you do not possess armour of your own then this may be used. This armour however, is not made for the use of men. If you decide to wear this armour it will afford a +1 armour bonus to your combat value, but will have a -2 reduction to your agility attribute during any agility tests. (Note this reduction in agility on your status sheet and increase your combat value by 1 point to account for your improved protection. This item must also be recorded as a part of your carry load. If you already have 8 items recorded you will have to drop one of them to take this armour.) You also find a dagger and a length of rope. If you wish to keep any of these items record them on your status sheet.

After finishing this distasteful task you turn again to consider the curious words etched above the second door. As your sword drips upon the cold stone floor, you bring back to memory the old stories of how the Stone Kings collected taxes on goods that crossed their Kingdom's borders. This "Custom's House" must have been a collection point for these taxes. You sense the possibility of rials (silver coin) nearby.

Do you wish to try and force this door as well? If so, go to section 132. If you choose not to do so, go to section 14.



189

The second door in the south wall of the Great Hall is of the same construction as most of the others you have encountered in Stoneholme. It is made of heavy timbers, was once highly polished and is reinforced with thick iron bands and studs. Unlike the others however, it is unlocked and you gain access to the passageway beyond without difficulty.

Turn to section 152.

190

Not wishing to spend any more time searching the old volumes you take one last look about the chamber, and then turn to open the door and make your way back into the passage beyond. As a precaution however, you place your ear against the door to ensure first that the hall is indeed empty. It is fortunate that you do. From within the ever-present sounds of the great furnace you hear the muffled approach of many iron-shod boots marching up the passage from the south. Through the heavy timbers the footsteps are dulled, but you have no doubt that the creatures are Hresh. Intermittently the marching stops, there is the rattle of a door handle and then the marching recommences. It is a Hordim patrol and it is coming straight towards you.

Stepping back from the door you ready yourself for combat. The room is small and you think this might work in your favour, but you are effectively trapped and without any avenue of escape a combat against so many can only go badly for you. The marching stops again, but this time it is outside your door. Perspiring heavily from the heat you stand silently, watching the door handle flick up and down as the lock is tested. Holding the grip of your weapon all the tighter you wait grimly, no doubt in your mind that at any moment the Hresh will burst through the door and overwhelm you. In those few seconds you hold your breath, then the patrol moves on and the sounds of heavy boots recede.

For some seconds you stand there motionless. When you begin breathing again you place your ear against the door and hear nothing, the guards having indeed moved on. Carefully you open the door and step out into the passage. The way south seems clear.

Turn to section 42.

191

Windhammer! In a thundering concussion of grasping claws the Dragon raises itself ponderously from the fiery pit. Retreating to the shadows within the passage you peer out into the Deep Vault, watching as the serpent finds its footing upon the edges of the pit before lifting the rest of its body out onto the ruined floor. Even though you are wrapped within the debilitating heat of the Vault your blood runs cold as you realise the sheer size of the monster. Standing more than twenty metres at the shoulder the Dragon is a vision of slick, glass-like scales, black even in the glow of a thousand fires, that reaches more than sixty metres from armoured head to horned tail. Fully out of the pit the beast flexes its wings before scraping razor-sharp claws across the stone flooring. As it stands in the ruddy glow of its domain you watch Windhammer and know that it stands between you and the Tellandra, and the object of your quest stands close indeed.

At the end of the Deep Vault, upon a stepped platform of marbled stone resides the Tellandra, its form no more than a simple column of white petrified wood. As you peer into the steam and billowing mists you can sense that it is now within reach, but if you are to save Maenum there is no time left. The Pillar of Stonewood radiates power, though even as you consider the ancient talisman you can see that its energy wanes, its capacity to keep the walls of Maenum strong weakening. Your people must be saved and there can only be one chance with this serpent. One strike from those talons will tear the life from you.

Do you have the three talismans of power required to defeat the Dragon Windhammer? If you have the Dragonseye, the Dragonclaw and Morgen's Spear turn to section 208. If you have none or only some of these items turn to section 165. If you do not have all of the three artefacts listed but have recently encountered the Druhl and escaped it in the underworld beneath Stoneholme turn to section 564.

192

Dangling from the jutting rock you gaze down into the Neverending Deep that yaws below. The hole disappears into black, a strong fetid wind blowing upwards from its depths. Steeling yourself you slowly begin the climb that will take you out of the hole to safety. Handhold by handhold you inch upwards, your fingers feeling each crack in the

stone, each ledge or bump that can give you support. Twice you almost fall, but after a seeming eternity of effort and sweat you pull yourself out of the pit of Neverending Deep and sit, breathing heavily, on the cool stone stairs. Exhausted you sit propped against the smooth rock, nausea and fatigue quickly overtaking you as you thank Providence once again for your deliverance. The sounds of pursuit are now however, too close. Pulling yourself to your feet you summon your last reserves of energy and continue the agonising climb upwards.

Turn to section 202.

193

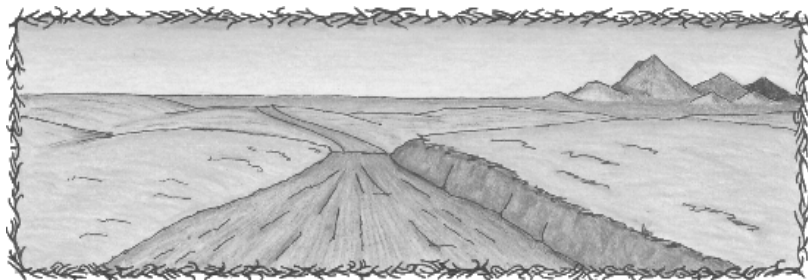
With a number of mounted soldiers in pursuit you turn southwards, urging Pallenten to greater speed. On the heavily rutted roadway the great horse accelerates and quickly you draw away from your pursuers. Pallenten is a mount unmatched by any of the guard's horses and although the guardsmen try it is a chase they cannot win. For a time the soldiers remain in sight, but it is not long before they give up their pursuit and bring their mounts to a halt. Upon a rise in the road you see them turn slowly and then disappear back towards Miller's Crossing. Without pause or hesitation the black Courser speeds southwards, her hooves pounding a drumbeat as you thunder on towards Das Frontiere. Not for the first time do you give thanks for the foresight of the High Prefect.

A good half hour later you rein Pallenten to a canter and consider your situation. As a Dwarvendim travelling alone you are an immediate target for any Kalborean looking for trouble. Far to the south lies Das Frontiere and to pass through its crowded streets unchallenged would be lucky indeed. Perhaps if you skirted the capital like you had Baellum? It is an idea with some merit but the city is huge. Picking your way around its fringes would be difficult and time consuming. It is true however, that you have many friends in the taverns and businesses that can be found there and their help could prove useful.

Trotting over a slight rise you come upon another fork in the road. To your right a narrow road joins from the west. It is signposted as another route to Melem's Fork. You can see upon the grasslands west of the road a collection of farmhouses and outbuildings nestled amongst protective stands of trees. The ground on all sides is broken by long stone fences and hedgerows, overgrown and neglected. At the

junction of the two roads there is also a small dilapidated roadside stall. At its front stands the proprietor, a weathered old woman dressed in the rags of a street beggar.

If you would like to talk with the stall-holder turn to section 461. If you can see no benefit in doing so but still wish to journey south to Das Frontiere turn to section 255. If you would rather take the road west to Melem's Fork turn to section 225. On either side of the road you can see a number of farmhouses and fenced paddocks. Beyond them lay open ground and possibly a more direct route to the DevKraager Tor. If you think it will be more practical to strike out across country and make for the mountain this way, turn to section 261.



194

A quick look at the chest fails to provide any reason why you should spend time on it. It is securely locked and you don't want to invite any further problems by trying to break it open. Leaving it, you pick up the items you have collected and move over to the door in the eastern wall. The door is secured with a large iron rod, which is heavy but you find it can be removed easily. Opening the door you carefully survey the hallway and find it to be deserted. Without hesitation you step out.

Turn to section 100.

195

The number inscribed above the door means nothing to you and you have no key that fits the lock. Try as you might you find it impossible to gain entry, the smooth polished stone making a good grip upon the door all but impossible. To your further frustration you

find that the keyhole lock is resistant to all your attempts to pick it. As you stand upon the open floor you can sense the presence beyond growing in power but you can find no way in. After searching the surrounding stonework unsuccessfully for any hidden latches or mechanisms you turn from the door and decide to move on.

If you have not previously done so will you;

Try the next door along the southern wall? If so turn to section 189.

Cross the Great Hall and try the door in the northern wall? If so turn to section 48.

Investigate the alcove in the north wall. If so turn to section 239.

Try the door in the far eastern wall? If so turn to section 161.

196

It is not known how the Dwarvendim LoreMasters discovered the fatal flaw designed into every Hordim known as the Shimmera, but as you raise your sword and confront the enormous Hresh you know it is probably the one thing that will now save your life. Quickly you elevate the tip of Than'durion so that its point hovers in the air before the charging Hordim. Immediately the Hresh's eyes focus on the threat, and it is in that moment that you perform the subtle movement that triggers the Shimmera. In concert you move the tip of the sword to the left, and as the warrior's eyes follow its path you step quickly to the right. It is a simple movement but one where timing is everything, and done properly the results are devastating.

As the Hresh lumbers down upon you it suddenly stops, its countenance wracked by a vertigo that it has no ability to control. Completely overwhelmed by the swirling disorientation it drops to one knee, then struggles valiantly to regain its senses. Swinging its scimitar wildly in an attempt to find you, it is immobilised by the Shimmera and in this moment you have the one opportunity you need to end the combat quickly. You do not hesitate.

Within seconds the Hordim lays dead, your sword protruding from its back. Although it gives you no pleasure to kill in such a manner the quest is too important, the consequences of failure too great. After pulling your weapon from the Hordim's lifeless form, you wipe the warrior's blood from your sword and then begin a quick search of the room. In the course of your search you find:

- 12 silver rials,
- 1 battle helm,
- 1 finely carved battle shield,
- a suit of leather and chain-mail armour,
- some food, (the equivalent of 2 rations) and
- a large locked chest.

You may take any two of the first 5 articles. Make sure you note these on your character status sheet. If you choose either the shield, armour or helm you should add a +1 armour bonus to your combat value for each item taken. If you are currently wearing a thick leather jerkin it will have to be removed before you can wear the armour. Note however, that this heavier protection also brings with it a -1 reduction to your agility during any agility attribute test. This reduction only applies whilst you are wearing the armour, or carrying the shield. They can be discarded at any time. The last thing you turn your attention to is the large locked chest.

If you have the skill of Lorecraft turn to section 483. If you do not possess this skill and wish to open the chest turn to section 29. If you do not wish to open the chest turn to section 194.

197

As you wait at the base of the stairs a growing sense of unease begins to invade your confidence. Up till now your travels have been relatively straightforward for you know Northern Kalborea well. There is not much of it that you haven't travelled at some time and it keeps few secrets from those who respect its dangers. What lies within Stoneholme is different though; it is unknown and dangerous. For a moment you ponder these feelings of foreboding but you know more is at stake than just your life. It is time for you to throw your lot in with Providence and hope that a measure of skill and luck will protect you.

One last time you check your pack and stow your equipment more securely. Considering the black depths of the entrance ahead you realise that you have brought no lantern to light your way. Sitting down upon the lowest steps of the staircase you think on what you might be able to use to provide light within.

Perhaps, you think, this is as good a reason as any to end your quest here, but the collar at your throat is a constant reminder of your

need to go on. Your thoughts however, are cut short by a glimpse of movement to your right. To your alarm a band of weary Hresh emerge from the forest that borders the clearing, struggling under a heavy load and moving purposefully in your direction. They are carrying the carcass of a blood-stained Sempaca calf on a pole and because of its weight are concentrating on getting the animal to the stairs. You cannot tell whether the animal is alive or dead, or whether they have seen you or not.

Test your luck attribute. If you are successful turn to section 56. If you fail this test turn to section 8.

198

Lighter for not having the weight of your backpack or weapons, you sail easily across the slab and land successfully on the other side. Pausing only for a moment to determine if your jump has provoked any unwanted curiosity you shoulder your pack again, pick up your weapons, and move forward up the passage the short distance to the east-west junction.

The lighting in the larger passage is much better and you notice that most of the tapestries and decorations remain in place, unmolested by the Hordim but suffering the effects of age and a lack of care. There is little else to see except for the tracks of many large creatures scattered along the corridor. Carefully you take a position at the edge of the passage and consider where your emergence from the ventilation grill has left you. The corridor here extends to the west and east but you do not have the advantage of the shadows to veil your passing. It is a circumstance that has your hand grasping the hilt of your blade all the firmer. More than anything else you notice that there is a heavy smell of something pungent in the air. Whether it is the mustiness of rotting cloth or the distant hint of ash is too difficult to tell.

Having decided to go west you turn left at the junction and, keeping close to the tapestries on your left, move carefully towards the increasingly violent sounds of activity ahead. You cannot be sure but it sounds very much like the clamour of a deadly combat.

Turn to section 114.

199

After your travels through the dark grandeur of the King's Hall its end proves to be somewhat disappointing. The spacious vaulted hall ends abruptly in what looks like a small open room; an annexe or shrine you think. It is sparsely furnished but has a number of rich tapestries hanging from the walls. Considering the ruin of the King's Hall itself this smaller chamber is curiously tidy, almost neat.

Raising your flagging lantern above your head to see better, you notice the floor has been recently swept, and there are unmistakable signs that someone has used a table against the far wall to prepare food. Unlit torches hang suspended from iron brackets along all the walls and a thick woven grass mat extends completely across the entranceway to the room. The matting is crude and definitely Hordim-made.

Do you wish to enter this room and take some of the torches? If so turn to section 38. If you see nothing that you wish to take and decide not to enter the room turn to section 15.

200

The instant your blade touches the strange blue light you are blinded by a silent, brilliant explosion. Where darkness prevailed there now dance hundreds of the same blue beams, criss-crossing the passageway ahead in a deadly lattice. Fortunately you have stood back far enough and have avoided being hit by any of them. Your sword was not as lucky, a full forearm's length at its end sheared and scorched by its slight contact. (When the opportunity arises you will need to acquire a new weapon. Until such time you must reduce your combat value by 4 points to account for this damage.)

With this deadly barrier before you, you decide to rest for a moment and determine a plan of action. (Take a meal if you need one and restore six points to your endurance level). There is no way that you can avoid the lethal blue lights and no way that you can return down the stairs. You will have to find some way to overcome this obstacle.

Feeling better able to proceed you take a closer look at this strange apparition. Following the hair-thin beam of light along the step you find that it emanates from a small metal tube set into the opposite wall. Being careful not to come into contact with any of the beams you take the pommel of your now damaged sword and hammer the tube flat. Crushing the tube has an immediate effect, the deadly latticework

before you flickering slightly before evaporating back into the darkness. Taken by surprise, and unsure as to why this has happened you thank Providence anyway, pick up your pack and move with haste up the stairs. You will not be happy until you are well beyond the reach of this mysterious apparatus.

Turn to section 59.

201

It is only a short distance to the metal door that stands at the eastern end of the hall. Placing your ear against the cold iron you strain your hearing trying to find any sound of danger beyond. You hear nothing. Trying the handle you find the door is unlocked but its immense weight makes it difficult to move. Applying all your strength you pull against the handle and slowly it opens to reveal a foul stench that is almost overpowering. It is a smell of rotting garbage so odious you haven't smelt anything like it since you were forced to take that job cleaning refuse pits back in Das Frontiere. Surprised by the smell you don't immediately notice the black pit before you. The door has opened out into a circular room with an arched and vaulted ceiling and no floor. Where the floor should be there is a deep void, reaching down into an abyss of unspeakable foulness. This is one threshold you will not be passing over. Quickly you close the door on the stench and move eastwards, back down the passage towards the Mess Hall.

Turn to section 69.

202

Only a short way further up the stairs you arrive at a flat landing that turns sharply eastwards into a long hallway. The hall is well lit with the strange yellowish glow with which you have recently become familiar. In this light you see that the walls are finely carved, depicting the legend of Morgen Orncryst from prosperous beginnings to gruesome end. Brushed crudely in paint over the top of some of these carvings is the Dragonsign of the Horde and the word "gael'qirion", which can be roughly translated into Old Dwarvendim as "Windhammer". Whether there is any truth to the legend is something you are yet unsure about. You smile nervously to yourself as you realise that you will find out soon enough.

Turn to section 12.

203

Your position is hopeless but all is not completely lost. The Jotun follow an ancient code of conduct many times older than human habitation in Arborell, and in this instance it works in your favour. With nowhere to run you raise your weapon and cajole them to attack.

In the light of many torches the Jotun fill the confines of the Library, torchlight throwing grotesque shadows about the chamber, but none move towards you. Instead the largest stands before the rest, a four metre tall ochre-skinned giant, emblazoned in tattoos and wearing a finely decorated set of battle armour.

It is only as they begin arguing amongst themselves that you realise what is about to transpire. If you had submitted to them without a fight they would have butchered you without hesitation, but such a surrender is not the way of the Dwarvendim. You have stood your ground, and to these giant creatures this is a personal challenge that must be answered by each in turn. You will not die immediately, however once they have decided the order of their participation they will try to kill you. Each Jotun will attack in succession, their fellow Hordim content to wait their turn. You must fight each as a separate combat. Combat values and endurance points are as follows.

	(C.V.)	(E.P.)
First Jotun	19	18
Second Jotun	18	17
Third Jotun	18	16
Fourth Jotun	18	15
Fifth Jotun	17	15
Sixth Jotun	17	14

If by some miracle you defeat these giants of the Horde their kinsmen will flee from your blade, leaving you alone in the Library. If you have survived turn to section 186. If you are overwhelmed by your adversaries then it is here that your quest ends. You can be assured however, that your brave stand will not be forgotten.

204

Time presses upon you, the metal at your throat providing all the reason you need to move on quickly. Leaving the doorway behind you travel a further 200 metres to the south before the passage turns

abruptly to the east. Coming to a halt you carefully peer around the corner, searching the gloom for guards or any other sign that danger lies ahead. There is nothing, but the shadow and noise of your surroundings cannot lessen the disquiet you feel as you carefully make your way forward.

Within this new corridor you travel quickly, avoiding the piles of debris that mark each collapsed doorway or ruined hall as you half-run into the shadows. Focused on the task ahead your senses are alert, searching for any sign of the Hordim. As you run the dark recedes before you, your torch flickering brightly in the hot air, but in this lonely place you begin to sense something else, and it grows insistent as you travel. In your mind you can feel a presence building in the stone. The sense of power that was so subtle yet distinct when you stood upon the threshold of Stoneholme's Imperial Entrance burns now in the stone as a living force, and you can feel it vibrating in the rock about you. As you run you have no doubt that your quest is about to reach an important turning point, the heat and the overwhelming smell of ash telling you that your goal may be very close indeed.

Following the easterly passage you continue on until your torch sputters and dies. In the sudden gloom you stumble upon a slightly raised stone threshold that opens into a large darkened hall, one very similar in aspect to the Great Hall you have left behind. It is however, smaller by half and has no illumination. In this lightless void the hairs stand up at the back of your neck as you feel the presence of something else moving in the darkness before you. Ahead you can hear the soft scraping sound of a large body being dragged slowly along the stone floor. With all your senses alert you move further into the shadows of the Lesser Hall.

Turn to section 243.

205

Without incident you are able to cross the Hresh's room and quietly unlock the door. It swings open freely and you move carefully into a long hallway that extends both to the north and south. To the south you can see the door of what must be the Armoury, ajar as if someone had rushed through in great haste. Ahead of you to the north the clamour of Hresh and Morg remains constant. Harsh sounds and distinct cruel voices are loud and near. As there is nothing to be

gained by returning to the Armoury you steel your nerves and move northward.

Turn to section 158.

206

With a start you awaken to find your torch extinguished in the dust at your feet. Fumbling in the darkness you find its handle and check that it is still usable. Luckily it has some life left in it and with your pack within reach find your flints. As you relight your torch you look about the stairwell and wonder at the luck of not being discovered whilst asleep. Surely Providence must have had a hand in keeping you safe but you cannot dwell on your luck, or the dangers of sleeping in such an exposed position. Thanking Providence anyway you collect your gear and look to the way ahead.

Above you the light from your torch extends only a small distance along the stairway, however the air has changed subtly here, it is both fresher and smells of odours that you might only expect from the outdoors. Intrigued by this change you move forward and find that the stairs do not spiral upwards without end.

As you continue your ascent the illumination of your torch soon reveals a wide landing; at the southern wall of which there stands a solid wooden door. The stone floor of the entranceway is swept and clean, though fresh scratch marks in the stone show the door is frequently used, and has been recently opened. As you approach the door the sounds of movement beyond its solid timbers are distinct. There are all the signs that a large creature is moving within, the sound of metal against metal indicating it is probably armed.

Do you wish to enter? If so turn to section 219. If you are not up to combat at this time and wish to return to the lesser hall before you are discovered turn to section 140.

207

Moving up the passage towards the east-west junction, you notice that the floor in front of you is marked by the slightly raised stone of a large rectangular slab. It extends across the width of the passageway and judging by the fresh chisel marks has only recently been laid. It is another trap, of that you are sure, but it is one you cannot avoid. With

any hope of escape laying beyond you must find some way of getting past without setting it off. Smooth walls and a high vaulted ceiling give you no opportunity to fix a rope above and swing across. With no other choice you realise you must jump across, and the leap is at least 3 metres wide.

Throwing your pack and weapons over the slab to the other side you retreat a short way down the passage. With as much strength as you can muster you sprint towards the trap and launch yourself out across the stone.

Test your Strength attribute. If you fail this test turn to section 110. If however, you succeed turn to section 16.

208

In the semi-darkness of the entranceway you watch Windhammer, marvelling first at the immense size of the beast then quickly recognising that something is very wrong. Now fully out of the pit it stands in the centre of the Vault, its long neck swaying from side to side, its behaviour becoming more erratic as it losses itself to some internal compulsion. It appears oblivious to its surroundings; too involved in its own thoughts to be aware of what is happening around it. Such is the strange nature of its behaviour that you wait for some minutes, looking for a clue to the purpose of its unusual motion. A chill washes over your skin when you realise that there is no purpose and in that moment you understand just how dangerous this beast may actually be.

It is true you know little about the life and habits of beasts such as Windhammer but they are animals nonetheless. It is also true that you have seen enough caged animals to know that a century of imprisonment within this hall may have left its mark upon the Dragon. Other animals you have seen acting in this way, but they were mad, confined so long that they had lost all reason and hope. As you watch the creature you can only ask yourself one question. What if Windhammer has gone mad? A Dragon at its best is a terrible foe, but one that that has lost its sanity is a pure force of nature, unrestrained in its violence and unable to know when to cut its losses. Such a creature has no sense of fear and no need for mercy, and as you wait in the shadows you wonder what Windhammer is truly capable of. For now however it remains silent, consumed within its own thoughts

and seemingly unaware of your presence.

Mad or not it is now that you must strike. Moving a few metres back into the fuller darkness of the passage you lay your three talismans of power on the ground before you. In the dim red glow of the flames the Dragonseye, Dragonclaw and Morgen's Spear all flicker with glimmers of potent magic.

If you have stood before the mirror known as the Elesmenedene Oracle turn to section 115. If you have not spoken with the Oracle turn to section 224.

209

The bottle contains a crudely made potion, distilled from Nahla fruit and fermented into a mead that smells distinctly of the powerful regenerative. A closer look at the glass container tells you also that the potion is Hordim-made. Most things medicinal in the Four Nations are produced by the alchemists of the Faeyen. It is a thing they do particularly well, and always with an attention to detail and quality. What you hold is something far less sophisticated but not necessarily dangerous. Carefully you smell it again before swilling the bottle about. There is only enough in the container for maybe a few mouthfuls and without thinking any further on its possible origins you drink it down quickly, leaving nothing remaining.

At first you feel nothing, a sense of unease washing over you as you realise there could just have easily been poison in the container. Then the potion begins its work and you have to grab at a nearby table to steady yourself. As you stand there comes a powerful flood of dizziness, one that quickly changes into a tingling touch across your skin. Before you can move the sensation deepens, focusing into a burning pain. From the core of your stomach the agony spreads, moving along your arms and legs, searching its way until your entire body is engulfed in its embrace. Trying not to cry out the Nahla within the potion takes a hold upon you, and as it has you in its grip it feels as if it is squeezing the very life from you. Then to your relief it passes. Breathing heavily you try to stand upright and as you do so any fatigue you have evaporates. In that moment your body heals, all the fatigue of your journey lifting from you as a fog might at the first touch of daylight. Unsure as to what has happened you steady yourself and recover the bottle which you had dropped at the onset of

the potion's effect. It is only then that you realise that your left arm from the shoulder to the wrist is numb and a good deal weaker because of it.

As you replace the bottle upon the rough top of the makeshift cupboard you are startled by a faint metallic noise behind you. Immediately you crouch, taking advantage of the semi-darkness. A quick look around finds nothing but you wait, all senses on alert, sure that you will soon have to meet the charge of some hideous creature. It does not come. For a good ten minutes you crouch in the shadows your body tingling from the effects of the potion, your brow dripping with sweat. When the expected attack does not eventuate you slowly relax and slip quietly to the floor, your back propped against the smooth stone of the Mess Hall's western wall. Now you must decide what to do next.

The Nahla potion has restored all lost endurance to your character status. Return your endurance back to its initial level that you started the adventure. This boon comes at a cost however. You have lost strength in your left arm, and although this will not affect your combat value you must now suffer a -1 to your Strength attribute for any strength test taken from this point onwards. Once you have recorded this on your character sheet you must decide your next move. Will you search the Mess Hall for useful articles? If this is your choice turn to section 90. If you would rather search the kitchen area turn to section 22. If there seems more value in trying the door in the western wall turn to section 237. If however you would rather try the door in the northern wall turn to section 136.

210

For a passage that had been so securely locked it appears well used and this gives you reason to move forward with even greater caution. The floor is covered in a thick blanket of dust, but a multitude of bootprints in the filth betrays how frequently it is being travelled. You note also that the footprints are large enough to be those of Hresh Warriors and with the prospect of Hordim close at hand you instinctively draw your blade in readiness.

With your weapon in one hand and the torch sputtering quietly in the other you move forward. The light it throws does not reveal much of the passageway ahead, however it does provide enough

illumination for you to ascertain that you are now moving through what must have once been an ornate and important ceremonial hallway. Complex relief carvings of the lineage of the Dwarvendim royal families cover both sides of the passage, and the roof is a continuous history of your people, outlining their legends and their greater glories. As you advance down the corridor the carvings unfold as a scrolling story of the Stone Kingdoms but unfortunately one that you have little time to appreciate; that is until one piece of the script catches your eye.

Do you wish to stop and read this script? If so turn to section 51. If you have no time for such things and would rather carry on down the hall instead turn to section 111.

211

For what seems like an eternity the rock and earth held by the trap falls into the passageway. It is only your agility and a good measure of luck that saves you as you pitch forward, leaping and then rolling away from the collapsing stone ceiling. Avoiding the larger lethal boulders proves easiest, but you were not fast enough to avoid the torrent of small stones and finely crushed earth that showers down like a blanket across most of the corridor. Held fast for a moment by the weight of the debris you almost suffocate as you try to struggle out. Only with a heave that takes most of your remaining strength do you finally escape and scramble free.

In the absolute darkness of the passage you check yourself for injury then search carefully for your belongings. Finding your pack and other equipment proves difficult and you have to overcome a moment of panic when you realise that most of it is buried deep in the pile of rubble. Choking dust and large amounts of loose stone stand between you and the equipment you need. To get it back you are going to have to dig it out.

The trap has left you with deep bruises across your back and shoulders. Deduct 2 endurance points from your character profile before continuing. In the gloom you massage your shoulder and consider how you are going to retrieve your equipment. If you have a shovel in your possession turn to section 429. If you do not have a shovel turn to section 497.

212

As you move forward you find the eastern passage extending for some distance before you. The corridor is wide and open, the floor covered in a thin layer of dust and grime that muffles your footfalls as you advance. On both sides the remains of exits and other hallways tumble into the passage; all collapsed and blocked by the Hordim.

For a moment you stop and consider one of the exits. It is a high arch, some ten metres in width at its widest point, but now a tangle of broken stone and smashed earth. At some time in the past the Hordim had pulled out the keystones above from their settings, bringing the facing stones of the corridor beyond crashing down behind them. There seems little purpose to the vandalism, you can only guess at what might lay beyond the rubble, but the Hordim have effectively turned the corridor into one long hall without exit or turn. In this place there is only one way forward.

Carefully you move on, following the passage eastwards. About you old rotting tapestries hang ragged upon the walls but there is little to hinder your way into the east. Apart from the tumble of stone that spreads from each broken exit the floor is clear of debris, and the same dim yellowish light radiates from its unknown source illuminating your way ahead. There is a noticeable change here however, and it becomes more obvious as you venture further east. In this quiet place a strong smell hangs in the air. At first you thought it might have been the heavy, musty smell of damp rotting fabric, but the further you go the more identifiable the odour becomes. It is the smell of ash and charcoal and it permeates everything.

Soon you begin to see a distinct mist in the air, a fine miasma of something that hangs upon the damp atmosphere, slowly circulating from somewhere ahead. Focusing your thoughts on what you know about Dragonlore you search for a connection between the winged serpents and this heavy odorous smell. While deep in thought it occurs to you that a large serpent trapped deep underground would need more than just gold to sustain itself. Those Dragons that dwell far from the realms of daylight require burnt wood to survive. At once you see why there are so many of the Hordim infesting the remains of this old fortress. For a purpose known only to themselves they are feeding the Dragon, keeping it alive, giving it the one thing it needs to sustain itself in the darkness. No wonder there is very little wooden furniture left in the fortress. It has all been converted into charcoal as food for the Dragon.

Whether this is the case however, is something yet to be uncovered and it is a mystery that can bode no good. Dragonlore is a subject best left to those who understand it, and the motivations of the Hordim can be as unfathomable as Dragons themselves. Whatever the purposes of the Hordim here you have an uncomfortable feeling that you will find out soon enough, and it will not be to your advantage.

For some time you move forward, the floor sloping in a shallow decline as the passage reaches ever deeper into the mountain. It is at the end of this corridor that you are forced to a halt, your thoughts interrupted by an abrupt southerly turn in the passageway ahead.

Turn to section 67.

213

You find that your blade proves very efficient at clearing away the dust covered webs that hinder your advance. The tunnel reaches deep into the stone of the mountain, however as you make your way forward you begin to feel that the passage will not help you. As you go you begin to find the rusting remains of mining tools and large piles of stone, placed as if they are to be used in some type of construction work. Moving steadily forward it takes only a short time to reach the passage's end. A quick but careful search confirms your growing suspicion that it is a dead end. Where the tunnel should have continued there has been set an enormous slab of dull grey metal. You can find no mechanism that will move the barrier and no other way around it. Discouraged you turn back down the passage and make your way back to the Lesser Hall.

By the light of your torch you find your way back to the hall, somewhat frustrated by the time taken on this diversion, but as you once again move towards the large chamber the temperature once again increases, the air becoming humid and uncomfortable. In your mind you are sure that you shall find the Tellandra at the source of this heat, and with the hope that you are indeed close to the goal of your quest you move all the quicker. Before long you come to an abrupt halt, the long fabric cover bringing you to a complete stop.

Standing behind the tapestry that covers the opening you listen for any sounds that might betray the presence of a patrol or lone guard in the chamber beyond. For some time you stand silent in the darkness. At first there is nothing, but as you wait you begin to make out the

subtle whisper of something quietly crossing the floor of the hall. Sweating in the heat you listen intently. It is a strange and surreal movement, muffled yet heavy in the darkness, betrayed every so often only by the slight scrape of one of the Reaver's bones being pushed aside. Before long however, whatever lingers in the hall moves on, leaving the chamber once again empty. The minutes pass, but hearing nothing else you edge your way from behind the heavy cloth hanging and decide your next move.

If you have not already done so you can try and open the double doors in the east wall. If this is your choice turn to section 153. If you believe that a better course will be to investigate the open passage in the south wall turn to section 70.

214

Within the confined space of the narrow passage the Mutan is unable to wield its spear effectively and the combat is swift. It takes but a few strokes of your blade and the disgusting creature falls heavily to the stone floor, its chest rent apart by your last blow. Cleaning your weapon quickly on the Mutan's clothing you listen closely for any sounds from the hallway beyond. Hearing nothing to indicate approaching trouble you move out into the more brightly lit hall and survey your surroundings. As soon as you step onto the smooth stone of this new corridor the door behind you closes quietly, all trace of the Mutan and the secret passage disappearing completely.

For a moment you try to establish where you are. It is obvious that you have emerged somewhere deep within Stoneholme, and certainly a part of the fortress well used by your enemies. Tapestries and other ornaments cover the walls, even though they are rotting where they hang. The floor is well swept and shows the marks of frequent usage. There is an unmistakable smell of ash on the air. You assume this is a sure sign of habitation in this part of the fortress.

At first it appears you have two options of how to progress. Where you have exited the secret passageway the hall extends in two directions, one travels away to the north and the other for some distance to the east. However, from the north comes the muffled sounds of a violent conflict. Over the unmistakable roar of a crowd watching some kind of blood sport you hear the sickening impacts of warhammers making contact with bare flesh. Each bone-breaking

thud is quickly followed by mingled cries of pain and jubilation. For the moment the option to go east seems the least dangerous.

Before moving on you re-check your pack and fasten your weapon securely to your belt. From the north you can hear the unseen crowd giving out a growing cry of triumph, it would appear that the conflict has been brought to a bloody conclusion. Not stopping to listen any longer you hurry on your way. At first the easterly passage remains level, the smell of ash becoming stronger as you go. About 400 metres further along you encounter a flight of stairs that descends steeply into darkness. At least, you think, its not uphill. Shrugging your shoulders you reset your pack upon your back and begin what may be a long descent.

Turn to section 230.

215

Leaping with all the strength you have you lunge for the edge of the pit. It is an ungainly jump, burdened by the weight of your equipment and the fatigue born of days of hard travel, but it is enough. Falling heavily on the hard stone floor of the tunnel you roll to safety amongst drifts of dust, and the unrecognisable remains of a multitude of vermin and insect husks. Thanking Providence for your deliverance you lay on the cold stone, breathing heavily in the dank air and once again finding it necessary to take a moment to ponder your good fortune. Crawling towards the edge of the pit you look carefully into a dark void, within which you can hear the squeak and scattering of a large number of rodents. The stick has been lost to the darkness below, and you have no doubt it will be better to use your weapon to clear the path ahead.

Turn to section 213.

216

The mirror pauses for a moment as if trying to remember something long forgotten, then continues.

"The gemstone known as the Dragonseye resides but a short distance from this room, the whereabouts of the other two items unknown to me. One has been lost for many ages, the other has fallen into the hands of evil and has been shielded from my knowledge. You

need all to defeat the serpent."

"To overcome Windhammer you must place the Dragonseye in the palm of your hand. When you face the serpent it will emit a column of light that will blind it in its dark lair. Under the cover of this light you must use the axe known as the Dragonclaw to strike at the great beast's back. Only the Dragonclaw can reave its flesh. This will disable it. The last stroke comes from Morgen's Spear. Extended to its full length, it must be thrown into the open mouth of the great beast, piercing its brain. With this done Windhammer will die and the Tellandra will be yours."

As the last of the oracle's words fade the mist that has shrouded the mirror slowly dissipates and is gone. In the glass you now see only your reflection. For long moments you consider what you have heard and then turn your attention to the flask of liquid at the other end of the room.

Turn to section 146.

217

Leaping with all the strength at your command you vault across a deep chasm that has suddenly appeared below you. With one finger's length to spare you clear the steps and land heavily on the other side. Not stopping to consider the strangeness of what you have seen you press on.

Turn to section 202.

218

With every blow the battle before you grows more violent. Streaming blood the two mighty warriors pound each other with their hammers. Impossibly vicious blows that would crush the life from lesser creatures rain down upon both combatants. You look on transfixed as they wield their weapons like they are made of wood and not heavy iron. As fast as lightning they move and like thunder they strike. The combat continues for a full five minutes before one of the warriors is struck a crushing blow to his forearm. With a sickening crack the arm breaks and his hammer falls heavily to the floor. One more blow is all that is needed for the battle to end. You turn away in

disgust as the blow is delivered and the Jotun warrior's head is crushed. As the heavy hammer falls upon its victim the crowd surrounding the walls let out a blood-curdling scream and begin to attack the hapless warrior with their fists. It seems as if his body will be torn apart.

Turn to section 30.

219

Determining surprise to be the best option you kick at the door with the heel of your boot, aiming the blow at the timber nearest the handle. Under the force of the impact the wood splinters and breaks about the lock, showering loose dust over the floor near the entranceway. One more kick smashes the door inwards, and with the doorway clear you jump easily around the broken timbers. Your impressive entrance does not go unnoticed for a Hresh Chieftain stands in the centre of what is a large, sunlit room. He is adorned in full battle dress and wears a look of both surprise and anger upon his heavy face. Slowly but deliberately the Hordim pulls a long, richly decorated scimitar from a scabbard resting nearby and plays it easily in the air between the two of you. No words come forth from the Hresh, but the malice written on the countenance of this powerful warrior is quickly transformed by a bloodlust that brings an evil smirk in its place. With no hesitation the creature attacks.

The Hresh Chieftain has a combat value of 18 and an endurance rating of 18. If you defeat this warrior turn to section 249. If however you succumb to the Hresh's brute strength and experience your quest will end here. You have indeed come far but a latter life may provide you with greater success.



220

Fighting Windhammer

Combat with Dragons is both difficult and extremely dangerous. Their large bulk and armoured hides do not allow the use of normal weapons. It is only weapons possessed of magic that will do direct lethal harm, however weapons of iron alone can inflict damage against the mouth, eyes and neck. To strike such areas of a large serpent requires luck, courage and a high degree of skill. To defeat Windhammer you will need them all.

Dragons have two offensive weapons; Dragonfire and their talons. Both will kill and both must be avoided. To combat the Dragon Windhammer the following combat system applies. It is the same as normal combat but has one significant difference. Before rolling for your attack round test your luck attribute. If you are successful you will have luck on your side. If you win your attack round you will have hit a vulnerable spot and the Dragon will be harmed. Failing this test signifies that you have been unlucky and even if you win the attack round the Dragon is unaffected. Combat proceeds on the basis that with each attack round of your own you will be either lucky or unlucky in striking a vulnerable spot on the beast.

Windhammer has a combat value of 33 and in the circumstances of this battle has an endurance rating of 33. As with all creatures Windhammer will die when its endurance falls to 0.

Turn to section 102.

221

In a rush the Hordim charges down the corridor, its white-cloaked body clearly illuminated in the light of your torch. For a moment you cannot identify what the creature might be, but as it approaches you see its blank, dark-eyed face and realise that what confronts you is something you have not personally encountered before. It is a Mutan of the korep underclass, a creation of the Trell's worst magic and every bit as vicious as a fully grown Jotun warrior. Tall and unnaturally thin, these grey-skinned creatures favour the use of impossibly large battle axes, and have the speed and agility to use them with lethal effect. Before you can ready yourself the Hordim rushes at you, wielding its axe in a high downward arc that you barely have time to block,

throwing you off balance and causing you to stumble heavily to the floor. Recovering quickly you return the blow with one of your own and the battle begins in earnest.

In this combat you have two choices. You may use the Shimmera or you may fight. If you wish to attempt to use the Shimmera test your Intuition attribute. If you are successful turn to section 431. If you fail this test the Shimmera will not help you, and you must rely instead on the strength of your arm and the sharpness of your blade. If it is a fight you must have the Mutan will prove a worthy opponent. The Hordim has a combat value of 17 and an endurance of 10. If you kill the Mutan turn to section 128. If you fall to its axe then it is here that your quest must end. If this is to be your fate then it will be to another life that you must look for better luck.

222

The metal plate proves to be a hastily attached warning to all who travel this corridor not to enter the large doors that bar its end. Looking down the passage you see no doors, only the red glow of some great conflagration. The warning is of little value as you have nowhere to go except forward. With your strength returning you steel yourself for what is to come and move north towards the fires.

Turn to section 99.

223

As you approach the door the level of your disquiet grows. Not only is the door falling to pieces but it is weighted down by at least a dozen chains and locks. None of the locks are of Dwarvendim origin and each link of each chain has unusual runes and hieroglyphs scratched roughly upon them. For a moment you try and identify the origin of the metalwork but it is unknown to you. All you can say for certain is that something has been placed behind this door, and nobody seems to have been willing to come back and check on it. As you have nowhere to go but forward it seems your fate must be to find out what it is.

Testing the soundness of the door and finding it rotten and insect ridden you strike out with your foot. The timber shatters in a flurry of

wood and dust, the chains and locks falling loudly in a heap of tangled, rusting metal on the floor at your feet. Covering your mouth with your hand you peer into the gloom but you can see little. The room beyond the splintered door is dark, quiet and reeking of evil. Lighting another of your torches you throw it into the blackness but, at least in the circle of its faltering light, you can see nothing.

Stepping over the remains of the door you make your way into a room as forbidding as the decrepit door you have just destroyed. A quick look shows the chamber to be circular, about 30 metres in diameter with one door in its western wall. This room is very different from any you have previously encountered in Stoneholme. The walls curve smoothly to a high arched point some 40 metres above you, and all are completely covered in a seamless metal of a kind you do not recognise. You have the distinct impression that it was made to keep something in.

Walking across the wide open floor the room appears deserted. When you reach the door in the western wall it turns out to be locked, there is a handle but no visible keyhole or other mechanism. Grumbling a few choice words about why life should be so hard you begin a search of the edges of the door for any hidden locking devices. Intent on your search you work quietly in the silence until suddenly the ground about you tremors as the loose earthen floor comes to life, rippling and heaving like a stormy sea. Caught by surprise you fall against the near wall and brace yourself against it. Steam hisses shrilly from the quaking earth and a low, groaning vibration builds quickly beneath your feet. Keeping your balance is difficult but you keep your back to the wall as your eyes search the floor looking for danger. It is from the centre of the room that a great mound of earth rises, twisting and contorting into the form of a hideous, malformed beast.

Turn to section 33.

224

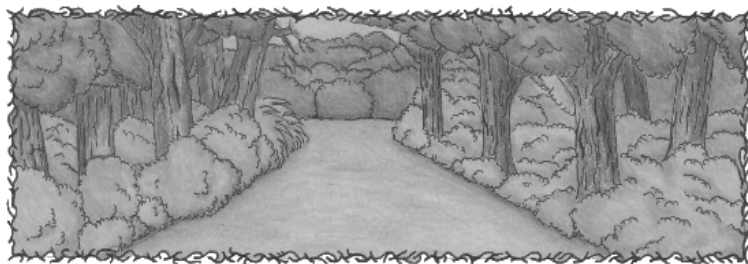
Squatting before the magic weapons you consider how they are to be used to defeat Windhammer. Lying on the stone floor they do not look particularly powerful. It is only as the red glow of a particularly bright flame flickers across the smooth metal surfaces of the axe that you see a subtle radiance that gives any hint of magic.

On an impulse you pick up the Dragonseye. Something deep within you beckons that you look closer. Immediately the gem begins to shine, a beam of bright light casting out across the passage which calls forth many blurred visions onto the wall opposite. Although the images are moving with great speed the story they tell is clear. Warriors and Dragons duel in lethal combat. Great beasts fall, stricken with mortal wounds and warriors die, torn by the power of monstrous talons or consumed by dragonfire. It is a melee of death and heroism but the story is unmistakable. Placed against your forehead the Dragonseye will cast a brilliant light that will blind the serpent momentarily. Striking at the Dragon's back with the Dragonclaw will cripple it. Thrusting Morgen's Spear deep into its mouth will kill it. It is also clear you will only have one chance to do the job right.

Your warrior's blood grows hot as you see how well your unasked question has been answered. Standing, you place the gem in your tunic pocket and bend to pick up your weapons. To your surprise the axe rises into your hand as if it is eager for the battle to come. As your fingers close around its haft a raw power surges up your arm and across your shoulders. In the darkness your whole being radiates with a tangible energy, the magic of the axe surging through your body, melding into bone and sinew.

Enveloped by the radiance all the fatigue of your quest disappears; the bruises and damage of previous battles washing away within the surging magic. Next rises the spear. As it moves into your other hand it extends to its full length and begins to radiate a deep blue light of its own. Now you are ready.

Turn to section 242.



The risk of trouble in the south is too great. Guardsmen like those you have just encountered are common throughout Kalborea, and you have little doubt that the closer you travel to Das Frontiere, the more likely it will be that you will fall foul of them. It will be better to err on the side of caution and take your chances with the less certain dangers of the West Road.

Turning Pallenten westwards you urge her forward and the great horse quickens her gait. From a canter to a gallop in the length of a few strides it is not long before the leagues are again disappearing behind you. Ahead lay the dangers of Stoneholme and the ancient Tellandra, but the village of Melem's Fork is your next stop and at your current speed you should be there by mid-afternoon.

As you ride further to the west the road joins with another from the south-east. At this intersection you take the time to rest and water Pallenten. Unlike most roads this juncture is not signposted. It does however, have a water-trough and a serviceable well, one that you make good use of watering Pallenten and refilling your water bottles. As you go about these necessary tasks you feel the wind freshen. It has a cool edge, and in the bright afternoon sun it blusters across the surrounding grasslands with a hint of impending rain. There can be little doubt that a storm is building, and in this part of the world they should not be weathered in the open.

When you are done you remount and continue on your way. For some time the road remains straight and flat, but as you begin to climb onto higher ground the way becomes uneven and the road surface heavily rutted. Recent rains have loosened the ground which makes it treacherous underfoot, however Pallenten takes the changed conditions in her stride and gallops on towards the village.

Although you are focused on your horse's progress a shadow falling onto the fields to your right instinctively turns your attention upwards. Above you, at the very edge of your sight, you can just make out a number of large birds circling against the deep blue of the afternoon sky. On its own this would seem innocent enough but a feeling of being watched has been with you for some time. These birds do nothing to lessen your growing sense of unease. As you watch them you consider that only the future will show if these unwanted companions are a threat to the completion of your quest.

With one eye on these unwelcome sentinels you ride swiftly for Melem's Fork, Pallenten a dark arrow moving effortlessly along the

uneven roadway. It is an isolated stretch of road, one that you have travelled often, and one that holds many memories for you. One in particular looms large in your mind, and inevitably confronts you on this darkening afternoon as a large signpost, and a well tended cobbled pathway that disappears southwards into a small area of woodland. You have no time to waste, but you cannot continue of your journey without coming to a halt before the name that rests upon the weathered sign. The signpost and path are well-known to you, and even with the imminent reality of your quest before you the memories of this place bring you to a stop.

Some half a league to the south stands the Truvo Farm, one of the few successful farming enterprises that can be found in this region of the frontier, and foundation of the only happy childhood memories you possess. At the age of four you had been indentured as a child labourer to the Truvo family, and rather than a life of hard work had found yourself brought into a world of care and ease that had been unknown to you. In this place you had remained until taken five years later to the Temple of the Suns in Das Frontiere. Within the boundaries of Truvo Farm you had found comfort and education, and strangely very little work. Why you were taken from the familiarity of the Farm to the discipline of the Temple you cannot say, but in an eventful life the strongest memories you hold close came from the attention and care given by the Truvos. As you sit upon your horse those same memories come flooding back.

For a moment you consider whether there is time to ride down to the farm, but you know it is a reunion that must be left for easier circumstances. Looking to the north you see a rushing wall of cloud, towering in great white buttresses but founded upon a dark veil of shadowed mist and rain. Even your horse feels the sudden change in the air, and the strengthening urgency in the winds that swirl through the trees about you. The stormfront is moving purposefully towards you and the first rumblings of thunder can be heard, muffled by distance but a sure sign of the weather to come. If it is to continue in your direction you must reach Melem's Fork before it hits. Reluctantly you turn Pallenten to the main road once again and urge her forward.

Onwards Pallenten gallops, without sign of fatigue or falter she pounds away at the leagues. Grassy fields pass you by, interspersed with isolated copses of trees and exposed piles of large boulders. Every so often you see a small farmhouse nestled inside a group of trees, a shelter needed in these places as ferocious winds can hit the

plains here without warning. Very little of your fellow humankind can be seen though, and the remainder of your journey to Melem's Fork passes quickly and without incident.

As you had hoped you reach your destination by mid afternoon. Pulling Pallenten to a halt atop a slight rise you look down towards the small farming community. It is in a state of complete chaos. Smoke billows freely from a number of buildings and men and women are running about frantically between them. At the far edge of the village you can see a group of creatures moving to the south-west. It is a Hordim raiding party making off with its plunder.

Do you wish to help the villagers? If you do turn to section 116. If you would rather avoid any confrontation with the Horde at this time turn to section 258.

226

With the possibility of the Horde still close you decide against lighting a fire. Deep sleep is elusive, the cold wind howling around and over the scattered boulders of the outcrop. Like the Ring of Stones the sound of the rushing wind conjures too many imaginary spectres in the night. Lying amongst the rocks with Pallenten close, and the wind whistling its own mournful song, you find you cannot help but think about the events of the past days. In the main your thoughts lie with the Kalboreans.

Your captors at Maenum, by their words and deeds proved they had accumulated a great knowledge of the history of the Dwarvendim, and specifically the circumstances that led to the loss of the Tellandra. It was equally plain that they did not fully understand how EarthMagic works, nor the place the pillar of stonewood has in being able to control it. It was ironic that the Kalboreans sent you on this journey for in their ignorance they could not foresee the consequences of your possible success. They have ensured you reach your goal by the use of the metal collar that rubs uncomfortably at your neck, but you know the act of fixing the Tellandra will forever take the powers of EarthMagic out of their hands.

Over the years you have heard more than one learned voice echo the suspicion that the magic the Kalboreans wield with the Tellandra is only a pale reflection of its true power. Like a man who has never stood in the face of the teachersa it is a force of nature they have

never truly experienced, and because of this will be wholly unprepared for its restoration. If you are indeed successful in returning the Tellandra to its former potency, the resulting surge in energy will rise like a tide to overwhelm whoever attempts to control it. In their desperation the Kalboreans will try and maintain their hold on the EarthMagic, but it will escape them as surely as tethering a wild horse with twine. Then the Dwarvendim will be able to take back its vast power for themselves. Since the demise of the ancients only the Dwarvendim have attempted to determine the real power of the EarthMagic and having done so, have respected it enough never to use it in its fullest extent. The secret to harnessing its great power lies not in control but in moderation and respect.

As you lay within the outcrop you wonder at the circumstances that have brought you to this juncture. It is true that the Kalboreans sent you on this quest, but you do it because you know what it will mean for your people. There is of course the matter of what will happen to you once the pillar is restored and the Kalboreans realise what has happened. But you've never been one of their favourite thieves anyway, and you feel sure that no matter what happens you will be little appreciated. They placed the wheels in motion. They will bear the consequences of their actions. Lying amongst the stones you look to the sky and consider the flowing tapestry of swift low cloud and darkness above. For a short while you listen to the wind, but then the fatigue of the day finally takes hold and you fall into sleep.

Test your intuition attribute. If you are successful turn to section 477. If you fail this this test turn instead to section 433.

227

Somewhere in the back of your mind the name of the Maturi Len opens the door to a vague but happy memory. Long ago in your early youth you had studied as a novice Shadar at the Temple of the Suns in Das Frontiere, in a time before the Kalboreans began to suppress all things Dwarvendim. For some reason the Maturi Len connects to your memories of the old temple.

Because of this you feel a need to see this Maturi. It is less than an hour's ride to Kal Arbor. Even with this diversion you can probably still make Baellum by mid morning.

Setting off along the west fork you follow the road towards the

village. The way is rough and narrow but Pallenten takes it in her stride. Soon the open plains and fields are left behind as you begin to climb into a series of steep hills and vales, each following rise more thickly wooded than the last. As you ascend into the hills the road lessens to a barely usable track, and then into nothing but a series of grass-choked wagon ruts winding their way between the trunks of trees and fallen timber. The air is cool and still, not a breath of wind can be felt as you guide Pallenten along the ill-defined path.

From the dark places and deep undergrowth that border the track there arises the uneasy feeling that you are being watched; as if a thousand pairs of eyes are following you on your way, wondering who you are and what you are doing here. Urging Pallenten forward you quicken your pace and hope that it is just a feeling, nothing more.

For an hour you negotiate the trail, watching the surrounding undergrowth and remaining alert to any sign of danger. It is through breaks in the overhanging canopy that you first recognise the curious behaviour of a flock of birds, maintaining a position at a high altitude above you. At first there is but a few, circling overhead and apparently without purpose, but as you travel they are met by more of their number, and soon there are more than a dozen, orbiting in a tight arc that keeps them directly above you. For a time you consider what this could mean, but after riding into a dense patch of forest you emerge to find the flock gone, yourself once again alone.

When you reach Kal Arbor it proves quite a disappointment. Consisting of only a few low-built stone houses and some ramshackle barns you can see no villagers going about their business, no children playing on the street. By all normal considerations the village appears deserted.

Reining Pallenten to a halt you draw your sword and carefully lower yourself to the spongy earth. In the quiet of the morning no sound comes from any of the dwellings, only the rusting hinges of a gate moving in a gathering breeze the only noise worth noticing. It is at the corner of your eye that you notice a door to your left open slightly. From within its recesses a pair of eyes squint from the dark. Then a voice, cracked and old, whispers forth.

"Vesh?"

"Yes," you reply, "who is it?"

The door swings wide and in the gloom of the doorway stands an old man dressed in the robes of a Dwarvendim LoreMaster. Although he has aged you immediately recognise him as one of your old tutors

from the Temple of the Suns. He smiles and motions you to enter.

If you wish to enter turn to section 241. If you would rather stand your ground and determine whether this man is who he says he is, turn to section 498.

228

The hall ahead appears quiet and for a moment you retreat to the shadows and wait, listening for any sign of danger. In the dim light of your torch you take a closer look at the area around you and see a number of hooks hammered into the wall opposite your position. Only one of the hooks holds anything, and it appears to be a grey-coloured cloak similar to the one worn by the Mutan you have just slain. Carefully you move across the corridor and have a closer look. It has no pockets or secret holds and appears nondescript, though it does have a single insignia woven in red into the right-hand sleeve. You do not know much about the Mutan but you do know that they are separated into two distinct classes; the Mutan who rule all Hordim as part of the Clavern'Sigh, and the Mutan of the korep class who serve only as underlings and soldiers. In the gloom you ponder whether a cloak of this type might be useful as a disguise, one worth taking with you.

If you wish to keep the cloak record it on your status sheet. Then turn to section 92.

229

Standing outside the second doorway you consider whether it is worth taking the time to discover what lies behind it. In the half-light of the passage you can still hear the murmurs of distant violence, and every so often the dull reminders of shouting and laughing carry along the abandoned halls, muffled by cold stone and humid air. As you wait alone in the shadows it proves a compelling reason to move on and finish the task that has been given you.

But there is something here that gives you reason to pause instead. As you wait in the dark, listening for sign of patrolling Hordim you notice that the door standing silently before you is much more than it first appears. Set within a high archway you find that most of the

arch's interior has been bricked in, only a smaller area at its base left unfilled to form the frame for a substantial door of solid stone. Even in the gloom you can tell that the door is Dwarvendim-made, but the arch that surrounds it is something much older.

Carefully you place your hand upon the stonework and recoil quickly from the touch as a slight tingle runs through your fingers. There is both power and danger here, and as you look carefully up and down the passage you consider what you should do.

If you wish to try and enter this second door turn to section 142. If you would rather continue on down the passageway turn to section 156.

230

As you descend further the gradient of the stairs increases. It is a decline that pauses only at a small landing before opening through a finely worked threshold into a vertiginous space beyond. Along the borders of a huge vertical shaft the steps continue, twisting dangerously into a wide spiral staircase. The dim light of a few sputtering wall torches is your only illumination as you feel your way forward, however beyond their feeble flickering you can sense that the stairway is very deep indeed. With one hand you take up a small stone and drop it carefully into the depths. When it hits bottom its clattering ricochets sound only as muffled echoes in the darkness. There can be no doubt that you have a long way to go.

Stopping for a moment you take a deep breath and steel yourself for what is to be a long descent. In the gloom you find quickly that the footing here is no better than before. The staircase is a product of the best Dwarvendim stonework but it has felt the absence of its makers keenly. Cracked, and covered in a tangle of dead roots that covers the stonework and tumbles in thick desiccated curtains out into the gloom below, the stairs are a mess of unstable rock and grasping vegetation. Upon this ruined path you tread carefully, any misstep a sure way to an untimely demise.

Thankfully it is all downhill and at first the weight of your equipment does not hinder your progress too much. Soon however, the gradient of the stairs begins to take its toll. Long before you reach the bottom you have to stop and rest again, and you do not reach its end for more than two gruelling hours. When you finally make the base of the stairs it is good to feel a piece of level flooring underfoot.

Physically drained, you rest in the semi-darkness and rummage through your pack for some food.

Throw one dice. The number thrown is the number of endurance points you have lost from the exertion of descending the stairway. Do not reduce your total remaining endurance points below 1 however. It has been a tiring descent but not one that should kill you. If you still have provisions you can restore 6 endurance points if you wish to eat a meal. Record this on your status sheet and turn to section 27.

231

Looking at the shaft of light before you it is hard to believe there can be any real danger here. After adjusting your equipment you start forward and carefully step over the beam. It is only then that you realise the thin line of blue light is but the first of a lattice-work of beams, criss-crossing the passage ahead like an impossibly thin spider's web. Before you can step back your boot contacts another of the streams of light and the true nature of this obstacle is revealed.

The instant your foot touches the light the leather of your boot erupts in an incandescent fire. Quickly the flame spreads up the cloth of your pants and then to your tunic, where it takes a vicious hold. Your attempts to put it out are futile, the blue conflagration attacking you as if it has a will of its own. About you the flame swirls, searching out your flesh as it envelops you in its destructive energies. Within the measure of five heartbeats you are totally consumed by the magical flame, only your scorched skeletal remains left to tumble chaotically down the steep steps behind you. Here your journey ends, but despair not for success may still be yours in a latter life.

THE END

232

You cannot afford to tarry here any longer, the metal collar at your throat too effective a reminder of the urgency of your quest. In the distance you can see that a number of Kalborean Army units have begun to make their way in your direction. For a thief who has only recently been the victim of their brutality this is the last thing you need. Most of your adult life has been spent avoiding men such as

these, and it will not be a good start to your quest if you are stopped by any of them. You have no doubt that such an encounter could only end in violence.

As you watch the line of soldiery making its way up the road towards you, and with their approach you know that a decision will need to be made quickly. Kalboreans have always been most comfortable with the Dwarvendim located on the far edges of the frontier. Out of sight, out of mind so to speak. A Dwarvendim such as yourself, armed and riding a steed of Pallenten's calibre, would be too noticeable to go unchallenged. Such a circumstance leaves you with no real choice. You will have to get off the road.

Choosing to move forward quickly you spur Pallenten on and head out at a gallop over the grasslands that lay between the road and the forest to the west. As you ride you feel you may have missed an important opportunity provided by the boy's appearance, but your task cannot allow undue delay. It is better that you get out of sight of the the road as quickly as possible, skirt the village ahead and keep to the safety of the forest. In this you believe caution will serve you best.

Luckily the undulating hills keep you out of sight as you gallop towards the line of trees. Overhead the sky is an untouched vault of blue, the suns of morning burning bright in the eastern sky. The trees stand as a dark line of shadow that looms up before you as you ride, and with Pallenten's remarkable turn of speed you make their embrace in less than a quarter hour. It is only when you disappear into the forest's gloom that you draw Pallenten to a halt and look back towards the road. In the distance you can see large numbers of soldiers clogging the highway, many of them struggling with heavy equipment as they move ponderously north towards Maenum. What you see tells you that you have made the right choice. Even if they did not challenge you, their sheer numbers would have made a rapid progress south impossible.

Keeping to the forest is hard going though. It takes some time to pick a path along the boundary of the trees, between copses and patches of undergrowth that keep you out of sight and unchallenged. The exertion required for such difficult travel quickly takes its toll on both yourself and Pallenten. After an hour you decide to rest your horse in a small clearing amongst the trees, and take the opportunity for a break yourself. Upon the open ground you let Pallenten graze, and as she nuzzles the grass you find a comfortable position for yourself against a large Oak. As you rest you can hear the steady

tramp of soldiers boots and the squeak and rattle of their carts. There is considerable noise being generated by this mass of moving men and equipment, and every so often you here above it all the faint bellow of an officer urging his men on. Like the soldiers on the road you have a job to do so your rest can only be brief. Taking the time only to drink some water and tend to Pallenten's needs you dust yourself off and resume your path southward. It is while you are winding your way between the trees that you make the first of what will probably be many unsettling discoveries on this journey.

At first the strange marks appearing on the trees about you seem unimportant. With the number of soldiers that must have been foraging in the area it would have only taken a few careless individuals to cause some damage to the forest. As you go further however, and your path cuts deeper into the trees, you find the frequency and ferocity of the marks increasing. No longer are they just a random strike here or there, whole trees have been hacked apart and the bark taken almost to shoulder height. This seemingly pointless vandalism is strange enough to make you stop and dismount. It is only then that you see the footprints. Small and four-toed they are like nothing you have encountered in these woodlands before, and as you stand surveying the soft ground you begin to recognise many more of the prints scattered through the trees. It appears a large band of creatures has passed this way, and judging by the state of the prints their passing has only been recent.

Do you wish to track these creatures and determine their purpose? If this is your choice turn to section 421. If you can see no benefit in doing so, turn to section 480.



233

Without knowing which way might be best, you wait in the half-light of the passage deciding your next move. It is while you stand there undecided, that you notice the faint brush of wind ruffling the dust at the base of the wall before you. Looking down at your feet you

can see a distinct clearing of the grit upon the floor of the passage. Falling to one knee you run your fingers along the stonework of the wall where it meets the floor. You can definitely feel the pressure of a gentle wind coming from somewhere. A quick search of the wall reveals a stone set into the rock that may conceal a mechanism for a secret door.

If you wish to push the stone turn to section 162. If you would rather not do so, turn to section 24.

234

Dangling from the small jutting stone you gaze down into the Neverending Deep below. The hole disappears into a black bottomless pit, a strong icily cold wind blowing upwards out of its depths. Steeling yourself you slowly begin the climb that will take you to safety. Handhold by handhold you inch upwards, your fingers feeling each small crack in the stone, each ledge or bump that can afford you support. It is however, all in vain. Some two metres from the stairs your left hand, slick with sweat and fatigued by exertion, slips away from the rock and you hang by your right hand momentarily. Beyond hope and help your strength gives way and you fall out and down into the Neverending Deep below. In this cursed hole you will fall forever, starving to death in a void of rushing wind and endless dark. Here your journey ends. Perhaps in a latter life you will have more success.

THE END

235

As you move forward the temperature in the corridor drops dramatically. It is cold enough that your breath condenses in the air about you, and water trickling down the walls near the door has frozen solid in long, snake-like icicles that flow along the stone and then spread across the floor. Each breath of air you take feels like ice water in your lungs, and for a moment you have to stop to tear away a piece of your travel cloak's inner lining. This you wrap about your mouth and nose as a protection from the freezing air. In the gloom the chill seems to reach out and take you in its embrace, but you can sense that it is no natural phenomenon. Something is creating the cold

and doing it for a purpose.

The door is rough and very cold, but one you have decided to enter nonetheless. For a moment you hesitate, wondering if gaining entry will be worth what may lie beyond. Steeling yourself however, you place your back against the door and force it open. What you find inside is incomprehensible.

The door is not locked but a bank of snow on the other side makes it difficult to push ajar. When you do make it inside you can do little but stand quietly and wonder at what you have found. The room you have entered is small, and houses a ferocious blizzard of snow, wind and stinging ice, swirling in gale force flurries around a pillar at its centre. Shielding your eyes from the flying shards of ice you force your way forward towards the centre of the room. There, standing squarely on a pillar of smooth clean marble, glows the most fantastic battleaxe you have ever seen. Balanced precariously on its handle the axe is finely carved and inlaid over its entire length with gold and precious stones. An inscription on the marble plinth beneath reads in Common Dwarvendim, "Dragonclaw".

Turn to section 62.

236

In the bright light of the morning you consider the path ahead. The road south meanders in long sweeping arcs towards the busy frontier settlement of Baellum. Set upon the plain it is easy to recognise and difficult to avoid if you wish to continue southwards. Although only a small settlement it is heavily fortified, its citizens protected by high wooden palisades surrounded by networks of defensive ditches and deadly pitfalls. The village itself is a well-established settlement, blessed with more than a few good taverns and all are well-known to you. Many have been the good times that you have spent in that town, but it gives you no reason for comfort today. Even from this distant vantage you can see the ordered tent-lines of an Army bivouac spreading about the fortified walls of the town.

The sight of soldiers this soon into your journey makes you feel very uneasy. There has been more than one occasion in the past where you have been hunted by men such as these; and you have always erred on the side of caution when there is a chance you may come into contact with them again. Today will be no different. Unsure as to what

type of reception you might receive, you leave the road and decide instead to skirt the village of Baellum, and the soldiery encamped about it.

The safety of the forest to the west of the road seems a more prudent course. Even as Pallenten leaves the road this proves quickly to be the case. Large numbers of soldiers are beginning to decamp, and move in units up the road towards Maenum. Even if they didn't challenge you directly their sheer numbers would delay you unduly.

Turning Pallenten towards the trees you gallop forward, eager to stay out of sight of the advancing soldiery. Although there are some signs that army scouts have passed this way you find the safety of the trees, and the anonymity of their deep shadows, without incident.

Finding a path through the thick vegetation that covers the floor of the forest however, is a task that requires both time and skill to negotiate. After a few hours of picking your way carefully between copses of trees and thick patches of undergrowth you take the opportunity to pause in a small clearing that you have found in the depths of the forest. Here Pallenten can rest and take some forage. With the soldiery still too close for comfort you decide it best to stay low and rest as well. In the dark embrace of the trees you take the time to take water and relax. About you the walls of the clearing are a thick tangle of undergrowth and old Oak, of huge gnarled limbs and buttress roots that dig deep into the heavy soil. You think that under other circumstances such a place would be an excellent campsite, but you cannot afford to linger in its shadows for too long.

So far your progress has not been as good as you might have hoped. Keeping to the forest is proving to be hard going, and scouts from the advancing army are becoming harder to evade. Indeed, you have found many signs of their passing, and because of it you have had to venture far deeper into the forest than you would have liked to avoid them.

As you sit in the clearing you can hear the steady trudge of a multitude of heavy feet on the road some distance to the east. Over the shouts of officers cajoling their men on you can also make out the squeaks and grinds of supply wagons, and the lamentation of beasts of burden as they struggle under impossible loads. There can be no doubt that a large force is moving northwards but whether such a force is being sent to help the Dwarvendim, or rather as the next line of defence if the fortress falls, is a question that cannot be answered today. Thinking that the latter will be the most likely you pack your

gear and continue on.

The day wears on and you find yourself travelling a wider detour than expected. The further around the village you travel, the thinner become the trees, and the deeper into the forest you have to turn to avoid detection. It is a slow and frustrating process. Eventually however, you break from the trees and strike out towards the road, which you rejoin a kilometre south of the village. From here you make surprisingly quicker progress. It appears that the main body of troops has already passed and the road is relatively clear of traffic. Giving Pallenten free rein the great horse bounds forward, and soon the leagues are again disappearing beneath her powerful strides.

After the claustrophobic confines of your prison cell the freedom of the road is a welcome tonic, but as you ride you notice that to the west dark clouds are beginning to crowd the horizon. A storm is coming and before nightfall you will need to find shelter.

Ahead lies a clear road to Miller's Crossing. At this stage of your journey you may either keep to the road, or you can strike out to the south-west, and make your way cross-country directly to the Devkraager Tor. If you wish to continue on the road to Miller's Crossing turn to section 251. If you would like to try and gain some time by leaving the road and heading straight for the mountain, turn to section 361.



237

Before you can move forward any further decision about which way you should go is taken out of your hands. From behind the northern door you hear a loud call, it is urgent and full of menace. Almost at once you hear the sounds of shouting and many running feet coming

from the eastern hallway. The western door is the closest exit, it is no more than 20 metres from where you now stand in the Mess Hall. Accelerating your pace you run straight for this exit and finding it unlocked, barrel through. Pausing only to ensure the door is locked behind you, you turn to run down this new passage to the west. Sweat drains from your body as you realise your presence in Stoneholme must now no longer be a secret.

Turn to section 155.



238

In the semi-darkness of the entranceway you watch Windhammer, marvelling first at the immense size of the beast then quickly recognising that something is wrong. Now fully out of the pit it stands in the centre of the Vault, its long neck swaying from side to side, its behaviour becoming more erratic as it loses itself to some internal compulsion. It appears oblivious to its surroundings; too involved in its own thoughts to be aware of what is happening around it. Such is the strange nature of its behaviour that you wait for some minutes, looking for a clue to the purpose of its unusual motion. A chill washes over your skin when you realise that there is no purpose, and in that moment you understand just how dangerous this beast may actually be.

It is true you know little about the life and habits of beasts such as Windhammer but they are animals nonetheless. It is also true that you have seen enough caged animals to know that a century of imprisonment within this hall may have left its mark upon the Dragon. Other animals you have seen acting in this way, but they were mad, confined so long that they had lost all reason and hope. As you watch the creature you can only ask yourself one question. What if Windhammer has gone mad? A Dragon at its best is a terrible foe, but one that that has lost its sanity is a pure force of nature, unrestrained in its violence and unable to know when to cut its losses. Such a

creature has no sense of fear and no need for mercy, and as you wait in the shadows you wonder what Windhammer is truly capable of.

For the moment though it remains silent, consumed within its own thoughts and seemingly unaware of your presence. Fate however, changes this quickly, stepping in to ensure you have no further time to prepare. In one instant of carelessness you lean forward to get a better look at the serpent's movements and fall head-first onto the cavern floor.

Turn to section 246.

239

The alcove in the northern wall is set deep into the rock of the mountain. Cut as an annexe to the main hall it is a space about 12 metres square, smoothly finished and perfectly proportioned. On its three walls hang rich tapestries depicting the long history of the Stone Kings, and across the length of the alcove's floor lays a finely woven and well tended carpet of dyed wool and silver threading. As you move towards it you cannot help but wonder why it is that this small room should be so well cared for. Considering the damage the Hordim have done to the rest of the fortress the alcove remains in as pristine a condition as such ancient places can be. As you get closer however, the reason becomes apparent.

Only a few metres from the centre of the rear wall stands a waist-high pillar of pure white marble. Its ornate column is decorated with figures of carved Dragons and Dwarvendim Axemen facing each other, frozen in a moment of hesitation before battle. At the front of the alcove there are two grotesque statues, ugly stone representations of some type of grossly mutated dog. There is one to the left and one to the right of the entrance. They have been placed at the entrance to the alcove by the Horde and have been set as if they guard whatever lies within.

Moving carefully between the gruesome stone images you look closer at the column and see a small yellow gem sitting on a cloth of green silk. The cloth has the word "Dragonseye" embroidered upon it. Ever mindful of the cunning the Hordim use in the construction of their traps you move forward towards the gem. Your heart beats faster as you reach the marble pillar, and with great care wrap the Dragonseye in its green cloth, and take it from its resting place.

Listening intently for any sign that you have set off a trap you stand in the alcove sweating hard. Nothing happens and with an audible sigh of relief you move back out into the Great Hall taking your new treasure with you.

You have found the Dragonseye and should record it on your character sheet before continuing. Once this is done turn to section 53.

240

The food arrayed in the stall is fresh and in much better condition than the frugal rations you were given by the Kalboreans. Searching through your pack you find your money pouch and consider what you can afford. There is both food here and small bottles of beer for sale, something that can be used as an alternative if the water you find on your travels proves undrinkable. (It will cost you 1 silver coin for each meal you purchase and 2 rials for each bottle. A bottle of beer will replace 2 endurance points when drunk and you can carry a maximum of 2 as a part of your carry load. Remember that you cannot have more than 6 rations in your pack at any one time. Record what you obtain on your status sheet.) Well pleased with the new supplies you are securing them in your pack when a large hand grabs you by the shoulder, and pushes you forward into the dirt of the square.

"Oi! Don't you know stone-eaters aren't allowed to carry weapons?"

You turn quickly and find yourself confronted by a uniformed Kalborean with a group of similarly attired thugs behind him. For a second you consider teaching the Kalborean some manners, but he has too many of his colleagues behind him to make it a satisfying experience. Instead you search for the Prefect's letter.

"With all respect Sir," You try to be as submissive as possible without looking like an easy target for a beating. "I am in the service of a Prefect of the LoreMages' Guild. My journey requires I carry this weapon, and I have with me a written permission to do so".

The guard does not seem impressed. "I couldn't give a toss about what you've got, and sod your Prefect. No stone-eater carries a weapon in my town. Hand it over now!"

So much for the letter. There are too many guards to fight and you do not feel disposed to hand over such a fine weapon as Than'durion. Punching out with your right arm you strike the guard leader heavily

between the eyes. With a look of complete surprise he falls backwards into his pack of thugs, who desperately try to avoid being crushed under him. In the confusion that follows you make your escape. Leaping upon the back of Pallenten, you dig your heels into its side but the horse needs no encouragement. With a lunge of strength she bursts through the milling crowd and races for the south gates at the other end of the town.

Turn to section 380.

241

The Maturi Len's home is old and ill-kept. Apart from a single table at the centre of its only room, every surface in the house is covered with books, scrolls and jars. The walls are adorned with charts and a wondrous variety of magical artifacts and devices. From your own vague memory it seems he has every piece of literature or apparatus that was ever housed in the Temple of the Suns stored in this small dwelling. The Maturi Len stands beside the central table, its worn legs supporting his frail form.

"Halokim, it has been a long time..."

You bow to your old teacher. It has indeed been a long time.

"Yes Master, many seasons have passed since our last meeting, but the Temple of the Suns is a fond memory nonetheless. How is it that you come to be in this uncivilised place?"

The Maturi Len smiles warmly and extends his hand in welcome. His handshake is strong.

"Halokim, time is short and I believe your progress is being watched. To talk of what has happened since the destruction of the Temple would be of great interest to us both, but circumstances will not allow it. Instead I must talk with you of a matter of greater import." The Maturi Len looks earnestly into your eyes. "I am aware of your mission Halokim and the circumstances under which you have been persuaded to attempt it. What I would like to do is apply a slightly different focus to the purpose of your quest."

The old man smiles slightly and you get the clear impression he is finding some wry irony in what he is about to say.

"You see Halokim, the Kalboreans do not know the full story of the Tellandra. They know only what they found after Stoneholme had been evacuated, and that is not all that must be known."

The old man moves his weight from foot to foot. He is obviously having trouble standing and you move towards him in an attempt to help him to a chair. He raises his hand and motions you to stop. His mind is focused on the message he must deliver.

"Soon after the death of Morgen the Younger a cohort of Dwarvendim warriors stormed the Deep Vault to do battle with the Dragon. In the fight that ensued all the Dwarvendim perished, the Dragon was badly wounded and the pillar of stonewood was cracked. It was that single act that spelt the ultimate demise of the Stone Kingdoms. Damaged as it was, the Tellandra's power changed, its capacity to act as a conduit of EarthMagic severely weakened. The Kalboreans subdued the Dwarvendim peoples, but they only know the power of the Tellandra in its diminished form. They do not know its true essence. Only a Dwarvendim LoreMaster can appreciate and control the vast power of the pillar in its wholeness."

"Listen to me carefully Halokim. When you find the broken pieces of the pillar you can meld them back into a whole by intoning the words that are carved into the Tellandra's base. To do so Halokim, will reverse the ebb of its power and restore the pillar to its fullness. This done the Dwarvendim will have the tool needed to rebuild the Stone Kingdoms and once again be strong."

Suddenly the Maturi Len stops. Outside the flutter of wings is urgent and full of concealed danger. The LoreMaster's bearing changes, there is haste in his voice. "Now you must go. The Kalboreans obviously believe they need more than that collar around your neck to ensure you complete your quest. Remember what I have said. When you complete your journey return here. We still have much to discuss."

Turn to section 122.

242

Striding out into the full light of the Deep Vault you shout a challenge at the monstrous beast. At once the Dragon ceases its mindless swaying and turns slowly to meet its attacker. Head lowered it looks directly at you and its cruel red eyes focus down upon yours. For a moment there is a pause as it considers its new foe but it hesitates for only that moment. Then it attacks.

Like a living avalanche Windhammer charges forward. Standing

there alone on the cavern floor you are dwarfed by its huge bulk, but you stand determined. Amongst the molten pools of precious metals the battle between yourself and the serpent is begun.

The Dragon Windhammer has a combat value of 33 but for the circumstances of this battle has no endurance rating. Unlike previous battles you must complete three tasks if you wish to kill the beast. Each of these tasks will be accomplished each time you win two attack rounds in a row. Upon the third task being completed the Dragon will fall and you will be victorious. The following list will help you to record the completion of each task.

- Blind the Dragon
- Strike its back and disable it.
- Thrust Morgen's Spear into its mouth and kill it.

If the Dragon wins an attack round, your endurance rating will be reduced in the normal way unless you have a Word of Protection spell in your possession, or you possess a Shieldstone and know the ancient Word that will activate it. If you know the Word say it now.

Before beginning combat restore your endurance rating to its full value. Your possession of the three talismans will increase your combat rating by 18 points, 6 for each talisman. Adjust your character sheet accordingly. If you have the book entitled "Words of Protection", use it now. Within its pages is just one spell that will be of value. This spell will reduce any damage you might receive per attack round to a maximum of 2 endurance points. If you have an activated Shieldstone the Dragon will only be able to harm you if it wins a combat round by more than four points. As with the Word of Protection you can only lose a maximum of two points per round lost.

Once all this is done you may commence combat with the Dragon Windhammer. If you are successful turn to section 500. If you succumb to the power of the great Serpent then it is here that your quest will end but be heartened, you have come further than most.

243

As you advance further into the centre of the Lesser Hall your eyes become better accustomed to the gloom, and even though the half-light obscures everything within a veil of shadows you are able to

make out more of your surroundings. Within this large hall the heat remains oppressive, the sound of a great conflagration roaring in the near distance, out of sight but somewhere close at hand. In the south wall you can just make out the dark entrance of an open passage; across the north wall there hangs a gigantic tapestry that extends across the wall's entire reach, and as you peer into the gloom the huge ornately decorated cloth billows slightly as if a soft wind ushers from some unknown source behind. At the very edge of your vision in the eastern wall there stands an enormous set of double doors framed within a wide arch. Before the doors rests a large, dark, brooding shape.

Realising there is nothing to be lost by having some illumination you pull one of the torches from your pack, light it quickly and then throw it out in the direction of the double doors. In a shower of sparks the torch hits the hard stone floor and skitters erratically to a stop. Like a nightmare exploding from the depths of some black pit the dark shape rises from its rest and rushes towards the light. In the smouldering flame of the torch you go cold as you recognise what it is, and with that realisation draw your weapon and take a nervous step backwards.

At the edges of the torch's reach you can make out the shape of a Reaver, a creature native to the northern wastelands of Arborell yet somehow here within this dark chamber. It is a huge scorpion-like beast, crouching on six muscular legs and standing more than three metres at the shoulder. All across the far reach of the hall you can also see the skeletons of many animals, cleaned of flesh and strewn about the floor. You have stumbled into the lair of one of the Hordim's pets, and they must keep it here for a reason.

Quickly you look back to the way you have come but you are too far from the exit to make a run for it. Reavers are incredibly fast creatures and there would be little chance of making it to safety before one of its huge clawed arms would cut you down. You have no choice but to stand and fight. This however, is a daunting prospect. Poisonous-looking green scum exudes from the creature's skin, and its head and back is encased in an armoured carapace that glistens in the faltering light like oil on water. There can be no doubt that this is truly a monster. Above the boom and rush of the distant conflagration you stand your ground, the beast's razor sharp claws rasping upon the stone floor as it moves towards you.

All at once dread overtakes you, but excitement crowds your

thoughts as well. Reavers guard only those treasures that the Hordim covet most. The Dragon's lair must surely be close at hand, though if you are to find it you must get past this creature first. Without hesitation the Reaver charges forward to attack.

If you are in possession of the Dragonclaw turn to section 169. If you do not have the Dragonclaw but do possess a small bag of flour turn to section 581. If you have neither of these items then you must rely on skill alone. Turn to section 46.

244

You are now feeling very tired. It is not surprising that the arduous journey of the day is beginning to eat away at what remains of your energy. With the foothills of the Krodestaag ahead it is wise that you rest properly before continuing. The gale that has blown down from the north is bitterly cold, the chill in its bluster a cool reminder of your need to find a good campsite quickly. Here on the plains you are within striking distance of the foothills, the trees have thinned to isolated copses, and most of the rolling plain ahead is covered instead in a thick blanket of grass, punctuated every few hundred metres by large outcrops of boulders. A stone's throw from your path is one of these outcrops. Formed of large weathered granite blocks, it lies in a roughly horseshoe shape and will be an excellent shelter from the wind. After tethering Pallenten within its rocky walls, you unfurl your blanket and prepare to make camp.

Do you wish to light a small fire? If so turn to section 256. If you would rather not risk it turn to section 226.

245

Pallenten quickly proves herself a worthy mount. As the early shadows of the dawn recede you begin to appreciate the great heart and stamina of this horse. Riding swiftly south towards the village of Baellum you estimate it will take no longer than a few hours to reach, the ground disappearing in a rush beneath the horse's powerful strides. You have no doubt that to walk the same distance would take you the better part of a day and a night and you can see why the Prefect gave you such an impressive mount. Upon its broad back you

can feel its strength, and as the great steed thunders steadily onwards you take the time to consider properly your situation, and what you should do next.



:dehr faeyen mar cem eshal'il:

At the speed at which you can travel on Pallenten it will take no more than two days to reach Stoneholme. Although the exact location of the fortress entrance has been lost for many years, you know it lies at the south-western base of the Devkraager Tor, the highest and most prominent mountain of the Krodestaag Ranges. Even now, with some two days of travel ahead of you, the Krodestaag mountains can be seen through the morning haze of the southern horizon. Towering above all the other heights of that distant range is the snow capped summit of the Devkraager Tor. You consider that finding the mountain will be no problem. The entrance however, may prove far more challenging.

Reaching into your pack you pull out the envelope from the Tak Lovar. As promised you find inside the handwritten pass from the Prefect. For a moment you consider the thin piece of parchment and smile. There is a chance that it may provide you with safe passage, but only as long as those Kalboreans who take offence to your sword allow you to show it. Still, it is a measure of protection, and one you shall make use of if the circumstances warrant it.

In the envelope you also find a small folded map of the area you will be travelling through. From your knowledge of northern Kalborea you have a number of possible routes you can take to the Krodestaag mountains. You can follow a well-travelled path, one that takes you along the road south through Baellum, Miller's Crossing and then on to Das Frontiere, the provincial capital. Kal Dor Tarma lies four hours travel further to the south, and from there you can veer south-west and spend the night at Kal Mulmi. From the town of Kal Mulmi it is possible to strike out directly west and meet the foothills from there. At this point you will have to leave Pallenten and ascend on foot into the shadows of the great mountain. For a traveller this is the easiest route to the Devkraager Tor.

The prospect of passing through Das Frontiere is not appealing however. Too many bad memories and close escapes for your liking.

Even the thought of the place makes the white collar at your throat feel uncomfortably tight.

Another path takes you away from Das Frontiere, but the way is somewhat harder. The south road passes through Baellum and then turns towards Miller's Crossing. From there you can veer south-west to Melem's Fork and then on westwards towards the ancient Ring of Stones. Journeying directly south from the stones will bring you also to the base of the Devkraager Tor. Both routes have their difficulties; passing through the main towns of northern Kalborea can be a risky business for a Dwarvendim at the best of times, but there are times however, when you have little choice. There is of course, the option of leaving the road and striking out directly for the mountains, covering the distance across country, only sporadically meeting either road or human habitation. Perhaps that may be a viable proposition as well.

Pallenten's gait does not change as the flat plains give way to a series of rolling green hills before you. Looking ahead you see nothing but grasslands cut randomly by small streams and animal trails. You consider carefully which of the routes may offer the least danger, but you know the path you take will depend entirely on what you encounter along the way.

The pounding hoofs of Pallenten carry you swiftly towards Baellum and it is not long before you stand on a slight rise looking down onto a broad plain. The village of Baellum lies at its centre, surrounded by neatly partitioned farmlands and a series of circular fortifications. Encamped in orderly rows about the settlement is a large force of Kalborean Soldiery, no doubt awaiting the fall of Maenum. You can see in the distance another column of armed men moving up from the south. Before you can consider your next move you are hailed by a small boy. He is calling for you to wait.

If you have the skill of Lorecraft turn to section 450. If you do not, but you wish to speak with the boy turn to section 135. If you can see no reason to tarry here, turn to section 232.



246

Leaning out into the cavern to gain a better view of your foe, you place all your weight against a thin piece of half melted iron protruding from the wall. It was no doubt a piece of the braces that held together a once mighty set of doors, but that was long ago. Without warning it gives way and you tumble headlong into the cavern. Rolling over the shallow precipice onto the cavern floor below, you land heavily and sustain a blow to the side of your head. Luckily it is not serious but it takes a moment for you to recover enough to raise your head.

The Dragon is not so slow to react. Arousing itself from its game it looks at you in surprise and then rears up from the floor, its neck bent in a long arc, its eyes looking straight at you. A cruel wicked squint forms in its left eye and something like a deformed smile spreads across its face, exposing a multitude of razor sharp teeth.

You have been discovered and now you must fight for your life.

Turn to section 220.

247

The door to the first room is sturdily built but unlocked and it swings open easily. Carefully you push the door ajar and move into a long, wide chamber, lit with torches and filled with the product of someone's considerable effort. This unexpected space is stacked with piles of charcoal, bundled with coarse rope, and mounds of broken furniture that extend almost to the ceiling along both walls. In the only clear corner of the room stands a large charcoal oven, a stove vent leading from its side upwards into the ceiling above. In this place black soot and grime covers everything, but amongst the piles of burnt wood you see something of interest. Against the far wall of the room a long shelf has been fixed, and upon its soot-covered surface sits a collection of old bottles, jars and small paper envelopes.

If you wish to search the room for useful articles turn to section 25. If you see nothing of interest and you wish to move on, turn to section 166.



248

With a cold determination the larger Jotun begin to advance upon you. You ready your weapon and with a twitch of your shoulder throw your backpack to the floor. The hard crunch of your equipment distracts your attackers for a moment, they are in no hurry and they know you cannot escape. As you stand your ground you kick your pack to the side and do not notice that some of its contents spill out onto the dusty floor. The Hordim however, see the collection of items and artifacts you have collected on your journey and in their eyes a new motivation grows. Greed quickly takes the place of duty in their eyes. They look at each other, an unanswered question forms between them. Who will have this human scum's possessions?

Their moment of hesitation is enough. Diving for the pack you pull Morgen's Spear from its wrapping. Commanding it to grow to full size your intention is to use it as a lance, but before you can wield it the spear takes the combat into its own hands, and you can do nothing more than watch. From your open hands the artefact rises into the air, lengthening to its full extension before suddenly exploding in a coruscation of energy. Brilliant light shines forth from its hilt, rapidly spreading along its length until even you must avert your gaze. You feel like you are holding the sun in your hands and for your attackers it is too much. Reeling backwards they run from the Library, a hot shining ball of light close upon their heels. As they disappear to the west, all you hear are muffled cries of pain as they tumble and fall down the deep staircase.

In the Library you don't stop to think about what it is you have just unleashed. Willing the spear to return to its former compact size you place it back in your pack and search for any possible escape. Near an old bookcase you spy a small ventilation grill. It is set at the base of the wall and is about a forearm wide. Running over to it, you try with all your might to pull it from the wall. It will not budge. Shouts and angry argument are now coming clearly from the hall outside. You have only a moment to decide what to do. Again you attack the grill and finally it gives way. Stopping only to throw your weapons and pack into the hole, you dive in and cover the open shaft with a piece of broken timber. Although you cannot believe it you will live to fight another day.

Turn to section 168. If you have a shield in your possession it will have to be left behind. Adjust your character sheet accordingly before continuing.

249

The Chieftain lays dead at your feet but you have not come through the battle unscathed. Blood pours from a deep gash in your forearm and lines of red trace its flow down your arm. As you make up a bandage to bind the wound you look around the room and examine it for anything of use. What you find is most unexpected.

The chamber is a long curving space, dominated on its western edge by a huge crystal wall, that extends from the floor to the ceiling along its entire reach. It looks like glass but feels rough to the touch, even though you can look clearly through it to the outside world. Carefully you peer out through the wall and see that the stone of the mountain extends beyond the crystal for about a metre before dropping off a sheer cliff edge. Before you extends a vista of the Krodestaag mountains, your vantage overlooking everything from the foot of the Devkraager Tor itself to the far western horizon and the jagged mountains of the Krodestaag. What you have found is a lookout, carved into the side of the mountain as a permanent observation point covering the entire western reaches of the old Dwarvendim kingdoms.

Caught by the grandeur of the marching lines of grey peaks you wonder on what the old cities of the Dwarvendim must now look like. Left to abandonment and ruin for more than a hundred years you can only think that they are long lost to your people, but you know the resourcefulness of the Dwarvendim and perhaps there will come a day when those grey citadels will once again be called home.



:ahn palan e' sharyah'durien a'd dien sigh et
ahn theoden:

As you survey the wide horizon the twin suns of Arborell settle against the upper edges of the crystal wall. Now late in the afternoon the suns have almost reached their daily rest and you turn away from their gaze, unaccustomed to the dazzling light. After all the time you have spent delving the secrets of Stoneholme your sudden exposure to the brightness of day leaves you squinting in the direct glare of the setting suns. Orange and red in the dusk they are a wondrous sight but one you cannot spend time enjoying. All you can allow yourself are a few deep breaths of the clear air that fills the room before you turn to a quick search of the Hresh and his personal equipment.

What you find amongst his belongings is surprising to say the least. Upon opening a small box held within a larger chest you uncover a medallion and chain, mostly silver in artifice but holding a large green gem at its centre. Immediately you recognise it as a Shield Stone and place it away within your own pack. Such talismans of the ancient world are rare indeed and even if it can be of no use to you, it should be returned to those who understand its nature. A further search shows that there is no other exit from the room bar the one you have demolished. You will need to return to the Lesser Hall if you are to continue your quest. For just a moment you watch the setting suns fill the lookout with the growing wash of a deep red glare, then turn for the exit. With nothing else to be found in the room you begin the long trek back down the spiralling stairs to the Lesser Hall.

Record your discovery of the Shield Stone on your character sheet then turn to section 180.

250

For a moment the image of the Mentor fades as if the old man is about to leave. It is then that you remember the plight of the wraiths of Kal Murda.

"Mentor, wait!" you shout. "I have a message from Aggamem the Elder!"

At the mention of the name the Mentor becomes solid once again, his face a vision of surprise edged with concern.

"Aggamem the Elder you say, Master Vesh. That is a name long remembered by the Powers of the World. The spark of his creation has been missing for many years and it would be good to know what has become of it."

You move towards the Mentor and explain all that you saw at Kal Murda; your use of the stonewood to see into the existence of the wraiths and the words of the Jotun General. It is a story long in the telling and the old man wants to hear it all. When you are finished the Mentor places his hand on your shoulder.

"Halokim, you have done a service to the Powers that cannot be easily repaid. For centuries this tragedy has passed unnoticed and only the Shan'duil can make it right. Give me one moment and all those who have been afflicted will be delivered from their torment."

As you watch the Mentor bows his head and begins to concentrate

hard on the stone at his feet. Immediately a burning blue glow radiates out from the floor, bathing his body and face in its radiance. It is a momentary brilliance but as you stare into the light you can make out beneath his feet a vast flowing river of blue pulsing like a heartbeat as it rushes deep beneath the earth. Within it you can see a myriad of stars, bright points of light swarming as fish might in the deep ocean; but through it all you can feel the power of the River of Life and hear the Mentor in earnest conversation with voices that resound within the stone like the tremors of an earthquake.

When he is done the Mentor stands as a frail old man visibly weakened by the effort of communicating with his Master.

"It has been done Master Vesh. The wraiths of Kal Murda have been released, and now all have found the rest that has been denied them. It is a great service you have performed Halokim. The River cannot abide imbalance and the plight of those trapped souls had gone unnoticed in the greater cycle of life. All is now a measure closer to perfection and the Shan'duil will remember the part you have played. Well done."

The Mentor smiles and turns to face the Tellandra. "Make now for Kal Arbor. The Maturi will tell you all you need to know."

As those last words echo within the chamber the image of the Mentor fades and then is gone. Within the vast space you find yourself alone, once again left to your own devices. Carefully you turn towards the doors to the Vault and come to a halt, startled by what you see. Across the entire surface of the huge doors is an intricately carved representation of the last desperate moments of your battle with Windhammer. In the restoration of the Deep Vault it would seem you have found a measure of immortality, a timeless reminder for all who might pass into this great chamber that it was you who brought EarthMagic back to the Dwarvendim. Not bad, you think, for a petty thief.

Carefully you head for the doors, the passage beyond lit brightly with a yellow glow. In the world above you will find the next task that awaits you and you see no reason to tarry any longer. Slowly you make for the corridor but turn to take one last look at the Deep Vault. At its end shines the Tellandra, a deep blue aura vibrating with power as it illuminates the chamber, the dark green of a forest canopy overhead, carved in arches of moving glass that sparkle in the pillar's reflected brilliance. All in all it has been a good day's work.

Ahead lay a slow return to the world and another quest to be

completed. Whether you are up to the task is a question that you know can only be answered in the fullness of time. All you can be sure of is that whatever happens next will, of course, be another story.

THE END

251

With a wall of black cloud building in the west you spur Pallenten forward. With luck you may be able to reach Miller's Crossing on the Laneslem River before the storm arrives and the heavens open. Northern Kalborea is well known for the ferocity of its weather and the approaching storm looks murderous. If possible you would like to be indoors before it hits.

The road before you quickly runs into open countryside, a vista of wide grasslands and tended fields neatly divided into farms devoted mostly to cattle and grain. The land here is very different from the more settled regions of Kalborea to the south. Sparsely populated and farmed only by the hardest of men it can be a difficult place to earn a living. With the troubles brewing to the north it must now be feeling a much more dangerous place as well.

Every so often you pass a wagon on the road or a farmer hard at work in his fields, but nobody pays you much attention. You put this down to the large number of troops that have recently moved northward up the road. To those you leave behind your passage must now appear unremarkable. Without a falter or pause the great horse thunders down the road, past collections of small farmhouses and their outbuildings and closer to the Laneslem River and Miller's Crossing.

For a short time you stop at a culvert that cuts the road above a small creek, and give Pallenten a chance to drink and rest. The horse glistens with sweat but champs at the bit to move on, and it is not long before you remount and continue. The staccato beat of Pallenten's hooves on the roadway are all you notice as you race south towards the next leg of your journey.

As Pallenten gallops on you begin to hear above the rumble of distant thunder the murmur and rush of a great river. Long before you see the Laneslem you can hear its mighty waters hastening their way to the south-east. It is a sound you have heard many times before, as both the Laneslem and Miller's Crossing are well known to you. There

have been many occasions when you have needed to venture this way and the town has always been a good place to pick up some quick work.

There are few fellow travellers on the road which is somewhat surprising. Under other circumstances there would be merchants and other journeymen crowding the narrow road, laden with goods or money. It would seem that the conflict to the north means few fat merchants will now venture beyond the protection of the larger towns. From previous travels you know Miller's Crossing lies just beyond the river at the end of a long stone bridge that spans the waters. It is a large town renowned for its taverns and wide range of merchant goods. It is a pity that you will not have long to sample them.

As you get closer to the river the road winds its way into an area of closely wooded forest. From this point the river parallels the road, and from between the trees you can hear the sounds of the Laneslem getting louder. The nearer you get to the river crossing the more wooded the way becomes, large Oaks and Beech crowding the edge of the roadway, deep undergrowth covering the ground between. A perfect place for an ambush you think.

If you have the skills of either Huntmastery or Bushcraft turn to section 442. If you have neither of these skills turn to section 420.

252

The combat is short but bloody. The Hresh is a skilled warrior but he is no match for your swordsmanship. With its body a crumpled heap at your feet you push it aside and go searching for more of the Hordim. Amongst the chaos of the burning buildings it has become impossible to find any more of the vile creatures though. Smoke billows from all directions, the cries and shouts of frightened children and panicked townsfolk combine with the fiery destruction to obscure from view the more purposeful retreat of the Hordim. Calling Pallenten to your side you mount and ride out of Melem's Fork in the direction of the main body of the raiding party.

As you reach the edge of the village all thoughts of pursuing the Hresh end however, as the heavens open and a deluge of rain falls from the dark clouds above. Instantly the way ahead is obscured, and the ground underfoot begins to dissolve into a muddy quagmire. Pallenten stops, unsure of her footing as enormous bolts of lightning

begin to strike the higher ground to the north.

You have no choice but to find shelter and wait out the storm. To your left is an old abandoned barn, partly collapsed at one end. In the rainstorm it is the nearest shelter, so you run with Pallenten by your side towards it. Luckily one piece of the roof is still intact and it is here you decide to wait for the rain to stop. As you stand in the shelter of the old barn watching the rain you curse the delay and pull uncomfortably upon the collar at your neck.

Turn to section 131.

253

Suddenly from within the hut there is a flurry of activity. A man's head appears out of the doorway and then disappears back into the darkness. From inside you can hear the ring of weapons being drawn from a metal wall rack. You count six. With a shout a number of heavily armed men run from the building towards you. The leading soldier, Telet, looks meaningfully at the guard standing in front of you and draws his finger across his neck.

Without hesitation the guard unsheathes his own sword and raises his arms in an attempt to spook your mount. It is a movement that causes Pallenten to falter backwards, but only for a moment. As the soldier advances the great horse rears upon her hind legs and strikes out with her hooves. Caught by surprise one hoof hits the Kalborean cleanly in the chest and he crumples onto the roadway.

At the sight of seeing their comrade fall the other soldiers charge, a grim determination written across their faces to avenge his demise. For a moment you size up the chances of coming out of this fight alive and the odds are not good. Each of the men alone hold no challenge for you, but it is said that even a pack of mangy dogs can bring down the largest of predators. Considering retreat a more viable alternative than standing to fight, you wheel Pallenten about and gallop away from the checkpoint. The road is jammed with traffic so you turn Pallenten to the west and strike out across the fields and hills.

If you wish to head north-west towards Melem's Fork turn to section 254. If you would rather turn Pallenten to the south-west and make directly for the Devkraager Tor turn to section 261.



254

Pallenten does not let you down. Her powerful strides quickly distance you from the guards as she races across the low hills into the north-west. None of the soldiers have any chance to mount a horse, and the one soldier who could reach for a long bow proved unable to draw a shot before yourself and Pallenten were well out of range. You again thank Providence that the Prefect had the foresight to give you such a horse. Cutting across the grassy hills is an unforeseen diversion from your route but it may prove beneficial nonetheless. It will only be a matter of a few hours and you will reach the west road to Melem's Fork. The small farming community will be a good place to tend and water Pallenten, as well as get a decent meal for yourself.

As Pallenten surges through the long grasses you begin to see familiar landmarks for this part of Kalborea is well known to you. In your youth you lived at the Truvo Farm, and of all the memories of your childhood your stay there is the least painful. The Truvos are Kalborean, but they had taken you in when you were very young, and although you had been allocated to the farm as an indentured servant they had accepted you as one of their own. As one child in a very large family you had found a life very different from before and they had been good years, ones you still remember fondly. The time spent with the Truvos had only been cut short by your entrance into the Temple at Das Frontiere. Of all those that had helped you in your youth it was to the Truvos that you owed the most.

Bringing Pallenten to a halt you consider whether there is time to visit with them. If you are right their farm should lie only a few leagues to the north, but you know you have no time to spent on such a diversion. Their hospitality would draw you in, and you know it would be difficult to leave. Better, you decide, to leave a reunion until your quest is over. Then you will no doubt have some tales to tell. Reluctantly you urge Pallenten on and return to your journey.

As you expect it only takes two hours to reach the west road. The rolling countryside is cut frequently by small streams and some marshy ground, but the way ahead is straightforward. To your surprise you cross the road a lot closer to Melem's Fork than you expect. After the uncertain footing of the countryside the road is a welcome sight though not so the approaching weather. Looking to the sky you see dark masses of cloud building ominously into a huge storm front. Already away to the west a grey curtain of rain is falling, advancing slowly with the cloudbank as it moves in your direction. As you watch the cloud's inexorable march towards you, you wonder what else Fate might wish to lay before you to hinder your journey to Stoneholme. With luck though, you should be able to reach the village before it hits.

Turning Pallenten to the west you urge her forward and the great horse quickens her gait. You estimate that at her current rate of travel you should reach Melem's Fork by mid afternoon. As you ride further to the west the road becomes uneven and heavily rutted. Recent rain has left the dirt track soft and easily damaged, but Pallenten takes the changed conditions in her stride and does not falter as she pounds away the leagues towards the village.

With the great horse set on her course you use the opportunity to survey the horizon for possible trouble. All about is clear, but on high you notice something unsettling. Above you, at the very edge of your sight, there are a number of large birds circling. This seems innocent enough and under other circumstances would be unremarkable, however these birds have been with you for some time now, always directly overhead and always high enough that you cannot identify exactly what they are. A feeling of being watched has been with you for most of your journey and these birds do nothing to lessen your sense of unease.

The countryside is pleasant enough though, small farms are scattered about the grasslands, and every so often you pass an isolated stand of trees about which congregate groups of Sempaca and Talga sheep. All seems very peaceful, but you smile ruefully knowing full well that here on the frontier it can all change so quickly. With nothing much to do except think about the unusual nature of your quest you ride onwards, keeping a watchful eye on both the road ahead and the gathering weather above. Although the sky is darkening with the approach of the storm, the remainder of the journey to Melem's Fork passes quickly and thankfully without

incident.

It is only an hour further on that you find yourself within sight of the village. Trotting over a small rise you look down upon a scene of devastation. Flame and smoke billows freely from burning houses and men and women are running frantically between them. You can see a number of bodies lying in the main road. At the western end of the village there is a large group of creatures running into the nearby brush. It is a Horde raiding party making off with their ill-gotten plunder.

Do you wish to help the villagers fight off the Hordim? If you do turn to section 116. If you would rather avoid a fight at this time turn to section 258.

255

Continuing south is definitely the easiest route to the Krodestaag mountains and Stoneholme. You know that at any time the collar at your throat could tighten like a noose, and this seems a compelling reason to take the shorter road. You decide to risk being stopped in Das Frontiere.

As you journey further south the traffic begins to increase. Wagons filled with rations and other supplies are beginning to move north, probably to re-supply the army units encamped around Baellum. In the growing movement of wagons and animals your progress starts to slow, but at least you are not as noticeable as you might be on your own.

The flat fields bordering the road gradually give way to a series of rolling hills, which force the road into a series of long curves that wind roughly southwards. It is as you are coming round one of these wide bends that you run into a Kalborean checkpoint. The post is nothing more than a small hut and a long stablehouse situated to the right of the road. It is manned, you can tell by the smoke rising from one of the windows that someone inside is cooking. There is no other activity that you can see. Usually such a checkpoint would be of no concern as very rarely is anyone ever stopped at one. Army checkpoints are well known for their tardiness, especially when positioned in isolated areas such as this. The flag hanging limp from its pole changes your mind immediately. This post is manned by a unit of the Provost General's men and is not a normal Army post at all.

Functioning as the military equivalent of a police force the Provost

General enforced all the laws of Kalborea, and it was rumoured they had power even over the Guild of Administrators themselves. Commissioned by the Lord Administrator to quell all dissent within the Union the Provosts were single-minded in their determination, and well-known for the ruthlessness of their enforcement. As far as you are aware they may still consider you an Enemy of the State.

Unable to turn around without bringing attention to yourself you decide to try and bluff your way through. From the small hut a smartly uniformed soldier marches out into the roadway and raises his hand.

"Halt in the name of the Kalborean Union!"

He is standing directly in your path and forces Pallenten to a standstill. At once he begins a careful visual search of you and your mount. From the look in his eyes it is evident he has noticed the sword at your side and the metal collar at your neck.

"State your name and purpose."

This challenge does present you with a dilemma. The truth did not help much in Miller's Crossing so a small untruth may help here.

"My name is Halokim Vesh, a Dwarvendim in the service of the High Prefect of the LoreMages' Guild. I journey south with a message from my master to the Provincial Governor in Das Frontiere."

The Kalborean seems at ease with your answer but there is obviously something still bothering him. Turning to the hut he calls a command.

"Corporal Teleth, check the lists for this Dwarvendim."

From inside the hut comes a slow response. In the pause that follows you can't help but begin to sweat. As far as you are aware you are still a convicted felon, and one with a death sentence upon your head no less. You hope the Prefect had the foresight to get your name off the lists.

Turn to section 253.

256

Lighting a fire proves difficult, the small amount of tinder you find about the outcrop is wet from the rain but eventually you are successful. The warmth is welcome and the additional illumination provides a comfortable shelter from the gale outside. Even with the exertions of the day sleep comes slowly. Lying amongst the rocks, with Pallenten close and the wind howling its own song, you find you cannot help but think about the events of the past days. In the main

your thoughts lie with the Kalboreans.

Your captors at Maenum, by their words and deeds proved they know a considerable amount about the history of the Dwarvendim, and the circumstances that led to the loss of the Tellandra. It was equally plain that they do not fully understand how EarthMagic works, nor the place the pillar of stonewood has in being able to harness it. The Kalboreans sent you on this journey. They have ensured you reach your goal by the use of the metal collar that rubs uncomfortably at your neck, but you know the act of fixing the Tellandra will forever take it from their hands.

Over the years you have heard more than one learned voice echo the suspicion that the magic the Kalboreans wield with the Tellandra is nothing more than a pale reflection of its true power. Fractured and diminished, the pillar stands unable to properly channel the vast power that EarthMagic can unleash. Whole it is the conduit for an unlimited reservoir of magical energy. Such energy the Kalboreans have never experienced, and because of this will be wholly unprepared for its restoration. Since the demise of the ancients only the Dwarvendim have tried to determine the real power of the EarthMagic, and having done so have respected it enough never to use it to its fullest extent.

With the Tellandra restored the Kalboreans' hold on it will fail as surely as tethering a wild horse with string. Then the Dwarvendim LoreMasters will rise again and take back their control of it. It is true that the Kalboreans sent you on this quest, however you resolve to do it because you know what it will mean to your people.

There is of course the matter of what will happen to you once the pillar is restored, and the Kalboreans realise what has happened. Their need for vengeance will make you a marked man, but you've never been one of their favourite thieves anyway, and you feel sure that no matter what happens you will be little appreciated. They were the ones who placed the wheels in motion. They will no doubt bear the consequences of it.

Lying amongst the stones of this outcrop you look to the sky and consider the flowing tapestry of swift cloud and darkness above. For a short while you listen to the wind, but then the fatigue of the day finally takes hold and you fall into sleep.

If you possess the skill of Lorecraft turn to section 585. If you do not possess this skill turn to section 512.

257

Leaving Melem's Fork behind you head west towards the ancient Ring of Stones. The road is well marked and easy to follow, even in the dark of night, but the way proves to be ill-maintained and you find that you must spend valuable time as Pallenten avoids areas of standing water and deep wagon ruts. Soon after dusk the sky clears markedly and about an hour after sunset the moons of Arborell rise in the east. Beneath this silvered light the way ahead becomes much clearer and you are able to make faster progress. After the rain the air is cool and crisp, the moonlight providing an ethereal quality to the now enclosing forest that lines the sides of the road. In this light you go swiftly but quietly, heartened by the natural beauty that surrounds you.

Pallenten gallops effortlessly, power still in her strides as she covers the remaining leagues to the Ring of Stones. The fresh, cool feel of the night air so soon after rain works as an invigorating tonic to your fatigue. The journey of the day has been made much easier with the help of your steed, but it has been a long day all the same. You can feel the heavy hand of fatigue beginning to take hold and are thankful that the keen chill of the night keeps you alert.

As you travel further along the deserted road you find the countryside varying within a patchwork of forest and open grassland. The woodland stands thick upon the edges of the road, its undergrowth swathed in shadows, enveloped in a darkness that even the bright moonlight cannot penetrate. The open grasslands make a welcome counter to the trees, though each copse or stand radiates a brooding disquiet as you pass. Even Pallenten senses the danger lurking hidden within the shadows and increases her pace, passing quickly beyond the forest, and then out onto the open plains and the Ring of Stones beyond. It is not until late however, that you reach the ancient monument.



:e' ka u mar theloth du'a ahda a' pheth ahn
et'es pyra:

Only once before have you seen the Stones, and that had been many years before, in a time when you were a novice at the Temple of the Suns. Then you had seen the monoliths in the bright light of day, and they had been impressive enough to burn a deep memory into the

mind of a young, and somewhat arrogant, Dwarvendim student. In the half-light of the moon they prove an awesome spectacle. Each stone towers higher than a man can throw a small pebble, and each is as wide as a two wagon roadway. Twenty-five of these stones stand in a huge circle, centered around a single small marble plinth. Even from a distance you can see the stones glistening in the moonlight, each a constellation of brightly reflected shards of light.

As you ride down towards the monument you cannot help but ponder the many questions raised by its existence. Indeed you remember your tutor raising the same questions that now overtake your thoughts as you move Pallenten closer. Here on this isolated plain, unseen and unappreciated by most Men, stands one of the greatest mysteries of Arborell. These massive stones had been set in place by an unknown race of creatures long before any written histories of Man or Hordim existed. Since their discovery the Dwarvendim had tried unsuccessfully to find either the technical or magical power necessary to build such a monument, but somehow, in a time long forgotten it had been done. It was a great achievement and an even greater mystery.

As you enter the circle of stones you cannot help but be awed by their size and by the great skill that would have been required to place them so precisely. It is as you are taking in the extraordinary power of the monoliths that you notice a number of small, furtive shadows moving quickly at your left. A few of Pallenten's strides later a set of similar dark shapes appear to your right, using the gloom created by the stones to remain unrecognised. The hairs at the back of your neck stand on end as you realise you have ridden into serious trouble. Carefully you draw Than'durion, then slowly turn Pallenten and try to exit the monoliths. In the space of a few heartbeats this awesome monument has become a very dangerous place.

Out of the moonlight and shadows you are immediately confronted by two small, almost laughably small, figures dressed in armour and armed with long stabbing spears. They stand with their spears readied for action, blocking your only exit from the Stones. Even with the bad light you recognise that they are Morg, but you are surprised more by the bravado they show at openly attacking you. Almost immediately however, you discover the reason for that courage. From beyond the shadows another twenty of the creatures rush forward and immediately you are surrounded. The Hordim are so short that you are forced to quickly dismount and protect Pallenten's legs from

attack, and it is then that the creatures make their move.

As your feet touch ground all of the Morg rush forward and begin stabbing at yourself and Pallenten. With the first stroke of your sword you are able to cut down three of the hideous assailants but this only changes the method of their assault. Momentarily stung by the fall of their comrades the rest retreat a few steps and begin a cautious circling movement, striking out intermittently at your defences. These small creatures will give you a tough battle.

The Morg have a combined combat rating of 23 and an endurance of 32. Pallenten is caught in this melee and will aid your fight. Your own combat rating should be increased by 5 temporarily to account for this help. If you survive the fight turn to section 125. If the Morg prove too strong then it will be here, at the Ring of Stones that your quest will end. In another life Providence may grant you better luck.

258

As the Hordim are in retreat there doesn't seem to be any useful purpose in pursuing them into the nearby brush. Instead you gallop into the village to see if you can render any assistance to the stricken villagers. Melem's Fork is in chaos and it needs all the help it can get. Most of the houses edging the main thoroughfare are well alight, both homes and businesses erupting in gouts of flame and smoke. Through the choking fumes you can see at least three bodies in the street and many more injured making for the town centre. The village Healer is moving quickly between these surviving wounded, but it appears that most of them are only slightly injured. All about you the smoke is thick and suffocating, forcing you to jump from Pallenten's back and lead her carefully through the litter of debris and personal possessions that lay scattered about the roadway.

Amongst the houses, and along the narrow streets that edge the main road it is easy to see the deliberate intent of the Hordim raiders. Although some of the buildings have been looted the majority have simply been burned, each house or business in turn being put to the torch, each feeding upon the fiery destruction of its neighbour as it builds into an overwhelming conflagration. There is little that can be done to save any of the dwellings, but it is the people that matter and it would seem most have been spared, although none have come through the assault untouched. The few armed men you can find

remain steadfast at the edges of the village square, guarding the villagers as a proper account is taken of the damage done. It is a task the local Administrator will take some time to complete, and it is not a task that you envy him.

As you move further down the road one of the men steps towards you, raising his hand in salutation.

"Hail traveller! What is your purpose here?" His face is covered in ash and you can see that he has recognised you as Dwarvendim, but there is no belligerence in his disposition, only fatigue.

"Greetings Friend," you respond, "Yours is a dark day and I wish to help if I can. Although, it appears that all is now well in hand."

The man looks back at the village and shrugs his shoulders. "It may seem so, but it will take a long time to recover from this. The Hordim came at us in the second hour after midday. Started lighting fires before any alarm was raised and used the smoke as cover to hunt us down in the streets. Didn't know how many of 'em there were until the band reformed to the south of the Fork. Well and truly caught us by surprise."

As the villager speaks you dismount from Pallenten and survey the damage caused by the Hordim. Many fires still burn and there are few enough villagers to fight the conflagration that threatens to engulf the entire north and west of the settlement. It is a job that is beyond you alone so you look to the Healer and decide that you shall help with the wounded. There is however, information that can be gained here and you take the opportunity to find out more about the state of the frontier before you move on.

"Tell me Friend, what is rumoured of the way to the Krodestaag. Can the Hordim be found even in the south?"

The man looks out towards the mountains and nods his head. "We've been hearing reports of sightings for weeks; even seen a few Ranger units moving in the open grass to the south, but didn't have any clue that the Hordim were this organised. If you are to journey on to the mountains you'd better be on your guard. Rumour says there are both Morg and Hresh to be found, especially in the foothills beyond the Pallah'dem Fields. If I were you I'd delay any trip south for the time being. It will not be safe."

Unfortunately you do not have the option of delay and you thank the man before drawing Pallenten towards the Healer's hastily erected tent. As you reach the centre of the settlement you bring Pallenten to a halt and turn your gaze towards the sky overhead. Around you other

villagers are looking upwards also, the suns disappearing as if a veil has been drawn across them. In the activity you have found here you have given no thought to the encroaching storm, and as you watch the sky turns dangerously dark, massive black clouds building into gigantic towers that look as if they are poised to fall upon the village.

Before you can move any further a huge blast of lightning explodes out of the clouds and impacts against a tree near the road's edge. In a coruscation of light and sound the tree erupts, showering burning wood and ash over a wide area. Running for cover the villagers scatter to whatever shelter they can find as a further hammering impact hits the ground. Another burst of light is followed immediately by a deafening drum-roll of thunder and a deluge of rain. Looking about, you see an old barn that will provide some protection. It is old and missing a large part of its roof, but a further blast of lightning, altogether too close for comfort, is enough for you to make the decision that this will be your best haven from the storm. Running towards it you lead Pallenten, who needs little encouragement to follow.

Standing in the damp shadows of the barn you can do nothing but watch the torrents of rain fall. It seems that now even the weather is conspiring to delay your journey to Stoneholme. It may just be your imagination, but in the dank gloom of your shelter the collar at your neck is feeling much tighter.

Turn to section 131.

259

The food spread out in abundance on the wide tables of the stall is fresh and varied, however you have enough to last the journey to Stoneholme. It is probably better to keep what money you have in case it is needed later. From the centre of the thronging market place you try to push your way out of the crowd and find a less populated way to the town's southern exit. It is as you are pushing past a large group of the community's well-fed citizenry that you come face to face with a group of Kalborean guards. Their leader is a particularly ugly, overweight man dressed in an ill-fitting uniform.

"Oi! Don't you know stone-eaters can't carry weapons here?"

"With all respect Sir." You try to be as submissive as your ego will allow. "I am in the service of a Prefect of the LoreMages' Guild. My

journey requires I carry this weapon and I have with me a written permission to do so."

The guard does not seem at all impressed. "I couldn't give a toss and sod your Prefect. No stone-eater carries a weapon in my town. Hand it over now!" The guard leader puts out his hand and starts to move purposefully towards you.

So much for the letter. There are too many guards to make for a satisfying fight and you do not feel disposed to hand over Than'durion. Instead you punch out with your right arm and strike the Kalborean heavily between the eyes. With a look of complete surprise he falls backwards into the pack of thugs, who desperately try to evade being crushed under him. In the confusion of flailing arms and legs you make your escape. Leaping upon the back of Pallenten you flick its reins but your horse needs no encouragement. With a lunge she bursts forward through the pressing crowd and races for the south gates at the other end of town. Around market stalls and loaded wagons you race, avoiding startled pedestrians and overturned baskets as you attempt to get as far as possible from the town guards. It proves to be a difficult task, one that will require more than Pallenten's strong legs to accomplish.

The crowds at the south end of the square are building steadily, now too thick to get through easily. It appears that you have arrived in Miller's Crossing on an important market day. People from all over the district have made their way into town, and you are confronted on the south road by a steady stream of townsfolk and merchants arriving for the afternoon's trading. Coming almost to a standstill you realise that your position upon Pallenten's broad back leaves you easily identifiable in the crowd. Quickly you jump from her back and begin pushing your way through what is becoming an ever growing tide of people, wagons and beasts of burden, all slowly moving towards the town centre.

Although it is hard going the crowds do work in your favour. Within the volume of moving traffic you quickly lose your pursuers, and once they have themselves been diverted by a major brawl that has erupted over spilt goods you draw Pallenten to the edge of the thoroughfare and consider your next move.

With the traffic still streaming in from the south gate you must decide what you will do next. The only way out of town is the south gate and there are a number of ways you can get there. If you wish to stick to

the main road and make your way within the cover of the crowds, turn to section 372. If you would much rather take a side street and avoid this traffic, turn to section 382.

260

"Sir, please wait!" The boy is running towards you, waving his hands wildly above his head.

"What is it you want boy? I'm in a hurry." There is something not quite right about the child. He is there before you but his image is not quite solid. As if she senses your thoughts Pallenten half rears backwards as the boy approaches.

"Please sir, is your name Halokim Vesh?"

Stunned by the boys words you hesitate and then answer, "Yes, but how do you know this?"

"I have been sent by my master the Maturi Len, to ask that you experience the hospitality of his house prior to continuing on your journey south." The boy hesitates for a moment as if listening to some other murmured conversation. "He says it will be to your benefit to do so."

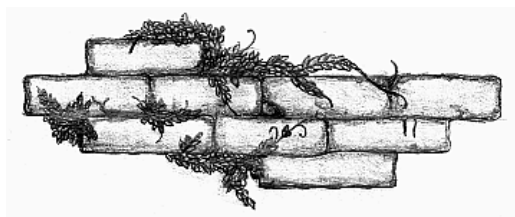
For a moment you consider whether you should accept the strange invitation. The name of the Maturi Len seems familiar, but you are hesitant to engage in anything that may waste your time. All thoughts of the boy and the Maturi disappear however, as you glance ahead of you and survey the armed camps surrounding Baellum. In the distance you can see that a number of the Kalborean Army units are beginning to make their way up the road in your direction. The situation must be beginning to deteriorate to the north for all this men and equipment to be on the move so soon.

Taking your leave of the boy you urge Pallenten forward. It is not long before you meet the first scouts of the advancing army. As it may not be in your best interest at this time to confront a large force of armed soldiery, you leave the exposed roadway and attempt instead to skirt the village, keeping to the forest that lies to the west of the town. This proves to be a wise course. Large numbers of soldiers are now beginning to clog the road, many of them struggling under heavy equipment as they move ponderously towards Maenum. Even if they did not challenge you, their sheer numbers would delay you unduly.

Moving carefully between thickly wooded copses and the available undergrowth, you and Pallenten pick your way around the edges of

the forest. With great care you keep out of sight of the army units and circle the town, but keeping to the forest is hard going. It is not long before you know you will need to rest. Finding a good secluded spot you camp in a small clearing amongst the trees. After removing Pallenten's saddle you allow her to graze at the edge of the clearing while you relax, propped up against a large moss-covered tree. From the distant roadway you can hear the monotonous tramp of marching boots and the endless squeak and grind of carts and wagons under heavy load. After a half hour you re-saddle Pallenten and continue on your way. It is two hours before you finally pass the town and rejoin the road. Once on the road you make quicker progress south.

Turn to section 251.



261

Without looking back you guide Pallenten swiftly over the terrain ahead. At first you must travel due west, the farms and old stone fencing not allowing you any swifter path, but as you clear the farmsteads that cluster about the road you are able to veer to the south-west and then strike out directly for the Devkraager Tor. The mountain sits on the horizon, its snow capped summit clearly visible, nearer now but still a good day and a half's journey away.

As you leave the last of the farms behind you find the terrain quickly turning to flat grasslands. Before you is a wide vista of green, broken only by the odd rocky outcrop and the slow, purposeful movement of grazing Sempaca beasts. The wagon-sized herbivores seem oblivious to your presence, but you give them a wide berth anyway as you make a direct path for the mountain. About you the plains extend as far as the eye can see, the long grasses flattening and rolling before the strength of a stiff northerly breeze. On the air you can smell the scent of rain, and as you ride on you see more sign to the north that there is definitely a storm on the way.

After a good half hour of travel you slow Pallengten and decide to check for any signs of pursuit. You scan the horizon but can see no indication of danger. Sure that you are alone on the plains it is now that a further choice must be made.

Do you wish to continue directly south-west towards Stoneholme? If you believe this is the best course of action turn to section 294. If you would rather turn more to the south and follow the borders of the Faeron Marshes turn to section 315.

262

You have only spent a few minutes in the farmstead but the smell of the animal hides clings to your skin like warm honey. For a moment you stand with your arms outstretched and allow the stiff northerly wind to blow the smell from your clothes. Pallengten's body language says it all, she stands off to the side, the odour something she would rather not be too close to.

Luckily the smell dissipates quickly and once Pallengten allows you to remount you are again on your way, riding steadfastly to the south-west. Ahead the Devkraager Tor rises up, its dark, snow-capped massif a clear objective on the horizon.

Turn to section 289.

263

Kal Murda. So much has been said and written of this small village that it is hard to separate the legend from the fact. No one lives in the town now for it has been deserted since the end of the last Horde War, abandoned as a ghost town, one filled with the echoing cries of the innocent and remembered only as a place of infamy. Here the most important battle of the Sixth Horde War had been fought and won. Its fate to be the stage for a desperate engagement that saved the Four Nations of Men but condemned the villagers of this small outpost to butchery.

It was in the final days of a bloody border conflict between the Faeyen to the west, and the Kalborean Union to the south, that the Horde took the opportunity to invade Kalborea and quickly move southwards. Taken completely by surprise the Kalborean outposts near the Rift were overrun and the Horde spread south, burning and pillaging as they went. With both the Faeyen and Kalborean armies

many days travel to the west there was little standing in the way of the rapid southwards advance of the Horde Army. Only the small fortified community of Kal Murda lay between the Hordim and the heavily populated cities of southern Kalborea. Without any chance of escape the small contingent of Kalborean soldiery dug in and awaited the approach of the enemy. Cut off from all help they had little chance of survival but fought anyway. Using a series of cleverly constructed ditch defences and the high stone wall of the village, the soldiers held the masses of the Hordim at bay for three crucial days.

It was inevitable that Kal Murda would fall to the Hordim. On the evening of the third day the inner defences of the village were breached and the garrison was overwhelmed. No one survived the fall of the town, but the delay it caused to the advance of the Horde Army allowed a reserve force from the southern Kalborean city of Das Nephrim to reach the enemy as they lay exposed on the open plain. From the west, a thousand axe-men from the Dwarvendim Stone Kingdoms intercepted the Hordim as they organised to meet the threat of the Kalboreans in the south. Attacked on two fronts the Horde Army fell into disarray and was halted on the grasslands. When the battle was over the Horde were in a full retreat, which became a rout when the diminished Armies of Men finally caught the Hordim at Pallah'dem Fields and destroyed them all.

But for the courage of the garrison at Kal Murda the Horde would have swept all before them. The village however, never recovered from the destruction that followed its fall. Since that time of infamy the village had never been resettled and has remained a silent testament to the violence of war and the destruction it brings.

As you stand on the rise and look down into the ramshackle streets of the village, you can almost hear the sounds of ordinary village life that would have filled its homes and markets. There is something else here though, something that has left the village with a reputation for the sinister and the spectral. It has been a place avoided by all who know of its existence and now it stands before you, awaiting your arrival.

Urging Pallenten forward she canters cautiously towards Kal Murda's gates. You can tell the horse feels the atmosphere of brooding fear that encompasses its walls, and you have to nudge her more than once to keep her moving forward.

Turn to section 275.

264

You do not have to wait long for the Hordim find you. Without warning two Hresh warriors jump from the brush to your right and begin shouting wildly. Pallenten rears up and lashes out with her hooves but the Hordim are too quick, one grabbing her reins as the other pushes her heavily from the side. Overbalanced by the force of the assault she topples sideways onto the riverbank. Rolling from her back you pull your sword and stand your ground. Pallenten staggers upright, fighting to gain a firm footing whilst one of the Hresh hangs precariously from her neck. As you stand there confronting the remaining warrior Pallenten disappears into the brush, wildly trying to dislodge the other Hordim as it tries to grasp a knife at its belt.

You will have to fight this Hresh. The warrior has a combat value of 15 and an endurance of 14. Unfortunately the force of the assault has left you with a jarred shoulder and as a consequence for the duration of this combat your combat value must be reduced by 2 points. If you win this fight turn to section 280. If it is the Hordim that prevails then it is here that your quest ends.

265

Pallenten can do with the water and you can do with the rest. The stream is surrounded on both banks by a thick hedgerow of low brush, and it takes a short while to find a path amongst the bracken that takes you to the edge of the stream itself. Here the stream is bordered by a thin strip of soft, spongy earth and the hedgerows provide a measure of protection from the chill carried by the winds. It is a good place to rest and you decide to take advantage of it. Drawing Pallenten to a halt you dismount and lead her to the water's edge. She needs no invitation to start drinking the clear cool waters. Squatting beside the great horse you take a few handfuls of water yourself and drink deeply. Sitting back upon the stream's soft border you watch Pallenten as she drinks and wonder at the stamina she possesses. The horse has covered more ground in this day than you could have travelled in a week, and still she appears as fresh as when you started this morning. You decide that for her sake it will be best to rest for a while longer.

Sitting there, considering the tranquillity of the slow flowing stream, you do not at first notice the deep impressions on the bank to your

right. Many animals must use this stream, and you can always expect to see tracks and other sign but as you survey the edges of the watercourse you see something quite different. Pressed into the soft ground are bootprints, the unmistakable heavy footfalls of soldiers following the bank upstream as it meanders from the north. Getting up you tether Pallenten and have a closer look. In two columns you can see the prints heading north, following the progress of the waters. You estimate there are probably twelve individuals.

If you have the skill of Bushcraft or Huntmastery turn to section 484. If you do not possess either of these skills and wish to follow this group turn to section 299. If you would much rather leave them alone and continue on to the west turn to section 305.

266

With the storm now rushing in from the north you gallop onwards, hoping some shelter will present itself. The plains are littered with old abandoned buildings, a legacy of times long past when men attempted to settle these grasslands. Too much war had ensured that farming here would be a failure, these wide open plains too frequently the battleground for the many Horde Wars that were fought to liberate Arborell for the Nations of Men. The way ahead is open, apart from the stony outcrops you can see nothing that may afford you protection from the storm-front, which is now descending like a suffocating blanket upon the lands to the north.

In the darkening light you can see little ahead of you that will provide cover. You ride quickly, desperate for any shelter that will give you sanctuary from the tempest to come. Then, just as you are about to lose all hope you find what you are looking for. Off to the right there is an old farmhouse, it is nothing more than four stone walls barely covered by a partially collapsed roof. It should be enough however, to protect yourself and Pallenten from the full force of the storm. Pulling Pallenten to a halt you dismount and quickly lead her through a smashed open doorway into the only protection you can find on these lonely plains.

Turn to section 277.



267

The damp ground and the encroaching dusk make for a cold passage on your ride towards the mountains. In the aftermath of the storm the air is cool and moist, the world a sodden carpet of torn grass and tumbled stone. Through this debris Pallenten gallops on, the hours passing as she finds her way quickly towards the mountains. Her stamina seems limitless but there comes a time when even she must rest.

Before you the Devkraager Tor rises, a vast stone massif hanging ominously in the early fogs of the dusk. With a long day behind you must now find a suitable campsite. Too many times the grasslands have proven to be a dangerous, lonely place in the night. It is necessary that you find a safe haven. From previous travels you know that there is a hunters' cabin just a short distance to the south. If you can find it quickly it will be your best bet for a safe night.

Turn to section 285.

268

For what seems like hours the storm thunders down upon the defenceless grasslands. Caught in your barely adequate shelter you stand soaked to the skin, Pallenten no less affected by the cold, icy tempest that rages about you. The storm is a surging maelstrom of hail and stinging sleet, thrown by impossibly strong winds against the plains, flailing the grasses and piling mounds of white against any obstacle that stands in its way. Trapped beneath the thin rock shelf you feel every blast of wind and every pulverised hailstone as it smashes against the rock about you. Deafened by this battleground of pounding thunder and detonating light you huddle closer to Pallenten and try and keep her calm. It is a raging assault that leaves nothing untouched, and there is little you can do except endure it.

But then, as quickly as it fell upon you, it ends. In the grip of powerful winds the storm moves southwards, taking with it its armoury of lightning and deafening drum-rolls of thunder. In the quiet that follows the storm's passing you take a few moments to extricate yourself from the shelter. Standing stiffly in the cool air, you coax Pallenten out from under the rock shelf and try and shake some movement into stiff, sore limbs. Looking about, you see that the storm has taken the remains of the day from you. It is now almost dark, the thin red glow of an approaching dusk prominent in the west.

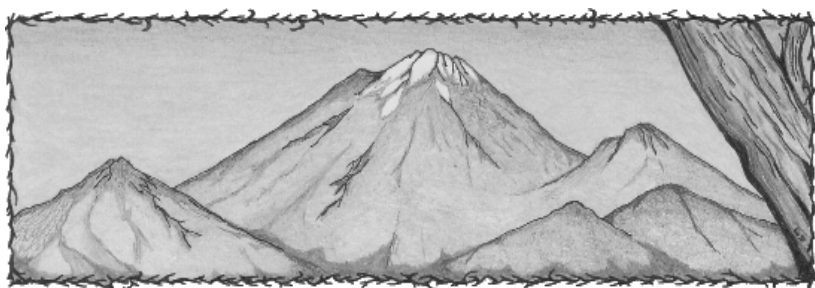
Do you wish to stay here at the boulder outcrop for the night? If so, turn to section 288. If you would rather try and find better shelter further to the south-west, then you should turn to section 307.

269

"Pallenten can only take you as far as the foothills." These were the words Tak Lovar said to you at the gates of Maenum, and it would seem that by some unknown artifice they are now to be enforced. Pallenten's eyes show her disquiet but then, obedient to a compulsion that remains unseen, she turns slowly to the east and heads off down one of the trails that lead back to the grasslands. Within moments she is out of view and you are left standing in the centre of the clearing alone.

For a short time you stand quietly watching the empty trail that Pallenten has followed and consider that you will miss that horse a lot, but the rest of your journey beckons, and now it will have to be made on foot. Re-shouldering your pack you turn towards the vast bulk of the Devkraager Tor that now rises clearly through the trees ahead of you. As you begin you breathe in the quiet morning air and look to the trail. Your first thought is that you hope it will not be a long trudge to Stoneholme.

At the edge of the clearing are three trails that may lead to the base of the Devkraager Tor. If you wish to take the left trail turn to section 273. If the centre trails appears to be a more likely path turn to section 293. If the right hand trail strikes you as being a quicker way turn to section 324.



270

The cry for help is too urgent to ignore. Pulling Pallenten to the left you make for the source of the noise and find it lying in a strange circular depression in the ground. But for the plea for help you could have easily ridden right past and not noticed anything at all. Dismounting quickly from Pallenten you rush to the side of a man staked firmly to the ground by his arms and legs. Judging by his appearance he must have been tied down here for at least two days, at the mercy of both the weather, and the predatory animal life that is known to inhabit this area.

Quickly you cut his bonds and help him into a sitting position. Looking about you see that a small pack lies a few metres from the wooden stakes that held him. Inside are a few days worth of rations and water.

"It'd be just like those ingrates to leave my food behind." The man grabs the pack from your grasp and rummages through it. "Just their style, leave a man dyin' on the plains and leave his food where he can smell it! Well I'll have the last laugh, you wait an see."

With the chance to get a better view you realise that the man is old and wiry thin, a straggling red beard making him look somewhat more unstable than you hope he really is.

"Who are you?", you ask carefully. Until you are sure this man has not turned mad from his exposure to the elements, you decide to stand back a small way. Your hand lightly grasps the pommel of your sword and the wretch before you takes full notice of your weapon.

"Me? Why, I's Jonath, comrade in banditry to the greatest of 'em all, Feln Carnoth." For a moment he seems almost triumphant, but then his shoulders slump and his demeanour changes. "Well, at least I was until we had a little fallin' out and I ended up here, staked out like a hide drying in the sun, waitin' for the crows to pick me eyeballs out. Shows ya doesn't it, ya just can't trust some people."

For a moment he contemplates his surroundings and then looks you straight in the eye.

"You're a stone-eater aint ya. What the hell you doing in these parts anyway. Don't ya know that the law'll have ya if they gets their grimy hands on ya?"

For a second you think about boxing this bandit's ears. It's not the first time you've been called a stone-eater and the term has always left you feeling somewhat aggressive, but this haggard excuse for a bandit is half delirious from the sun and wind. You'll let him off this

time.

"Don't you worry about why I'm here," you reply, "I just want to know where your friends might be. I would like to avoid them if I can."

Jonath laughs, "Don't worry 'bout them, by now they'll be in Das Frontiere living the high life and laughin' about what they've done to old Jonath, but I'll tell ya one thing for free. You don't fool me, that sword 'n horse ain't the property of no stone-eater, an' that collar ain't for show neither. I'll bet ya a horse for an apple that you're on some mission for our glorious Lords 'n Masters eh?"

He takes a small piece of dried meat from his pack and starts to eat it. His mouth is full but it doesn't stop him talking. "Don't worry, your secret's safe with me. Hell, I'd be dead meat if you hadn't happen'd along when ya did." Then his demeanour changes, his voice carries a hint of real concern. "The other thing I'll tell ya for free is that you'd better think twice about makin' for them mountains. I seen the way you been lookin' o'er that way and I tell ya it's crawlin' with critters, an' they don't like nobody snoopin' about. If I was you I'd stay clear away and go back home."

For a short time you talk further with the old bandit. He seems to know nothing of the war to the north, nor does he have any idea of what dangers might lie between here and the mountains. He does seem certain though that the mountains are infested with "critters" and are a place better left alone. After you assure yourself that the old man has enough food to get him to the nearest settlement you bid him farewell and remount Pallenten. The last thing you see of him is his red beard waving in the wind as he turns to begin what will be a long journey on foot to the east. You think ruefully that you would not want to make an enemy of such a tough old man, and that Feln Carnoth better be a light sleeper.

Again you turn Pallenten to the west and strike out across the plains. The conversation with Jonath leaves you full of questions, however you know the answers will lie somewhere ahead and there is still a long way to go. With the wind starting to grow in strength you turn Pallenten to the south-west and find the plains beginning to rise and fall in a series of gentle hills. As you crest one of these rises you pull Pallenten to a dead stop. By some awkward quirk of fate you find before you a small fortified village, deserted and in ruins. You have come face to face with the legendary village of Kal Murda.

Turn to section 263.

271

Although you could do with the warmth of a fire you believe it is too dangerous to take the chance. There are many things on these plains that may be drawn to flames, things you would rather not have to confront. Instead you will remain as inconspicuous as possible. You are lucky in that the boulder outcrop makes an excellent break from the cold northerly winds, and you do your best to protect Pallenten and yourself from the chill. It is going to be a miserable night but you decide to make the best of it. After placing Pallenten in the lee of the boulders you lay out your blanket and try to settle down for the evening. Even though it is cold and the wind is still rushing about the outcrop, you make yourself as comfortable as possible. The journey of the day has been very tiring but you cannot sleep. Lying amongst the rocks, with Pallenten near and the wind howling a dire song, you cannot help but think about the events of the past few days. In the main your thoughts lie with the Kalboreans.

You have no love for your captors, they have proven over the course of your life that they cannot be trusted, and that they use a fog of half-truths as a means to coerce and control those they subjugate. This quest is one based upon such half-truths, but it is one which you must not fail to complete. The irony is that it will be completed for reasons the Kalboreans cannot begin to appreciate.

It is true that the Kalborean LoreMages know a considerable amount about the history of the Dwarvendim, and the circumstances that led to the loss of the Tellandra. It is also true that they do not fully understand how EarthMagic works nor the place the pillar of stonewood has in being able to control it. The Kalboreans have sent you on this journey and in doing so have made a huge miscalculation. They have ensured you reach your goal by the use of the white metal collar that rubs uncomfortably at your neck, but you know the act of fixing the Tellandra will forever take it out of their hands.

Over the years you have heard more than one learned voice echo the suspicion that the magic the Kalboreans wield with the Tellandra is only a pale reflection of its true power. Locked away from all human contact in its deep, dark vault it has not been seen since the fall of Morgen Orncryst. And as such, has not been used by any of the Dwarvendim since that time. For the Kalboreans, the power of the Tellandra is only what they have experienced, a power diminished by its fracture and by their misuse. Because of this the LoreMages will be wholly unprepared for its restoration, and with the pillar's return to

fullness the Kalboreans hold on the Tellandra will fail. Such is the power of EarthMagic that it will rise like a flood-swollen river before them and sweep away any vestige of their hold over it. In the face of this overwhelming power the LoreMages will falter and then the Dwarvendim will easily regain their control of the stonewood, and have the tool they need to shrug off the repression of the Kalborean Union. It is true that the Kalboreans sent you on this quest, but you resolve to do it because you know what it will mean to your people.

There is also the small matter of what will happen to you once the pillar is restored, and the Kalboreans realise what has happened. In your own mind you know they will not be pleased, you are also sure that you've never been one of their favourite thieves, and no matter what happens you will be little appreciated anyway. It is a certainty that from the conclusion of this quest you will be a marked man.

Lying there considering the bright stars and the flowing wisps of low cloud your mind begins to wander, and soon the fatigue of the day takes hold. With Pallenten standing by your side you fall into an uncomfortable, fitful sleep. When the morning comes it is clear and cool. Getting up from your blanket you cannot see Pallenten at first, she has wandered off to graze but you can hear her chomping away at the thick grasses somewhere behind the boulders. After eating a small breakfast and putting away your equipment you walk out onto the grass and call her to your side. One call is not enough but a second gets her moving. Within a moment she is by your side, looking out in the direction of the Devkraager Tor and waiting for you to remount. Today you will reach the mountain. Climbing up onto the great horse you flick her reins and begin this next leg of your journey. In the quiet of the early morning, the muffled beat of Pallenten's hooves on the plain is the only sound you hear as you set her on her way to the south-west.

Your restless sleep and cold meal will only return 3 endurance points to your endurance level. If these points are needed record them on your character sheet and then turn to section 292.

272

As you ride closer to the farmstead you see that it is even more decrepit than you first thought. It is nothing more than a one roomed hut with an unstable looking veranda at the front. At first glance there

does not seem to be much point in going inside, but then you spy the large number of foot and hoof prints in the soft earth. At least two horses have been here within the past two days. Perhaps you may find some clue as to why inside.

With Pallenten now at a halt you dismount and kneel to check the prints more closely. There is no doubt in your mind that they were put down around two days ago, and that they were made by two, maybe three, different horses. The horses were well shod and judging by the depth of the prints, heavily loaded.

Getting back to your feet you have one more look about to check you are alone then step up onto the veranda. The front door is jammed shut and there is a slight odour in the air that is somehow familiar. With a crash you kick the door in and make your way inside.

Turn to section 283.



273

The left path looks in the best condition and appears to travel directly towards the west. At a half-run you move forward, the forest quickly closing in on both sides of the trail. Soon the rolling hills are left behind and the land begins to rise as a series of steep slopes that appear to ascend to the base of the mountain itself. With each rise the trail becomes more precipitous and then begins to wind in a zig-zag fashion into the higher hills. As you go ever higher you begin to feel the chill of the wind more keenly and find the ground beneath your feet becoming loose and unstable. In the end the way is so steep that you have to use the trees about you as supports to slowly climb upwards.

By midday the trail ends abruptly at an old quarry. It is little more than a gouge in the side of a cliff face, but must have once been a source of rock mined for use in the Stone Kingdoms further to the west. Now it is deserted and there are no other trails leaving the

quarry apart for the one you have just travelled. Looking about you see that you have climbed high into the hills. The Devkraager Tor is still a short distance further to the west, the vast grassland plains laid out as a huge panorama behind you to the east. There is no other path to take, you have emerged at a dead end.

If you wish to enter the forest and try and find another track turn to section 316. If you believe it will be better to retrace your steps and go back to the intersection with the other trails turn to section 323.



274

With the wide plains ahead you urge Pallenten onwards. At a gallop she races for the edge of the Marshes and what you hope will be a safe route to the mountains. Soon the leagues are being left behind as her strong legs pound away at the soft earth of the grasslands. It is an exhilarating ride, with no obstacles before you the great horse thunders over the trackless plain, only the thick grasses themselves any impediment to her progress. As you ride you take the time to survey the horizons knowing that you must remain alert for any dangers.

The plains before you are wide and open, a vast tract of flowing green but they are not lifeless. Where the grasses do not cover the ground in their thick blanket you can see the tracks and impressions of small deer and wild pigs. These animals keep well clear of any travellers, but you know there are large numbers of them scattered about the plains. As you gallop you see ground birds and other nesting fowl scatter from your path. If you were not in such a hurry you would certainly stop to hunt some of these game birds, but now is not the time. On high there are large numbers of birds milling in the sky or heading south in great flocks. You can see why when you look northwards.

To the north a huge storm is brewing. You cannot be sure if it is moving towards you, though the wind that now blows from that direction will surely push it your way. With the wind rushing past your head you ride, enjoying the feeling of freedom and the smells of the plains. Soon you will reach the Marshes and your unrestricted gallop will end. The Faeron Marshes do not favour the incautious, you have travelled them before and know they can be deadly if not treated with respect.

Turn to section 329.

275

Standing before the village's silent walls you wonder whether the stories of ghosts, or the tales of the moaning cries of the Horde's hapless victims, is something you should test for yourself. You have heard of no-one who has ventured through the ruined streets of Kal Murda in your lifetime, and you wonder if maybe there is good reason for that. Or perhaps the legends of hideous spectral inhabitants is just the residue of the horror that was perpetrated so many years ago. You do however, have a choice as to whether you wish to find out or not.

There are two options open to you at this juncture. You can ride through the ruins of Kal Murda and take your chances, or you may simply ride around the deserted walls of the village and continue on to the west. If you wish to ride through the village turn to section 287. If you would rather ride around the village and leave a possible encounter with its ghostly inhabitants for another time, turn to section 339.

276

A quick survey of the northern sky tells you that the storm will soon be upon you. Although it has slowed its advance for the moment, it will reach you within the next hour. This should be enough time to reach the town and find shelter until the weather passes.

Turning Pallenten to the north you ride on. As you gallop for the town you search your memory trying to remember what the name of this settlement might be. You cannot place it, but there are some towns you have not yet been thrown out of, and this may well be one of them. Still, in the back of your mind you have a nagging fragment of

memory that you cannot quite bring into focus, something half-forgotten but important.

As you ride the wind begins to strengthen. Blowing directly from the north, it produces a stiff headwind full of the rich smell of rain, and loaded with particles of broken grass and leaves. It is a swirling blast of detritus which makes your advance all the more difficult, your path sometimes obscured as you push Pallenten onwards. Well within the hour however, you crest a rise and find before you the town you seek. It is no ordinary town or village. As soon as you see the high circular, fortified wall of this settlement you realise you have stumbled upon a legend. You have found Kal Murda.

Turn to section 263.

277

The storm hits hard and you have little enough time to prepare for it. The farmstead is a ruin, but enough of it survives to afford a measure of protection from the full force of the storm. Quickly you draw Pallenten into the far corner of the building and wait for the tempest to hit. In the deepening gloom you hold Pallenten's reins firmly, her breath steaming as the air chills about you.

Like an advancing tide the storm marches overhead, quickly blanketing out the horizon and laying down a vicious swirl of wind, sleet and heavy rain. In the barely adequate protection of the collapsed farmhouse you stand with Pallenten, unable to avoid the wind gusts that throw flurries of rain and sleet under the roof. Before long you are soaked to the skin, suffering the numbing effects of the gale force winds as they blow unrelenting about the crumbling stone walls. Feeling completely miserable you can do nothing but pull your cloak closer about you and wait for the storm to pass.

With the ferocity of the tempest still building you stand in awe of its power. Unrestrained the storm hammers away at the unprotected plains, its energy growing with each passing minute. Buffeted by ferocious winds the farmhouse shudders to each deafening roll of thunder, the ground tremoring under the impacts of blinding bursts of lightning that fill the air with the smell of smoking turf. With Pallenten close you thank Providence that this shelter was at hand.

The fact that you have found shelter is a stroke of good fortune that has probably saved your life. To be unprotected in weather such as

this can mean death, and many unfortunate souls have been lost, taken by such storms in the past, never to be seen in the world again. Shivering, but happy that you have a roof over your head, you stand silently. Then, a slight movement out in the storm catches your eye. It is a black shape, laying still amongst the grasses as they are whipped and shredded by the wind.

You cannot be sure what the dark shape may be, but if you are brave, or foolhardy, enough you can run out into the storm and try and attempt to retrieve it. If this is your choice, turn to section 295. If you believe there is no way you will leave your shelter until the storm has passed turn to section 304.

278

Previous travels here have shown you that the southern borders of the Faeron Marshes are almost completely uninhabited. Left untroubled you should be able to make this longer path quite quickly. A day will be the most you need to skirt the marshes and reach the foothills of the Devkraager Tor. A light flick of Pallenten's reins is all that is required to send her at a gallop to the south.

Turn to section 298.

279

You have no idea where the Kalborean came from, or why he should attack you so violently, but his assault proves to be both efficient and ruthless. Armed with a long sword he possesses considerable skill, and it takes some effort to end the fight and put this leather-clad assailant down. When you are finished the Kalborean lies limp upon the ground, his sword broken in two, his body lifeless.

After taking a moment to thank Providence for your survival you commence a quick search of the Scout, but find nothing that might provide a clue to his identity, or his purpose in attacking you. You can only surmise that he was ordered to find you, however that doesn't make any sense for it was the Kalboreans that sent you on this quest after all. Perhaps even the Kalborean command is not fully aware of what the LoreMages are doing? Perhaps the LoreMages have secrets

of their own? Who can say, all you know is that it seems every person you encounter on this journey wishes to do you harm. All the more reason you think that it is best to remain as inconspicuous as possible. Calling Pallenten to your side you remount and continue on southwards. Your meal will have to wait till later.

Turn to section 274.

280

After a hard fought battle the Hresh lay dead at your feet. But you are alive. Looking quickly around you search urgently for Pallenten. The last you saw of her she was trying to remove the remaining Hresh from her back, the look in her eyes one of anger and frustration. Thankfully it does not take long to find her. At a canter she returns from the east, crashing through the brush and coming to a rest in front of you. The other Hresh is nowhere to be seen.

You have survived the battle but you must now consider what you can actually do for the captive held by the Hordim. If you wish to continue the chase turn to section 470. If you feel that it is better to return to your quest and make for the Devkraager Tor turn to section 475.

281

The sodden grass and soft earth make for a hazardous surface upon which to do battle. The Assassin fights in a ruthlessly efficient manner, his skill in hand-to-hand combat unmistakable and well-practised, but your sword carries with it too much force for his dagger to fend for long. After a short and violent confrontation your foe lies dead at your feet.

Kneeling beside the prostrate form you try and conduct a search of his possessions; perhaps there is some evidence here of who he is, and what his mission may have been. In the power of the storm it is hard to see much, he is definitely Kalborean although a scrawny runt of a man. His clothes prove to be far more interesting however. Made of black leather and almost seamless in manufacture they have been purpose made for this man's craft. He was obviously a professional in his chosen life but why would he be after you? A quick look about does not give any further indication of his identity or purpose. He appears to have no other equipment except for the dagger he wielded

so efficiently in combat and upon closer inspection it proves to be extraordinary. Finely carved and well tempered it is a remarkable weapon, one which would be highly valued in any armoury. You consider for a moment if you should take it with you. (If you wish to take the Assassin's dagger record it on your character sheet)

As you stand you see that the storm is beginning to abate, to the north the horizon is beginning to clear and the winds have dropped away. Returning to the farmhouse you wait for the remainder of the storm to pass and then lead Pallenten out onto the sodden ground. Both Pallenten and yourself are stiff from the wet and cold and it takes a short while for sore muscles to unlimber. All about the plains are covered in water, the land now a patchwork of shallow pools and muddy ground. For a moment you look out to the south and see the storm pounding away at the unprotected lands, great bolts of lightning crashing into the ground with such force that can feel the vibration of their impact through your boots. You were truly lucky to survive, but time to ponder your good fortune will have to be found later, now you must continue on. After brushing Pallenten down you remount and ride on towards the south-west.

Turn to section 267.



282

The pile of large boulders does not appear to be the best shelter to weather a storm such as the one that approaches, but they are all that you can reach in time. With large droplets of cold rain slapping at your face you veer Pallenten to the left and ride hard for the stones. When you reach the outcrop you make a surprising discovery. At some time in the past a number of the smaller boulders have been moved, placed in a roughly horse-shoe shaped mound. From a distance the boulder pile looks like a random jumble of stones, up close it has obviously been formed as a shelter of last resort by someone who would have to have been a very strong traveller indeed. As you dismount from Pallenten you can see a table-sized slab of stone has been laid across a few of the larger boulders to provide a simple shelter. The arrangement of the stones forms a small protected alcove within the pile. Although it is not much it will be enough to give you cover from the worst of the storm. After getting as much of Pallenten

under the rockshelf as you can, you crawl in under her belly and await the deluge that is to come. You do not have to wait long.

Turn to section 326.

283

The moment you kick in the door you know what the smell is, your nose assailed by the fetid smell of hundreds of damp animal skins. One look around the interior of the farmstead shows that it is now a poacher's hut. Mostly small deer and wild boar, the skins hang about the walls and stand in long racks, stretched tightly over frameworks of sticks and wire. Putting your hand to your mouth and nose you quickly search the building but find only a few items that may be of value to you. If you wish you may take any of the following:

- a hunting knife,
- a bar of soap,
- a length of rope, 10 metres long,
- a candle, and
- a small mirror.

The stench is too much to bear for very long. Leaving the drying skins to their fate you quickly make your way outside.

Turn to section 262.

284

Pitched from Pallenten's back you fall heavily into the surrounding undergrowth. Winded but unhurt you stagger back onto the trail, unsheathing your sword as you go. Here you are confronted by two Hresh Warriors. Dressed in light armour and carrying very efficient looking scimitars, they stand their ground, sizing you up for the fight to come.

Behind the Hresh you can see Pallenten struggling with a third warrior who is desperately trying to hold her by the neck. You cannot help her though and lose sight of her as she gallops back down the trail with the Hresh desperately trying to drag her down. The two Hordim before you give you no time to do anything except defend

yourself. As one they attack.

You must fight these Hresh Warriors and they have the advantage of numbers. Each must be defeated in turn. The first Hresh has a combat value of 17 and an endurance of 10. The second has a combat value of 15 and an endurance of 12. If you win this battle turn to section 306. If you lose then it will be here that your quest ends. In another life you may find that Providence will grant you better luck.

285

In the gathering darkness the cabin proves to be more difficult to find than you would have hoped. After turning to the south the grasslands give way to isolated patches of low scrub and the first scattered areas of light forest. It is within these patches of woodland that you begin to lose your way. Somewhere in amongst these trees is the cabin but the terrain has changed since you last passed this way, the trees sparser, many of the familiar trails lost to neglect and a thick blanket of fallen leaves. In this wide land a small cabin can be an easy thing to miss.

For a short time you take a path that leads through the trees and then into a series of wide areas of open, stony ground. Beyond these clearings the forest closes in, thick areas of undergrowth crowding the ground beneath an increasingly dense canopy of high trees and arching branches. Within this darker world you guide Pallenten carefully southwards, aware that night will soon descend and the cabin is still nowhere to be seen.

In the half-light of the evening you persist on your heading until you are brought to a halt by a confronting discovery. Spread about the trees and through the undergrowth are the torn remains of a Hordim, a Jotun you think, but shredded in a manner you have never seen before. No piece of the giant Hordim remains intact and the entire area is covered in arcing sprays of its drying blood. For a moment you try and understand what has happened to the creature, but there are no clues to its demise except for the overwhelming violence that must have been used to kill it. You are certain no man could have inflicted such wilful damage and you can think of no predator that would dare attack a Jotun and leave so much of it behind. All you can be sure of is that whatever killed the Hordim did so with great vigour and with considerable malice. Quickly you check your surroundings and skirt

the carnage, not willing to risk the possibility that whatever did this might return. In the deepening gloom you urge Pallenten forward.

Continuing on due south you finally intersect a trail you recognise which heads directly west. Following this trail brings you to a small clearing, within which stands the dilapidated but still functional hunters' cabin.

Turn to section 320.

286

The night passes quickly and in the chill of the early morning you rise for the new day. It takes only a few moments to rekindle the dying embers of your fire and after making a small morning meal you ready yourself for the day's travel. Pallenten has kicked away the doorjamb and is already outside, grazing on the thick grasses that grow in the lee of the cabin. She appears well rested and fit for the day to come. One call is all that is required to bring her to your side. After shouldering your pack you remount Pallenten and continue on your way to find the legendary fortress of Stoneholme.

The combination of the hot meal and a good night's sleep will restore a further ten endurance points to your character's endurance level (Remember not to exceed your initial endurance level though). Record this on your character sheet and turn to section 343.

287

After a moment of hesitation you urge Pallenten forward. Before you the gates of Kal Murda lay broken and rotten, their hinges long rusted away, their shattered beams silent yet powerful testaments to the violence of their destruction. Around many a camp fire you have heard the legends and stories of this place, and it is with no small trepidation that you find yourself joining the road that leads into it.

As you pass under the arch of the village's eastern gates you are able to get a clearer impression of what the village must have been like before its destruction by the Horde. Unlike most fortified settlements Kal Murda was not particularly big, probably no more than 300 metres from east to west and set out upon the plain as a perfect square of high walls and higher watch towers; all encircled

within a complex arrangement of defensive ditches and pitfalls. Upon Pallenten's broad back you can see the streets coming together at a central market square, around which lay the trading houses and civic halls of the community. All now lay in ruins.

Carefully you guide Pallenten into the town and immediately ask yourself why you are not riding around this settlement rather than choosing a path through it. It would be just as easy to find a way around the high walls but your curiosity cannot let you leave such a legendary place unvisited.

In its heyday Kal Murda had been a thriving focal point of trade, vibrant and busy, servicing most of the surrounding agricultural regions, and recognised as a vital link between the Stone Kingdoms to the west and the larger towns and cities of Central Kalborea to the south. Riding down the main boulevard towards the Town Hall you find the remains of many large villas and townhouses. There must have been many wealthy merchants that would have used the advantages of this settlement as a base for their trading enterprises, and the success of these townfolk could still be seen in the remains of the well paved and guttered streets that serviced them. This was all however, before the coming of the Hordim.

As Pallenten trots cautiously along the roadway all you can hear is the echoes of her hooves clattering on the cobblestones and the low rush of the wind as it finds its way through the deserted streets. The village is eerily quiet, a strange expectant edge to the air as you guide Pallenten into the central market. Stopping for a moment you look to the sky and find that the storm is now too close to be avoided. The dark wall of cloud and rain hangs in the north, a menacing veil of gloom that rushes towards you. You have no doubt that this storm is a Treachersa, and you will not survive it unprotected. Before you can move Pallenten on a gust of wind rips through the streets, lifting grit and detritus in its wake, spinning loose dirt and leaves in a dance that heralds the power of the impending storm. You shake your head as you feel the wind rising, a squall of rain and lightning hard upon its heels.

It is time to decide what you should do. A quick survey of the main square determines that only the broken remains of the Town Hall may provide any protection from the approaching storm. If you wish to confirm if shelter can be found there turn to section 441. If you would rather leave Kal Murda as soon as possible turn to section 495.

288

With the worst of the storm now past and only an hour's worth of daylight remaining, you decide to camp amongst the boulders for the night. It is not the best campsite but it will provide an effective barrier against the wind that still blows stiffly from the north.

Most of the heavy cloud has moved on southwards and in the hastening gloom of the dusk you can see the first appearance of a few early stars. Wrapping your heavy travel cloak tightly about you, you make camp within the formation of boulders and then find a suitable tether for Pallenten. She still suffers from the effects of the storm and it will be necessary for her to be kept out of the wind. The best place for her is inside the rock shelter under the lee of the boulder pile. In the encroaching dark you watch the sky clear of cloud and begin to fill with a bright multitude of stars. From the north the wind rushes on, bitterly cold and full of the promise of further bad weather.

Do you wish to light a fire? If so, turn to section 302. If you believe it may be wiser not to, turn to section 271.

289

About mid afternoon you come to a small stream that cuts across the otherwise featureless plain. To the north the storm front is building, but it appears to be holding off for now. You are thankful for that, the weather in this part of Northern Kalborea can be positively murderous at this time of the year. Stopping at the stream you consider whether you should water Pallenten here, or perhaps do so further to the west.

If you decide to water Pallenten here, turn to section 265. If you believe it will be better to do so later, turn to section 296.

290

From the battlements you have a clear view to what remains of the northern horizon. In that direction the plains have disappeared beneath a solid wall of black cloud, its enormous threatening presence moving directly towards you, marking its progress across the grasslands with bright flashes of lightning that strike at the earth like spear thrusts. As you watch its approach you have no doubt that the

storm will be a violent tempest, though one that can be weathered here safely. Leaning against the battlement you can feel the sure strength in the stone about you, and know that the toll bridge will provide a warm, dry haven from anything the weather may throw at you.

It is the twelve Riders galloping directly towards you however, that give you reason to pause and move quickly away from the battlements. Although they are still a good twenty minutes from your position you can see that two orderly rows of mounted Kalborean soldiery have the same idea as yourself. They wish to make the toll bridge their sanctuary from the storm, and you know that if the soldiers find you here there will be no chance that they will let you finish your quest unchallenged.

For a moment you consider whether it might be possible to hide from the advancing troops and weather the tempest unseen. The toll bridge is certainly large enough, each level a conglomeration of storerooms and annexes that could provide adequate hiding places for a Dwarvendim who might wish to remain unnoticed; but Pallenten is altogether too large to simply conceal away. Her size and fine breeding would surely bring her to the soldiers' attention, and then ultimately that attention would focus upon finding her rider. If you were to be discovered it would be an unhappy meeting that could only lead to violence and death. Although you do not like it, you know that by strength of numbers these Kalboreans will have the toll bridge as their shelter, and that you will have to find another.

Quickly you take to the stairs and make your way back to the courtyard where you have tethered Pallenten. Through the eastern gate you can see the Riders hastening towards your position, the storm hard upon their heels. Mounting the great horse you urge her to the gallop, setting her course towards the western gate, then across the span of the old stone bridge and out onto the plains beyond.

Without looking back you set Pallenten on a course directly for the Devkraager Tor, your hope that the Kalboreans are just as focused upon the approaching storm as you are.

Turn to section 356.



291

The afternoon marches on and there is still a great deal of ground to cover. With the retreating storm at your left shoulder you urge Pallenten on. Across the grasslands she gallops as if her journey has only just begun, her strides finding no falter in the soft earth and pooled water left after the rains.

In the aftermath of the storm the air is cool and clear, a strong wind gusting from the north-west pushing the remaining cloud cover into the south. In the face of this chilling bluster the wind whistles past your ears, the way ahead a vast expanse of rippling grassland seemingly open and unencumbered by obstacle or danger. Without pause the great horse gallops westwards, the leagues lost to her pounding hooves and inexhaustible stamina. As the suns of Arborell reach closer to the horizon your solitude is broken however, when a movement upon the plain quickly grows into the menacing form of an approaching mounted soldier.

From the plains to the south the man rides at a reckless speed, his unmistakable intention to intersect your path a short distance ahead. At first you cannot identify who this rider might be, but as he gets closer you can see that he is Kalborean, and that he is wearing the uniform of a Ranger of the Watch. In the swirling winds the soldier does not call out, nor does he try to avoid your position. With a growing sense of unease you watch as he gallops straight for you.

If you possess either the skill of Brigandry, Bushcraft or Huntmastery turn to section 510. If you do not possess any of these skills and believe you should draw Pallenten to a halt and see what the Ranger wants, turn to section 309. If you would rather try and lose this man in the marshes to the north turn to section 350.

292

After the solitude of the night the rush of the wind on your face and the beat of Pallenten's hooves on the grassland brings a clear focus to your journey. This great horse will reach the foothills within the hour, leaving the remainder of the day to find the entrance to Stoneholme, and to prepare for your descent into its depths. Whether you can find the entrance to the fabled fortress easily remains to be seen, but you have a general idea where it might lay, and no matter where you meet the edge of the mountain you should be able to follow its base and find the fortress.

Very soon the open plains give way to scattered copses of trees and large areas of low brush. This in its turn makes way for the forest that surrounds the south-western edge of the Devkraager Tor. In this part of Kalborea the forest is an unusual mixture of large, impressively tall trees with vast overhanging canopies, and a dense vegetation that carpets the ground in between. Thick and tangled in complex webs of vine and low brush, you cannot make any headway through the trees, instead you must follow the many wagon and animal trails that cut through the undergrowth towards the west. One of these trails appears to have been recently travelled, and as it leads directly towards the mountain you decide to use it. The trail is wide and makes its way between the large trees of the forest. Although mostly straight it does take a number of bends and as you are rounding one of these you come upon an abandoned wagon.

Do you wish to have a closer look at the wagon? If you do turn to section 318. If you would rather leave it and continue on, turn to section 358.

293

As you have no idea which of these trails will take you to the mountain you pick the central trail and quickly move forward. On both sides of the path the forest grows thick and dark, the light of day disappearing easily within its gloomy depths. Carefully you scan the sides of the path as you head westwards, large branches and thorn vines thrust out from the forest forming dangerous obstacles to your way ahead. At a half-run you traverse these natural barriers and soon the relatively flat ground you have been crossing rises into a series of ascending hills, cut frequently by small streams and heavily wooded gullies. Thankfully most of these are skirted by the trail and, although you are forced to make a few detours to avoid large fallen timber, you quickly close the distance between yourself and the mountains. Ahead the Devkraager Tor grows larger, a vast snow-capped granite massif that looms through the trees, and one you must reach as soon as possible.

Turn to section 353.



The open grasslands are a direct path to the foothills of the Devkraager Tor and the best route to getting there unnoticed. From your previous travels in these lands you know that very little stands between you and your destination. History has ensured that these wide plains have remained relatively unsettled, both conflict and the ferocity of the weather having conspired to make living here very difficult. Without delay you place Pallenten on her course for the mountains. With no obstacle before her Pallenten gallops unchecked across the wind-blown grasses, only the occasional slight hill or small stream standing in her way. On open ground she moves with a velocity that is breathtaking, one that consumes the leagues as she pounds forward, leaving large tracts of ground in her wake as she arrows for the mountains and the object of your quest.

In this vast expanse you settle into the gallop and take in the vista that spreads out before you. At all horizons the plains are clear but as you look to the north you know that this day will not remain untroubled. To the north-west clouds are building upon the high mountains, their white billowing forms growing as you watch, forming and joining into a weather-front that is moving across the plains towards you. There can be no doubt that a storm is brewing, the rolling of distant thunder a harbinger of bad weather ahead.



**:dehr hoewck; alaal; es phenath a'skel dehr
alethaal:**

Onward you ride, Pallenten set on her path and the leagues disappearing beneath her mighty strides. Overhead the sky is a patchwork of white cumulus and deep blue, only the thick line of advancing cloud to the north any hint that you have anything other than clear weather ahead. You search the horizon but can see nothing that might indicate trouble, it would seem that you are alone in this part of the world. You smile slightly at the thought and then take a firmer hold on Pallenten's reins; experience has taught you that it is just when you believe you have nothing to fear that things have a way of becoming very dangerous indeed.

Cresting a rise in the land you find, some one hundred metres to your right, a small stone-built farmstead. It stands on the plains as a single isolated building, surrounded on three sides by overgrown

hedges that have nestled tightly against its weathered walls. It has the look of being abandoned, but the ground surrounding its front entrance shows sign of recent use.

Do you wish to have a closer look at this farmstead? If you do, turn to section 272. If you can see no need to waste time here and want to move on, turn to section 303.

295

The dark, indistinct shape lays motionless in the fury of the storm some twenty metres from the farmhouse. Every few seconds a great burst of lightning illuminates the area about you, the shape outlined momentarily but then gone. It is difficult to distinguish and you cannot tell clearly what it might be. Quickly you tether Pallenten to a strong beam and move closer. In the face of the storm you throw your hood over your head and brace yourself for what is to come. As you step out into the tempest it hits you like a physical blow, and for a moment you have to steady yourself as you fight the strength of the wind and the relentless stream of rain and sleet that falls around you. Then you see a glint of hard steel. A slight movement of an arm against the backdrop of the storm tells you all you need to know.

Drawing your sword you run straight at the form laying in the grasses. Immediately the shape raises itself from the ground. It is a man dressed in close fitting black leather, wielding a vicious looking dagger. Within the raging storm the Assassin attacks.

You must fight this Assassin. He has a combat value of 15 and an endurance level of 14. If you defeat this skulker of the night turn to section 281. If you are defeated, then it will be here, in the ferocity of this storm that your quest will end.

296

There are many similar streams further to the west and Pallenten does not yet look like she needs to rest. With a slight flick of her reins you urge her forward and she trots lightly through the shallow watercourse, and then up through the undergrowth on the other bank of the stream. Once free of the low brush Pallenten builds her pace and you are soon again galloping smoothly towards the distant mountains.

With Pallenten set on her course you take the time to ponder the beauty of the plains. Although mostly flat, the terrain is cut by small streams and gentle hills that do nothing to hinder your speed or necessitate a change in direction. There are not many trees nor features of any kind that break up the serene calm of the gently waving grasses, and as you ride you find your mind wandering to things other than the dangerous nature of your quest. In this almost trance-like state you speed onwards. Suddenly, from the corner of your eye, you see the momentary reflection of something metallic to your left. This is followed quickly by the desperate cry of someone in great pain.

Do you wish to investigate? If you do, turn to section 270. If you believe there is too much of a chance that this is a trap and you wish to ride on, turn to section 313.

297

The body of the Hresh is enough evidence for you. Turning Pallenten to the west you head off directly for the marshes and then turn southwards following the border of the wetlands. As you ride through the long grasses you realise that the body of the Hordim underlines your need for caution. With the Horde roaming the plains of Northern Kalborea you can sense your quest becoming all the more complicated with each hour that passes. It would appear that you now have more than just the Kalboreans to worry about.

For a time your thoughts are focused on the way ahead, the rhythmic pounding of Pallenten's hooves and the regular rise and fall of her head as she gallops a comforting reminder of how fast you are covering the distance to your goal. Indeed, so fast is her progress that you reach the south-eastern corner of the marshes by mid-afternoon. Turning Pallenten westwards you can see the rising summit of the Devkraager Tor directly ahead. Heartened by the ease with which you have made the southern boundaries of the Faeron you give Pallenten a further flick on her reins. In the fresh afternoon air she accelerates, taking advantage of the large tracts of grassland ahead. Only when you look back to check for any sign of pursuit do you see the approaching storm, a dark wall of cloud and mist advancing from the north.

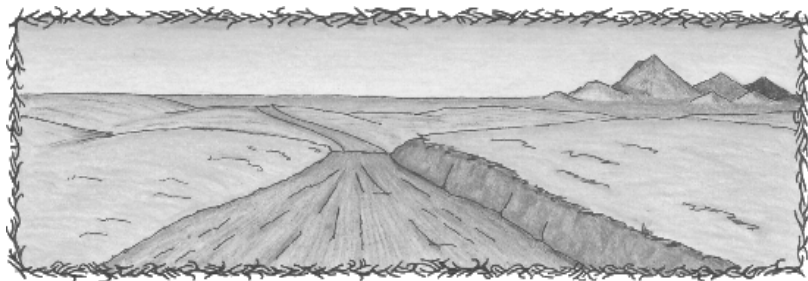
Turn to section 345.

298

With the expanses of the marshlands on your right you follow the contour of the terrain and swiftly make your way southwards. You pass many an abandoned building, old farmhouses, decrepit sheds and long lines of crumbling stone walls. All are the remains of a number of unsuccessful attempts to settle the fringes of the marshes. Almost a century ago the wetlands began to expand, and with no way to stop their advance they quickly covered most of the farmlands making them uninhabitable. Entire villages were swallowed and most now lie either beneath the swamps or lay decaying within its borders. Although the growth of the marshes ceased some time ago nobody has been foolhardy enough to try and resettle these lands. They remain a natural wilderness that men avoid and legends have ensured will remain untroubled.

Riding on you find Pallenten has no difficulty avoiding the numerous patches of damp ground. The edges of the Faeron are a patchwork of wet and dry, clearly identifiable by the subtle changes in the grasses and brush that lie within them. As long as you remain focused on these changes in the terrain you should have no difficulty avoiding any dangerous areas at the marshes border. It is as you search the way ahead that you spy two distinct sets of bootprints, running parallel to the marshes before veering off quickly to the south-east.

Do you want to stop and have a closer look at these prints? If so turn to section 331. If you would rather move on instead. Turn to section 342.



299

These bootprints are definitely those of soldiers but a closer look shows they are not man-made. It appears that whoever, or whatever made them has kept close to the banks of the stream and used the cover of the hedges at its edge to move undetected. You feel the collar at your throat and consider whether it is a good idea to follow them. You see also that they are dragging something heavy with them and that it was struggling at the time.

Your curiosity aroused you reposition the metal collar and decide you will give yourself one hour to find out who has made these tracks, and what they have with them. Luckily the prints are fresh and with Pallenten you should be able to catch their owners without much trouble.

Turn to section 321.

300

In the cold and damp of the night a fire will be most welcome. The room is small and holds no furniture or fittings except for a rusting brazier and flue pipe against the far wall. As has so many other travellers you will be able to safely make a fire here and settle for the night. Tinder and firewood proves to be no trouble as a short excursion back out into the stalls finds a pile of dry wood stacked against the stable entrance. From this supply you take more than enough to provide a flame through the cold night. After relocking the tack room door you start the fire and make yourself a hot meal. (Deduct one ration from your character sheet.)

Outside the wind has started to build again in strength. Settling down next to Pallenten you watch the fire crackle and spark, and listen to the howl of the wind as it buffets the trees outside. Here, inside your stone shelter you sit in the comfort of your fire's warmth and think about your quest and the trials of the day. In the main your thoughts lie with the Kalboreans and the circumstances of your quest.

Your captors at Maenum proved that they knew a considerable amount about the history of the Dwarvendim, and the circumstances that led to the loss of the Tellandra. It was equally plain that they did not have a good understanding of the real nature of EarthMagic or the true power of the pillar of stonewood. In their desperation the Kalboreans sent you on this journey, and they have ensured its

completion it by the use of the metal collar that nows rubs uncomfortably at your neck. What they do not realise however, is that the act of fixing the Tellandra will forever take it from their grasp.

Your early training at the Temple of the Suns, and the echoes of more than one learned voice, have told you that the magic the Kalboreans wield with the Tellandra is only a pale reflection of its true power. This power is something they have never experienced, nor had to control, and this inexperience will leave them wholly unprepared for its restoration.

Since the demise of the ancients only the Dwarvendim have attempted to test the true limits of the powers of EarthMagic. Having done so they have respected it enough never to do it again, the consequences of the Tellandra's full potency simply too overwhelming to control. With the Tellandra restored the Kalborean's hold on it will falter as surely as attempting to tether a wild horse with twine. It will be then that the Dwarvendim LoreMasters will have their opportunity to take back their control of it.

It is true that the Kalboreans sent you on this quest, but as you listen to the whip and surge of the winds you resolve to complete it because of what it will mean to your people, and to their chances of shrugging off their servitude. Of course, there is the small matter of what the Kalboreans will do to you once they realise that the Tellandra has been restored and that their control of it has ended. But then you've never been one of their favourite thieves anyway, and you feel sure that no matter what happens you will be little appreciated.

The crackling of the fire brings you back from your musings and in its flickering light you feel the heavy hand of fatigue grab you squarely by the shoulders. For a short while you listen to the wind as it howls through the many cracks in the old stone walls, but then your eyes close and you fall into a dreamless sleep.

Turn to section 286.

301

Thanking Providence that you have survived the encounter you press on, ever mindful of your need to reach Stoneholme as quickly as possible. With Pallenten set on a south-west path you settle down for what must be a swift passage to the mountains. She gallops purposefully forward, revelling in the challenge of bringing you to the object of your quest.

For your own part you settle into the ride and consider the slow rise of the Krodestaag mountains before you. So far your journey has been through lands well known to you, but these mountains are a different matter altogether. Since the fall of the Stone Kingdoms no Dwarvendim has ventured upon the old roads and trails, the denizens that infest these cold summits good enough reason to keep distant. You wonder quietly how you will fare when you reach the foothills, and you must leave the strength of this extraordinary horse behind.

To the north the storm closes in, building in strength as it moves southwards, its veiled base a dark wall of impenetrable gloom rushing ominously towards you. Within its towering, anvil-capped clouds you can see the violence of its raging winds and the havoc that it is creating on the ground below. Looking towards the tempest you feel a strange tingling sensation with each lightning blast as it hits the unprotected earth and flinch as it is quickly followed by deafening drum-rolls of thunder. With Pallenten galloping ever faster the wind increases beyond gale force, the grasses blown flat to the horizon by its power. You will need to seek shelter from this storm, for to be caught in its full fury may very well be your undoing.

With rain slapping at your face you search the horizon for suitable protection. Apart from a series of rocky outcrops there appears to be nothing close that will give you shelter from the storm. As you ride further on you come across a cluster of boulders that may provide some shelter, but you will need to check them out first.

If you have the skill of Bushcraft turn to section 468. If you do not possess this skill but wish to go to the boulders turn to section 282. If you believe that better protection might be found further to the west turn to section 336.

302

After the dismal cold of the storm a fire will be most welcome. Although there is not much in the way of dry wood on the plains, you find enough material jammed between the boulders of the outcrop to get a small fire going. You find also that some of the small shrubs in the area burn very well, their sap is particularly flammable and you spend some time collecting enough of these bushes to last the night. In the welcome warmth of the fire you dry your clothing and prepare yourself a hot meal. (Withdraw one ration from your pack. Record this

on your character sheet.) Pallenten stands side on to the flames and you can see that the warmth of the fire is doing her a lot of good.

When your meal is done you settle down for the night. With the fire near, you unfurl your blanket and lay back. The journey of the day has been very tiring but you cannot sleep. Lying amongst the rocks, with Pallenten near and the wind howling its dire song, you cannot help but think about the events of the past few days. In the main your thoughts lie with the Kalboreans.

You have no love for your captors, they have proven many times over the course of your life that they cannot be trusted, and that they use a fog of half-truth as a means to coerce and control those they subjugate. This quest is one which you must not fail to complete, but it will be completed for reasons the Kalboreans cannot begin to guess at.

It is true that the Kalborean LoreMages know a considerable amount about the history of the Dwarvendim, and the circumstances that led to the loss of the Tellandra. It is also true that they do not fully understand how EarthMagic works, nor the place the pillar of stonewood has in being able to control it. The Kalboreans have sent you on this journey and in doing so have made a huge miscalculation. They have ensured you reach your goal by the use of the white metal collar that rubs uncomfortably at your neck, but you know the act of fixing the Tellandra will forever take it out of their hands.

Over the years you have heard more than one learned voice echo the suspicion that the magic the Kalboreans wield with the Tellandra is only a pale reflection of its true power. Locked away from all human contact in its deep, dark vault it has not been seen since the fall of Morgen Orncryst. And as such, has not been used by any of the Dwarvendim since that time. For the Kalboreans the power of the Tellandra is only what they have experienced, a power diminished by its fracture and by their own misuse. Because of this you believe they will be wholly unprepared for its restoration, and with the pillar's return to fullness the Kalboreans hold on the Tellandra will fail as its true power rises like a wave before them. Then the Dwarvendim will regain the EarthMagic and have the tool they need to shrug off the repression of the Kalborean Union. It is true that the Kalboreans sent you on this quest, but you resolve to do it because you know what it will mean to your people.

There is also the, not insignificant, matter of what will happen to you once the pillar is restored and the Kalboreans realise what has happened. In your own mind you know they will not be pleased, you

are also sure that you've never been one of their favourite thieves, and no matter what happens you will be little appreciated anyway. It will be safe to assume that from the conclusion of this quest you will be a marked man.

Lying there considering the bright stars and the flowing wisps of low cloud your mind begins to wander, and soon the fatigue of the day takes hold. With Pallenten standing by your side you fall into an uninterrupted sleep.

When the morning comes it is clear and cool. Getting up from your blanket you cannot see Pallenten at first, she has wandered off to graze but you can hear her chomping away at the thick grasses somewhere behind the boulders. After eating and putting away your equipment you walk out onto the grass and call her to your side. One call is not enough but a second gets her moving. Within a moment she is by your side, looking out in the direction of the Devkraager Tor and waiting for you to remount. Today you will reach the mountain. Climbing up onto the great horse you flick her reins and begin this next leg of your journey. In the quiet of the early morning, the muffled beat of Pallenten's hooves on the plain is the only sound you hear as you set her on her way to the south-west.

The warm fire and good night's sleep will return six endurance points if needed. Record this on your character sheet and then turn to section 292.

303

Even from this distance you can smell the faint odour of rotting flesh. Whatever is in the building is probably better left well alone. Urging Pallenten forward you continue on with your journey to the south-west. Before you extend the vast grassland plains, an expanse of gently rolling hills with only the mountains on the horizon breaking up an otherwise continuous panorama.

Pallenten neither tires nor falters as she races towards the mountains, and the leagues are soon disappearing quickly beneath her hooves.

Turn to section 289.



304

The vague, formless shape lays quiet but menacing in the darkness. You are sure that you saw something move in the last blast of lightning that rocked the surrounding plain, but it could just have easily been a twitch in your eye, or your imagination. As you stare out into the tumult of the storm you watch, concentrating on the area where you thought you saw the movement but nothing further becomes evident.

Meanwhile the storm rages, thunder rolling in great waves through the clouds above, buffeting your shelter and assailing your ears. As the thunder and lightning crash all about, the wind rises to a new crescendo, howling through the many gaps and holes in the walls. In the overwhelming bluster the roof begins to lift as if it is about to be torn from its fastenings but luckily they hold, weathering the power and force of the storm as it tests the ailing structure.

Then, as quickly as it started, the storm recedes, lessening its bite as it slowly moves southwards. For some time you wait, hoping that it will not resume but the Fates are with you, and slowly but surely the cloud begins to lift and then clear away. In a drizzling rain you pull Pallenten out into the open and survey properly the lands ahead. Great pools of water cover the ground but they are draining southwards, and as you stand there you can see the clouds being pushed by the still strong winds in the same direction. After giving Pallenten a rub down you remount and continue your journey to the west.

Turn to section 267.

305

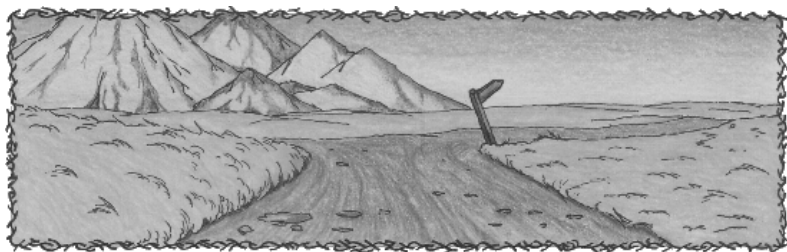
The footprints look like more trouble than you would like at this time. With Pallenten rested you remount and continue on to the west. The grasslands are wide and open before you, a sea of waving grasses that flow towards the horizon and the mountains that are your goal. With no barrier in your way, you let Pallenten race across the plains, taking the leagues in her stride as she forges on towards the Devkraager Tor.

As you ride you find the grasslands slowly changing. With the passage of the leagues the soft earth of the grasslands harden, becoming stony and littered with large outcrops of boulders. The grass

too becomes thinner and changes, a much hardier, drier grass replacing the denser ground cover you have previously travelled. The way ahead is still without hazard though.

Then, as if risen from the depths of a thousand fireside legends, you crest a small rise in the ground and bring Pallenten to an abrupt halt. Before you stands a small village, abandoned and desolate. You search your knowledge of history and folklore for some clue to its name, and then find a chilling remembrance stored away in the depths of your memory. You have come face to face with Kal Murda.

Turn to section 263.



306

The fight with the Hresh is vicious but you stand victorious. With the bodies of the Hordim laying sprawled at your feet you look around frantically for Pallenten and the third Hresh. As first you can see nothing. The trail in both directions is empty bar yourself and the dead warrior, but then you hear the sounds of hooves pounding up the trail from the east. It is Pallenten returning. There is a look of fright and fatigue in her eyes and it takes a moment for you to grab her reins and bring her under control. A quick inspection shows she has a nasty gash on her hindquarters but the third Hresh is nowhere to be seen.

Although it would be wise to get away from this place of ambush as soon as possible, you need to rest and tend to Pallenten's wound. Luckily it is not deep and requires nothing more than a clean with some fresh water, however you let her rest for a short time before remounting. The Hreshs' weapons are inferior to your own and they hold no equipment of any value to your quest, the fact that they were here at all gives you further cause for concern. These three must be scouts and you have no doubt this means there will be more in the

area. It is time to go.

You are eager to leave this place of ambush and Pallenten needs no encouragement to be on her way. Nudging her forward she breaks into a canter, and soon the dead Hresh are left far behind.

Turn to section 343.

307

From previous travels you know there is a deserted hunters cabin about an hour's ride to the south-west. There is a good chance you will be able to reach it by dusk. Before continuing you give Pallenten a rub down and a chance to loosen stiff muscles. When you are satisfied she is fit to resume the journey you remount and make for the cabin.

In the hastening gloom you ride quickly, not wanting to be caught out in the open at night. Very quickly the country begins to change about you. At first it is the appearance of low brush you notice, then scatterings of thinly wooded copses. This in turn becomes a thicker wooded forest, but you expected this, somewhere amongst the trees is your goal, all you need do is find the right trail.

Luck is with you, the trail is easy to locate and just before last light you find yourself standing before the hunters cabin.

Turn to section 320.

308

The old signpost is faded and so loose in its foundation that you cannot be sure that it is even pointing in the right direction. As the storm is advancing from the north anyway there seems little benefit in trying to find a town that may no longer exist. With the Devkraager Tor just slightly west of south-west you set Pallenten in that direction and race to keep ahead of the approaching tempest.

As you ride you notice the soft earth of the plains beginning to harden, the open vista of grassland changing as it is punctuated by large outcrops of boulders. The land about is devoid of any human habitation, previous attempts at settlement here proving the ground too stony and unsuitable for agriculture. Your plan to remain as unnoticed as possible is proving to be quite successful because of this, though it does now leave you with a more urgent problem. You cannot find any suitable shelter that will provide protection from the storm. As it rushes closer you can feel the power building within, the dark

wall of mist and rain growing beneath a line of distinct, anvil-headed towers of cloud, that frequently exchange huge arcs of lightning as they push southwards.

With rain slapping at your face you urgently look for some type of refuge from the weather to come. The plain is wide and offers little in the way of cover, but as thunder drums through the air about you there arises ahead a large boulder pile. Perhaps within its stony ruin you might find shelter.

There are few choices left to you. With the storm bearing down will you try the boulder pile for shelter? If this is your choice turn to section 282. If you would rather not take your chances here, but continue on further to the west, turn to section 336.

309

Perhaps, you think, there may be good reason why this Kalborean approaches in such haste. Upon recognising him as a Ranger of the Watch your first thought is that he is a messenger sent by the High Prefect, with new instructions or news of the battle at Maenum. Although you are not altogether sure of what you should do, you decide to stop and see what the urgency of this horseman's ride will bring.

In the glare of the afternoon light it is difficult to make out the rider's features but his true purpose becomes apparent only when he draws his horse to a halt, and then it is too late. In a swift and determined movement the Ranger dismounts, drawing his sword as he runs at you. There can be no doubt now what the Rider's intention is. He is neither a messenger nor a scout sent to find you for some unknown purpose. If you have come to his attention it is only because he means to kill you.

Before you can shout any question or explanation the Ranger grabs you firmly by your cloak and drags you off Pallenten, sending you toppling across her hind-quarters. Luckily you fall to the opposite side of the horse and this gives you the few precious seconds you need to regain your footing and draw Than'durion. With your sword flashing in the afternoon sun you gesture for the Kalborean to come and meet his fate.

You must fight this man. Powerful and well-trained, the Rangers of

the Watch are formidable opponents and it will take all the skill you can muster to defeat this one. The Ranger has a combat value of 18 and an endurance of 16. If you win this battle turn to section 415. If it is the Ranger that prevails it will be here upon the open grasslands that your quest will end. Perhaps in another life you shall find better luck.

310

As you are travelling on horseback it should not take long to catch whoever has made these tracks on the plain. You have no intention of chasing them down, but if you can get a good look at them from a safe distance you will be better prepared for any possible confrontations later in your journey. If the prints prove to be those of Kalboreans then you will not be overly concerned, Kalboreans avoid the southern reaches of the Faeron Marshes like it is a stronghold of the plague, you should not encounter any more on your travels. If they are Hordim then that will be a completely different matter. You know little about the Horde and for all you can guess they may now infest these wetlands. Concentrating on the tracks you ride swiftly to the south-east.

Turn to section 340.

311

In the first hour after daybreak the weather turns clear and crisp, the sky a vault of deep blue dappled only infrequently by wisps of high cloud. A wind blows gently from the west and you can smell the forests ahead as they draw closer under Pallenten's relentless gallop. With the Devkraager Tor within reach you set your path firstly to the west, and then veer slightly to the north. The Faeron Marshes quickly recede into the distance to your right, the grasslands again spreading out before you like a vast sea of rolling green.

As you ride on you begin to hear a subtle change in the noises of your passage. Under Pallenten's pounding hooves you can hear the ground becoming firmer, the way more stony. Ahead the plain is punctuated now by large outcrops of protruding rock, mainly piles of granite boulders, within which gnarled and stunted trees wrap their roots and branches. The country changes slowly about you, but you

show little interest, you have been in this part of Kalborea before and those times had not always been good ones. These outcrops of rock can hide all manner of dangers, so you steer clear of them as you thunder on even faster now towards the Devkraager Tor.

Soon the ground again changes, the open plains replaced by patches of low brush, and then the first vestiges of the forest that you know encompasses the foothills of the Krodestaag Ranges. Finding a trail ahead you do not stop as you charge deep into the forest.

Turn to section 343.



312

The old ruins are interesting but an exploration of their secrets will have to wait. There are more pressing objectives to be met, their urgency underlined by the uncomfortable tightness of the thick metal collar at your neck. With a pull on Pallenten's reins you turn her to the west and leave the old stone toll bridge behind.

Before you the sparse remains of a cobbled road reaches westwards, its dark stones not yet consumed by the encroaching grasslands. There is no other trail, and for the want of another path to follow you use the patchwork of grass and solid roadway to your advantage, setting a quick pace as you ride on towards the Devkraager Tor. As you ride you can see that the remains of the road are quite wide at some points, in its heyday it must have been a very important highway indeed, probably a main trade link between the Stone Kingdoms and the Kalborean Union. Those days are gone however, lost when the Dwarvendim were subjugated by the Kalboreans and forced into exile on the edges of the Sanhar Wastes. Now it is disappearing slowly under the plain as the verdant grasses cover it beneath a thick carpet of root and stem.

After a short time you come to a crossroads of sorts. To the west the road continues on for a short distance before it vanishes beneath the plains completely. From the north another road emerges and intersects

at the point where you now stand. At the junction of these two roads stands an old signpost, weather-beaten and faded. The signpost is so old that its writing has been reduced to illegibility, its message lost to years of neglect. You can only be sure that it indicates a town is situated just a short distance to the north.

With one eye on the storm you consider whether it might not be a good idea to make for the town. It should be easy to find shelter there until the weather passes.

If you believe it will be worth a slight diversion to find decent shelter, turn to section 276. If you would much rather continue on westwards turn to section 308.

313

This could just as likely be a trap, or an ambush set by bandits. Deciding to err on the side of caution you disregard the somewhat convincing cries for help and ride on. Pallenten seems particularly eager to leave the vicinity and you console yourself that this is proof you made the right choice.

As you ride westwards you notice the country gradually changing. The open grasslands are now being punctuated by large outcrops of boulders, the soft earth of the plains becoming harder and more stony. Very soon the lush cover of grass begins to thin and in patches the vegetation grows drier and more hardy. For some time you ride, the vast form of the mountain breaking up the west horizon. Slowly you can see it inching closer as you cover the distance that still remains between yourself and the Devkraager Tor.

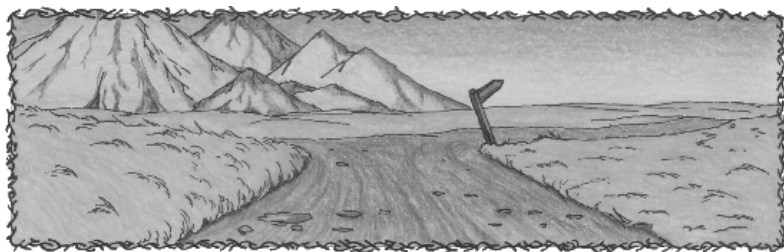
With the plains spread out before you Pallenten gallops onwards, your thoughts focused on the journey ahead, but the rhythmic pounding of the great horse's hooves on the harder earth cause those thoughts to wander. Before you now run memories of times past, of your first year as a novice at the Temple of the Suns and all the hardships that have been yours to bear since the temple's destruction. The memories are not altogether harsh but they serve to harden your resolve, to revive your distaste of the Kalboreans and their subjugation of your people. For a moment you feel anger building within you, but only for a moment.

In that instant your thoughts are jarred back to the here and now. Pallenten has pulled up abruptly on the crest of a rise and stands

seemingly unwilling to move forward. At first you look at the horse's hooves in case she has somehow injured herself. You can see nothing but when you look up you see why she has halted. Ahead of you, some two hundred metres from the rise stands a large fortified village, completely surrounded by a high wall and an extensive series of earthen defences. It is as silent as a graveyard and just as foreboding.

Sweat drains from your brow as you realise you have unwittingly stumbled onto the site of one of the greatest legends of Kalborea. You have come face to face with Kal Murda.

Turn to section 263.



314

The cold chill of morning bites deeply into your clothing, numbing your fingers and toes and stiffening your muscles. For a moment you lie in your travel cloak, thinking about how many times you have awoken to the discomfort of the cold and the hard ground of such a place.

Pushing yourself upright you notice Pallenten is no longer by your side. Luckily you can see her through the open door grazing outside, she seems happy to munch away at the dew-sodden grass, slowly cleaning up some long patches that have grown up against the walls of the cabin.

You are eager to get on your way so a small cold meal is all you put together for breakfast. You will need to break camp quickly if you are to make best use of the day. After repacking your equipment and burying the remains of your meal you call Pallenten to your side. In the cold of the early morning her breath streams from her nostrils in long plumes of vapour. You smile as you think that this is as close as you hope you will come to seeing anything that breathes smoke from its nose.

With your pack secure on your shoulders you mount Pallenten and make your way towards the south-west and the awaiting foothills.

Due to the cold night and your restless sleep you can only restore three endurance points to your endurance level if needed. When you have adjusted your character sheet turn to section 343.

315

The direct way to the Devkraager Tor is a straight line to the south-west, but your knowledge of this part of Northern Kalborea tells you that if you divert south, and follow a path around the southern boundaries of the Faeron Marshes, you will have more chance of making the journey undetected. From the edges of the marshes it is but a short distance westwards to the Krodestaag Mountains and the Devkraager Tor. These are wild, inhospitable lands, inhabited by few men and dangerous to those who do not know them well. You have spent considerable time in these parts and the marshes hold no mysteries for you. With luck you can make the entire remainder of the journey without meeting anyone or becoming involved in any conflict.

Turning Pallenten to the south you consider the way ahead and what you hope will be a lonely road to Stoneholme. Little do you realise how the world has changed since you last came this way.

Do you want to stop for a meal and a rest before continuing on? If you believe this will be a good idea turn to section 335. If you would like to get on your way immediately turn to section 274.

316

You can't go back, it is simply too far to go, too much time wasted. Without hesitation you charge into the depths of the forest that border the quarry and push your way northwards. There is a chance that you will cross another path leading to the west, and perhaps have better luck at finding a way to Stoneholme.

The forest proves to be a deep, gloomy world of hidden dangers and furtive shadows. Most of the trees are just starting to lose their leaves, the cool of the day a reminder that the snows of winter are only weeks away. The undergrowth however, is thick and uncompromisingly difficult to negotiate. It takes considerable effort to make any

headway and more than once you are forced to draw your sword and hack a path through the clinging greenery.

Your efforts are rewarded though. One hour of hard effort sees you break out onto another trail. It heads roughly to the west and will be a lot easier than trudging through the forest. Turning to follow the path you can see the mountains ahead, there is a good chance that this trail will afford you better luck. After settling your pack securely on your shoulders you continue westwards.

Turn to section 353.

317

The storm is now an impenetrable wall of black, no more than five minutes from where you stand. The old cattle shed is as good a shelter as you will find in these parts so you quickly dismount from Pallenten and carefully lead her into the building. The shed is divided into two areas, one a cattle pen, the other a room for the accommodation of a cowherd. It is not big but it sits under what appears to be the strongest part of the roof. Here you will wait out the storm.

With Pallenten by your side you watch the approach of the weather front. Skidding low over the flat terrain the great mass of moisture-laden cloud rushes towards you. So deep is its gloom that you cannot tell where the cloud ends and the ground begins, all you can do is wait for it to hit. You do not have to wait long.

Standing there in the old cowshed you feel the walls shudder as the first squall line hits, ferocious gale-force winds slam into the exposed shed, its timbers groaning under the stress. Hard on the heels of the wind comes the first rain followed by an icy blast of sleet and then hail. Pallenten shifts about beside you, anxiety evident even for the great horse. Under the power of the storm the shed grinds and moans, the rattling hammer of the hail rising to a deafening crescendo. Just when you think the storm has reached its peak, one arcing flash then a barrage of lightning blasts tear the sky. The storm is overhead and the lightning is followed instantly by thunder claps so loud that your teeth vibrate with each booming roll.

Unable to move from where you have tethered Pallenten you wait for the maelstrom to pass. Although the storm is an immense vortex of noise and power, it is the rain that causes you the greatest discomfort. With a solid roof overhead you are spared the volleys of hail and sleet that hammer at the ground. The wind ensures that you cannot escape

the rain. Swept along by gale force winds, the rain and sleet smashes up against the walls of the cow shed, turning instantly into a fine, icily cold mist that finds its way through the many cracks and holes of the shelter. Within minutes you are soaked to the bone, standing shivering in the cold. In the end you must content yourself with watching the power of the storm play itself out.

You can see it all through a small window in the southern wall of the cowherd's room. Lightning and thunder, the flurries of rain and hail, it makes a hypnotising display that keeps you enthralled for some time. One particularly large arc of lightning illuminates the whole area surrounding the shed. As it dies you see something black and still lying in the grass about twenty metres from the entrance to your shelter. Thinking you might have been seeing things you wipe your eyes and forehead and look again. In the gloom of the storm you can see nothing, and the next flash of light shows nothing except the grasses of the plain. It could just have been your imagination. Perhaps a trick of the eye?

The storm lasts for an hour. As it starts to taper off you can see the clouds beginning to lift as it makes way slowly to the south. Within fifteen minutes you can see patches of blue returning to the sky and a distinct lessening in the wind. The storm has moved on and so must you. Pulling Pallenten out into the cool air, you give her a rub down and consider what lies to the west. The grasslands are covered in large pools of water, most of which will quickly dissipate into the ground or flow off into the marshes. You should be able to travel without any trouble. After remounting Pallenten you turn her westwards and continue on your journey.

Turn to section 291.

318

As you approach the wagon you see immediately that it is the remains of a brutal combat. Two bullocks, still in their tethers, lie dead at the front. Great gaping wounds on their backs and heads testament to the powerful strokes that felled them. All about the smashed wagon is the torn and broken remains of what must have been the property of a cloth or household goods merchant. Of the merchant there is no sign.

Carefully checking your surroundings before you dismount you have a closer look at the wagon and its shredded contents. You can

find no clue as to why this merchant should be here, so far from the normal trade centres and alone. Moving around the smashed remains of the wagon you find a wheel, torn from its bearings and laying on the ground. Sticking up from one of its wooden spokes there is a dagger, covered in blood but finely made and razor sharp.

If you wish you may take this dagger. If you do record it on your character sheet. A further look about the wagon turns up nothing of any further interest so you remount Pallenten and move on. Turn to section 332.

319

In the night's bitter cold you could do with a warming fire. There is plenty of dried wood within the homestead and it does not take long to get a small fire going. Once the flames have started to warm the confines of the homestead you get Pallenten settled and make yourself a hot meal. (Deduct one ration from your character sheet.) Outside the wind has started to build again in strength. Settling down next to Pallenten you watch the fire and listen to the howl of the wind as it buffets the plains outside. Here, inside your stone shelter you sit in the comfort of your fire's warmth and think about your quest and the trials of the day. In the main your thoughts lie with the Kalboreans and the objective of this quest.

Your captors at Maenum have proven that they know a considerable amount about the history of the Dwarvendim, and the circumstances that led to the loss of the Tellandra. It was equally plain that they do not have a good understanding of the real nature of EarthMagic nor the true power of the pillar of stonewood. The Kalboreans certainly have sent you on this journey, and they have ensured you complete it by the use of this metal collar that rubs uncomfortably at your neck. But what they do not realise is that the act of fixing the Tellandra will forever take it out of their grasp.

Your early training at the Temple of the Suns, and the echo's of more than one learned voice, have told you that the magic the Kalboreans wield with the Tellandra is only a pale reflection of its true power. This power is something they have never experienced, and because of this will be wholly unprepared for its restoration.

Since the demise of the ancients only the Dwarvendim have attempted to test the limits of the powers of EarthMagic. Having done so they have respected it enough never to do it again, the

consequences of the Tellandra's full power are simply too overwhelming to control. With the Tellandra restored the Kalborean's hold on it will falter, then the Dwarvendim LoreMasters will be in a position to take back their mastery of it.

It is true that the Kalboreans sent you on this quest, but you resolve to complete it because you know what it will mean to your people, and to their chances of shrugging off their servitude.

Of course, there is the small matter of what the Kalboreans will do to you once they realise that the Tellandra has been restored, and that their control of it has ceased. But then you've never been one of their favourite thieves anyway, and you feel sure that no matter what happens you will be little appreciated.



:sharyah; tre; u dien cem iphar esh' dehr
gael'qirion es ahn feo'gaal:

The crackling of the fire brings you back from your musings and you feel the heavy hand of fatigue grab you tightly. For a short while you listen to the wind as it howls through the many cracks in the old stone walls, but then your eyes close and you fall into a dreamless sleep.

In the chill of the early morning you awaken, the cold has found its way into your very bones and it brings a numbing stiffness that takes a moment to loosen. Sitting up you look about the homestead. The fire is nothing but a pile of glowing ashes, the living area as sparse and neglected as when you went to sleep. Something is not right though. Clearing your sleep-fogged head you focus upon your surroundings and then you realise Pallenten is missing. Jumping to your feet, your heart pounding in your chest, you search the other smaller rooms at the back of the homestead and find nothing. Running outside you scan the plains but cannot see her. Calling her name brings no response, however a second call is answered with a whinny from somewhere out behind the homestead. Relief rushes through you, Pallenten is grazing on a patch of lush grasses behind the building's northern walls. Leaving her there for the moment you return to the homestead and stoke the fire back to life. Before you leave you will have a hot meal. It may be the last you have for a while, so you take the time to make it a good one.

(Withdraw a further meal from your pack and record its use on

your character sheet. The comfortable rest and hot meal will restore seven points to your endurance level if needed.)

After eating you repack your equipment and call Pallenten to the front of the homestead. With the weather clearing you remount your horse, and start on what will be the last leg of your journey to Stoneholme.

Turn to section 311.

320

The cabin is as sturdily built as you remember it, even though it shows all the signs of years of serious neglect. It is a larger building than most that are found in this part of the world, and you have been told that in better times the cabin had served as the summer hunting residence of a Kalborean noble. These days it is nothing more than a convenient shelter for those few travellers who know of its existence. Made completely of stone and roofed in slate it will make a good campsite for the night. Cautiously you peer in through the open doorway and see that little has changed since your last visit. One half of the structure stands as a large, one-roomed living area, the other half lies segregated to the rear as a stable. As you remember it that part of the building runs as a line of stalls and a number of tack and work rooms. Years of harsh weather and harsher use have worn its edges, but it appears as solid as ever.

For safety reasons you do not camp in the main living room, there are simply too many ways that anyone wishing you harm can enter unnoticed. Instead you make your way through to the main stable and into a small area at the back of the cabin that once was used as a tack room. Here there is one door and no windows. With night now upon you, you lead Pallenten into the tack room and close the door behind you. A large piece of timber provides a good way to jam the door shut and with Pallenten at your side you get settled for the night. Even though you could very easily fall asleep from the fatigue of the day you will have to think about an evening meal first.

Do you wish to light a fire? If you do turn to section 300. If you would rather not have a fire turn to section 338.



321

Mounting Pallenten you head off northwards in pursuit of the band of creatures. The fact they appear to be loaded down with something heavy will slow them considerably. Your hope is that you will at least be able to get a glimpse of who these prints belong to. Such information will be very useful as you progress on your journey. Forewarned is, as the ancients have written, forearmed.

To the north the horizon has become an ominous wall of cloud and rain. Punctuated by bright flashes of lightning, the distant rumble of thunder puts the storm probably an hour from your position. If you are to find the Hordim you will need to do it quickly. Following the prints is an easy task though, the heavily shod creatures leave deep impressions in the soft earth of the bank. Carefully you follow the course of the stream and as you do so find hard evidence that the object they are dragging is definitely human. A clear impression of a hand in the mud confirms this as you track the group.

For a moment you bring Pallenten to a halt and consider your need to continue. Even though these Hordim are obviously up to no good, the more you travel to the north the greater the doubt grows that following these prints is a good idea. The stream has veered to the north-east and you are now travelling away from Stoneholme. Regardless of the fate of their captive you know that if you do not find the creatures within the next ten minutes you will have to turn back.

If you have the skill of Huntmastery turn to section 465. Otherwise turn to section 264.

322

The first two attacks made by the Hresh are blows that you only barely survive. Slashing out wildly at the warrior you manage to keep him at a distance, but he is a powerful adversary and as he circles your position you know it will take all your skill to put him down. Looking around you try to find Pallenten but she is out of sight. Over the clamour of your own combat you can hear the sounds of another struggle going on somewhere over the crest of the hill and can only assume that Pallenten is putting up a fight of her own.

Suddenly from the long grass to the left of your position arise a dozen Kalborean Rangers. Instantly you realise that the second set of tracks must have been these Rangers, tracking the Hordim and awaiting the right moment to attack.

Powerful and well-trained, the Rangers of the Watch have kept the lands of Kalborea safe from the Horde for centuries. Usually they patrol the Rift Mountains to the north, guarding all the mountain passes that allow access from the Sanhar Wastes beyond. Lethal in combat, their only mission is the extermination of any Hordim that attempt to enter the lands of Men. The fact they are here shows the Horde has found a way through the mountains and must now be infiltrating south. To find yourself between the Rangers and their quarry is probably the most dangerous place to be in all the lands of Arborell.

Armed with long bows the Kalboreans do not hesitate. As one they let loose a barrage of metal-tipped arrows straight into the now disorganised group of Hresh soldiery. You are caught in the middle of this group, and the Rangers seem unconcerned that you may be hit by one of these deadly missiles. Crouching low you try and flee the camp, the only safety lying beyond the crest of the hill and away from the Rangers' keen eyes. As you stumble through the melee you are hit heavily by one of the Hresh, who strikes out at you as you try to pass. Falling to the ground you struggle to raise yourself, but are then felled again by a second blow that takes all the strength from your legs. Lying there in the killing zone the now frantic Hresh fall about you, arrows whistling through the air, striking the ground at your feet and side. Trapped in the midst of the barrage there is no way you can avoid being hit and are mortally wounded, three arrows driving their way into you chest. Within the bloody melee you die, the victim of a Kalborean ambush. Perhaps in a latter life Providence will grant you better luck.

THE END

323

You will go back and find the other trails, surely one of those will provide you with a better way to the mountain. Thankfully the way down is far easier than the climb up, but you are frustrated by the wasted time and the effort it took to reach such a dead end. Still, there are other trails that you may follow, and you may be able to make up some time if you choose carefully.

Before long you find yourself back at the intersection of the trails.

Will you take the centre trail? If that is your choice, turn to section 293. If you believe the right trail will be a better way to go, turn to section 324.

324

The right trail veers off sharply to the north but it is just as likely a path to the mountains as any of the others. Moving forward at a run you find the trail initially heads due north, and then veers slowly around to the west. The further you travel towards the mountains the steeper the way becomes. The hills ahead rise in a series of ever higher steps that become more wooded with each new ascent. As you run the forest closes in and soon the path is nothing more than a narrow trail winding its way westwards between the massive trunks of Beech, Oak and the largest Pines you have ever seen.

Turn to section 346.



325

Without any thought you career down the right path. Immediately you hear your pursuers to the left drop out of hearing, but the forms to your right accelerate their pace and are getting closer with every step you take. Now as you run you can make out more than just the rustle and crash of running feet. With the sounds of your pursuers you can now hear the clinking of chain mail, and the breathless whispers of commands being given and orders being carried out. Although you can now only hear pursuit to the right, it sounds like there could be as many as thirty creatures after you.

The harder you run the more urgent becomes the pursuit. The trail is clear but the forest has changed, the trees sparser and there is far less undergrowth to hinder movement. You can only run for so long though, and a sudden turn in the path gives you no respite. Your luck has run out.

Ahead the trail ends at a small clearing and a shelf of rock that extends out over a sheer cliff face. There is nothing here but a 50 metre drop to the thick forest below. Somehow you have found yourself at a complete dead end. Turning at the edge of the cliff you wait for your pursuers. Standing there, sweating heavily from the heat of the chase you draw your sword and stand your ground. Slowly your pursuers emerge from the forest, first in two's and three's and then by the dozen. They are Morg and they are as mad as hell.

Do you have a dagger in your possession? If you do turn to section 352. If you do not, turn to section 347.

326

In the course of a few short minutes the black wall of cloud covers the sky, the horizon disappearing in a heavy mist of low cloud and rain. Then the downpour begins. First as rain, and then sleet and hail, the storm hammers away at the earth, flattening the grasslands and laying down great piles of half-frozen slush about the boulders. Huddled under the rocky shelf you are safe from the full power of the gale force winds that howl about the boulders, and the fist-sized pieces of hail that slam into the stones above. They cannot protect you from the rain though. Carried by the wind and spun into flurries of mist by the unmoving boulders, it finds its way into every part of your shelter, soaking you to the skin. Cold and miserable you can do nothing but wait as the storm rages about you. In the brilliant cacophony of lightning and thunder you crouch, thankful that you are not out in the storm, exposed to its full lethal power.

Turn to section 268.

327

With nowhere to go you stand and fight. It is a battle that taxes you to the edge of your endurance but in the end you prevail. The Morg prove to be skilful fighters, using their advantage of numbers they try and overpower you, but your sword is too quick, your reach too long to allow them to get within striking distance. After killing most of the hideous creatures the few that remain run into the surrounding forest and disappear into its gloomy depths.

With the Morgs' bodies lying scattered about the clearing you crouch for a moment, leaning against your sword and trembling from the exertion of the fight, hoping you do not encounter another group like that again. Only the fact that you still had on your thick travel cloak saved you from some serious wounds, you do not want to imagine what might have happened if the Morg had managed to overwhelm you.

Even now you cannot rest. The battle may be done but the journey is not yet complete. Raising yourself to your feet, you collect your scattered equipment and head directly into the forest. The Morg may be abroad, however, you have the feeling that any of them that survived the fight will keep clear for the moment. Through the trees and canopy of the forest you can now clearly see the Devkraager Tor. It is near, only the high alpine forest stands between you and your goal.

Turn to section 348.

328

Huddled within the narrow confines of the stall you crouch against the cold stone wall and ready yourself. You do not have to wait long. As the wind rises to a gale and howls up and around the exposed building, a torrent of rain, then sleet, then hail smashes into the walls and roof of your shelter. Hammer blows of thunder assail your ears and great crashes of lightning tear across the sky. In waves the hail ebbs and rushes, piling drifts of dirty slush up against the stone walls. The stonework you are leaning against vibrates with the power of the storm, the lightning blinding as it arcs into the unprotected grassland. You are just glad that you found this shed when you did, and that you had not been caught out in this tempest.

For an hour you endure the violence of the storm, but eventually its power dissipates as it moves slowly on to the south. In the quiet that follows the storm's passing you rub down cold legs and stiff joints and prepare Pallenten for the journey ahead. There is but an hour until dusk and more distance you must make up before the night falls.

Turn to section 341.

329

As you ride further to the south you notice the increasing frequency of small creeks and areas of sodden ground. The Marshes can only be a short distance further on. As you crest a small rise in the otherwise flat vista of the grasslands you find what you are looking for. As expected you have struck the Marshes at their north-eastern corner. Before you now extends a huge, roughly rectangular area of marshlands, small lakes and an intricate web of creeks and streams. Although you have traversed these wetlands before there is no point in doing so now. It would take at least a week to find a safe way through and your own experience has shown that there are creatures in this quagmire that should be avoided. Instead you must go around it.

You can either follow its northern boundary by turning to section 357. Alternatively you can continue south and skirt the marshes that way. If this is your choice turn to section 278.

330

Dismounting from Pallenten you tether her to a nearby piece of exposed timber and begin a quick exploration of the whole toll bridge structure. It is much larger than you first realise, and must have been a very important landmark in its heyday. You give yourself just a half hour to have a look then you must be on your way.

Starting with the east tower you search each of its four levels, finding nothing but dust and thick matted curtains of spiderweb. You determine quickly however, that the entire structure is very sound. It has all the hallmarks of being Dwarvendim-made, every part of its construction wrought of carved stone, cleverly fitted together and reinforced. While you search the remainder of this tower you realise that the future could hold great possibilities for such an abandoned building. You have never had a home of your own and it is accepted throughout Arborell that possession is nine-tenths of ownership. With a few alterations this toll bridge could make an excellent base of operations for an enterprising Dwarvendim such as yourself. Reality does raise its ugly head though, you remind yourself that all you have to do is survive this quest first, and the collar at your neck is an ever present reminder of how unlikely that might be.

The western tower is very much the same as the first, however it has an observation deck on its uppermost level that is still accessible by a

spiral flight of stone stairs. Using your sword you cut through the curtains of clinging web that hang all along the spiral course of the stairway. With a few minutes to spare you slash your way up to the high deck. Looking out from its battlement you survey the horizon. You do not like what you see.

Turn to section 290.

331

What surprises you more than the fact that you have found signs of activity in this desolate place is the number of tracks you have found. Running from the north and crossing your path to the south-east you can make out two distinct sets of tracks, one following the other. They appear to be about six hours old and each group comprises roughly eight to ten individuals. There is no indication who they are, but they are all on foot.

If your curiosity is sufficiently aroused you can track them by turning to section 310. If you feel you have no business following them, turn to section 359.

332

Leaving the wagon behind you keep to the trail and head on towards the mountains. On both sides the forest has closed in and borders the path like a green wall. As you ride you see a number of further signs that the trail has been recently used. Bootprints and wagon marks cover the soft earth, there is a number of broken branches and patches of crushed foliage that indicates something very large has moved this way. Your interest in the prints turns to concern when you see that not all the prints are those of men. From what you can see two columns of soldiery have passed this way in the last 24 hours. The bootprints are too heavy and too rounded to be that of humans, and the careless way in which the passing bush has been hacked and broken tells you that these soldiers were in a hurry. A further set of prints, definitely those of men follow these strange prints to the west. The fact that you have no idea what is ahead of you gives you great cause for anxiety. Pallenten senses your apprehension and lengthens her gait. With the branches flicking past your head you ride onwards.

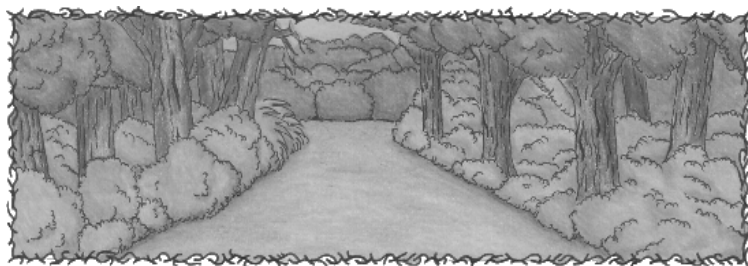
Turn to section 343.

333

Without thinking you race on down the left hand path, the sounds of pursuit close and menacing. To your right you can hear creatures crashing through the brush, harsh shouted commands echoing amongst the trees as your pursuers try to get ahead of you. In a state of fatigue you barrel down the path, eyes shifting from one side of the trail to the other, awaiting the inevitable attack that may lunge from the trees. Ahead the path divides again and soon you find yourself weaving through a labyrinth of old tracks, animal trails and finally into the forest proper. Within minutes you are completely lost in the woods, your only fixed point of reference the snow-capped summit of the Devkraager Tor.

On you charge, a sense of hopelessness beginning to overtake you as you realise you cannot run like this forever. Then, before you fully realise it, you are running through the trees, but there is nothing behind you. Whatever your pursuit was, it has been left scattered within the maze of trails to your rear. Coming to a halt you lean against a large tree, panting with the exertion of the chase, sweat streaming down your face and torso. In this state it will be a few minutes before you will be able to continue. Looking about you try and get your bearings. Apart from the summit of the mountain rising through the canopy of the trees ahead, you can see no other trail or indication of how to reach your goal. The mountain is closer though. The chase has left you much nearer but you can spare no further time for rest. You must move on.

Turn to section 348.



334

With one eye on the storm you ride, knowing full well that if it turns in your direction you will have to find shelter quickly. Storms in Northern Kalborea are not to be endured in the open, and it is a

foolhardy man indeed that underestimates their ferocity. Fuelled by bitingly cold winds that sweep down from the mountains to the north, they collide with warm air on the plains and develop into monster storms that can literally pound the life from an unprotected traveller. In many cases leaving no trace of them behind.

As you ride forward you scan the horizon for any sign of shelter ahead. The storm is still some way off so it is not urgent that you find cover just yet. It will be prudent to keep an eye out though. At any time the storm could move your way and it will help to be mindful of what cover may be available. Your search immediately turns up something that strikes your interest.

Off to the right, spanning the remains of a dry riverbed, stands the twin spires of an old toll bridge. Toll bridges were common in centuries past, part of a network of taxing points established to draw income from the transport of goods and people. In most cases a bridge would be built at a strategic point on a river and then a tower would be constructed at both ends of its arch. These towers held the toll collectors who would extract a fee from merchants carrying goods and other trade items between the main cities of the Four Nations. Over time some of the bridges had become the foundation for much larger towns such as Miller's Crossing. Others, like this abandoned structure, had died along with the trade routes that used to connect the Stone Kingdoms with Kalborea and the Faeyen. In this case even the river had dried up, and in the afternoon light it stands as a strangely innocuous structure on these plains, two thin fingers pointing up out of the surrounding flatlands.

Would you like to have a closer look at the toll bridge? If so, turn to section 360. If you would rather press on to the west, turn to section 312.

335

The gallop from the arms of the Kalboreans has left both you and Pallenten exhausted. For a short time you decide to stop and rest. Looking back at the wide expanse of the plains behind, you can see no sign of pursuit, Pallenten has easily left all your pursuers in her wake and they have appeared to have given up the chase.

Dismounting from Pallenten you let her graze on the plain as you take the time to stretch out in the long grass and rest. With your eyes

staring up into the dappled sky you see that the weather seems fairly clear, but there is a storm front building far off to the north. Hopefully that is where it will stay, you could do without the complication of a storm at this time. While you lay there you feel the fatigue of the day starting to take hold of your muscles. You decide to rest for a bit longer and then make yourself a meal.

As you are considering what you feel like eating you notice a movement to the south. You are deep in the long grass, but you are sure that you saw something moving quickly on your left flank. After lying in the grass it takes a moment to get to your feet, the stiffness in your joints causing you to rise slowly. Before you have time to react a dark shape rushes you, slamming into your half-standing form and throwing you back onto the soft earth. Winded, you jump to your feet and stand resolute against your attacker, labouring for breath as you wait. There is only the one assailant, he is short but powerfully built, dressed in the close fitting black uniform of a Kalborean Army Scout. Without hesitation the man attacks, a long sword in his hand and a scream of defiance on his lips.

You must fight this Army Scout, he has a combat rating of 15 and an endurance of 14. If you win turn to section 279. If not, then it is here on these lonely plains that your quest ends. Perhaps in another life you shall have better luck.

336

From a distance the boulder formation does not appear to be an effective shelter. You are reasonably sure that a number of deserted farmsteads lay just a short gallop further to the west. With Pallenten you will probably be able to reach at least one of them before the full force of the storm hits.

Urging Pallenten ever faster you make your way quickly forward, and soon you see on the edge of a darkening horizon the outline of a small supply hut that will make a good retreat from the storm. Unfortunately you never reach it. Almost as soon as you see the hut the storm overtakes you. Like a black wall it descends on the unprotected earth, first as a blast of icily cold wind, then as a torrent of rain and a hammering onslaught of sleet and hail. Trapped in the unrelenting power of the storm you try and make headway, hoping to reach the safety of the small hut, but you cannot see what is in front of

you and are caught by surprise when Pallenten pitches forward and throws you heavily to the ground.

Test your luck attribute. If you are successful turn to section 414. If you fail this test turn to section 349



337

It is impossible to move quietly through the mounds of dried leaf litter that covers the trail. If you do anything, make any move from your position, then whoever is out there will know exactly where you are. For a moment you hesitate, but you know that you cannot stand waiting for danger to find its way to you. When you move you will do it at a run, and hope your position on the trail will allow you to outdistance any possible pursuers.

With no other choice at hand you turn on your heel and break into a sprint, barrelling flat out up the trail to the west. Immediately you hear the sounds of pursuit. With all pretence of stealth gone your pursuers crash through the trees to your right and left. It sounds like there are dozens of them weaving through the forest, but they are far enough from the trail that you cannot clearly see who they are. Ahead the trail forks in two directions. One path leads to the left, the other veers off sharply to the right.

Which of these trails will you take? If you choose the left turn to section 333. If you choose the right turn to section 325.

338

For a moment you think about a fire but consider it too dangerous. In the cold and wet the welcome warmth of a fire may also draw to it more trouble than you would wish at this time. Settling down next to

Pallenten you try and get comfortable but sleep eludes you. The day's travel and the curious nature of your quest leaves you full of unanswered questions, questions that pose a number of practical problems. Not the least of these problems being how you are going to survive the next few days. With the wind beginning to build again you listen for a time as it blows through the nearby trees, and you think on how lucky you were to escape the dungeons of Maenum alive. The nature of your quest is your main concern though, and what the Kalboreans think you are going to achieve.

Outside the wind has started to build again in strength. Settling down next to Pallenten you listen to the howl of the wind as it buffets the trees outside. Here, inside the cold confines of your stone shelter you sit and think about your quest and the trials of the day. In the main your thoughts lie with the Kalboreans and the circumstances of your quest.

Your captors at Maenum proved that they knew a considerable amount about the history of the Dwarvendim, and the circumstances that led to the loss of the Tellandra. It was equally plain that they did not have a good understanding of the real nature of EarthMagic or the true power of the pillar of stonewood. In their desperation the Kalboreans sent you on this journey, and they have ensured its completion it by the use of the metal collar that now rubs uncomfortably at your neck. What they do not realise however, is that the act of fixing the Tellandra will forever take it from their grasp.

Your early training at the Temple of the Suns, and the echoes of more than one learned voice, have told you that the magic the Kalboreans wield with the Tellandra is only a pale reflection of its true power. This power is something they have never experienced, nor had to control, and this inexperience will leave them wholly unprepared for its restoration.

Since the demise of the ancients only the Dwarvendim have attempted to test the true limits of the powers of EarthMagic. Having done so they have respected it enough never to do it again, the consequences of the Tellandra's full potency simply too overwhelming to control. With the Tellandra restored the Kalborean's hold on it will falter as surely as attempting to tether a wild horse with twine. It will be then that the Dwarvendim LoreMasters will have their opportunity to take back their control of it.

It is true that the Kalboreans sent you on this quest, but as you listen to the whip and surge of the winds you resolve to complete it

because of what it will mean to your people, and to their chances of shrugging off their servitude. Of course, there is the small matter of what the Kalboreans will do to you once they realise that the Tellandra has been restored and that their control of it has ended. But then you've never been one of their favourite thieves anyway, and you feel sure that no matter what happens you will be little appreciated.

The whip and crack of tree branches outside brings you back from your musings and you feel the heavy hand of fatigue grab you squarely about the shoulders. For a short while you listen to the wind as it howls through the many breaks in the old stone walls, but then your eyes close and you fall into an uncomfortable and dreamless sleep.

Turn to section 314.

339

You feel no obligation to test any of the legends or rumours you have heard about this village so your decision is easy. It will take no longer to ride around the village than it will to pass through it, and Pallenten seems more willing to go around. Flicking her reins you begin what you believe should be a simple detour about the village and its crumbling outer defences.

Riding around the outer wall does prove straightforward. The high walls stand strong even in their abandonment but the chiselled stonework shows signs of long neglect. As you ride you find that the evidence still remains of the damage visited upon the walls in those last, desperate days before its breaching. Huge gouges in the stone mark the impacts of many heavy weapons, and around each of the gatehouses you pass you can see clearly the collapsed stonework and rusting metal that once held their massive iron gates in place. Into these fractures thick vines have found a purchase, sending waterfalls of green vegetation tumbling from their upper reaches.

To find a safe passage about the walls however, requires riding close to the high stonework. Some 20 metres from its face there spreads the remains of a series of concentric ditch defences, following the contour of the village and which harbour still many of the pitfalls and water traps that proved so effective against the Horde Armies. You would prefer not to fall victim to one of these so you hug the stone face of the battlements and make your way carefully to the western edge of the town.

When you reach the south-western corner of the fortifications you are hit squarely in the face by the strengthening wind. Looking to the north the dark, menacing cloud banks of the approaching storm race towards you; the distant rumble of thunder, accompanied by short, sharp flashes of lightning leaving no doubt as to where the tempest is headed. It can no longer be a question of whether the storm will overtake you, it is only a question of when.

Hastening Pallenten on it takes only a few minutes you reach the western gates of the settlement. Running from the ruined entrance gates you discover that a part of the old western road still exists, although it is nothing more than a patchwork of paving stones and clumps of grass. Turning onto the old road you place the ruins of the village behind you and set Pallenten again on her way to the south-west. Although you have one eye on the north, the sky in the west is still relatively clear, the mountains ahead growing ever larger and more defined as you gallop towards the foothills of the Devkraager Tor.

Quickly the old road disappears into the grasslands and soon you can find no further evidence that a road ever existed. Before you the plains spread as an unbroken vista of green though flattened now by the strong wind that heralds the approaching storm. You look to the north and see that the weather front is closing in. You must find shelter quickly.



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When you turn your gaze back to the west you are startled by the figure of a man, dressed completely in black, standing in the long grasses directly in your path. Desperately you pull back on Pallenten's reins trying to rein the great horse to a halt. The man does not wait for you to bring Pallenten under control. Running forward he raises his arms and waves madly, shouting curses at your horse to make it rear up. Pallenten cannot go forward so she veers to the right and stumbles awkwardly into a series of shallow ditches, pitching her forward and throwing you heavily to the ground. Rolling to your feet you search the surrounding grasses for your assailant. He stands before you, brandishing a wicked looking dagger and moving towards you like he has only murder on his mind.

Standing your ground you unsheathe your sword and point it at the Kalborean.

"Hold Friend," you say loudly. "There is no need for violence here. Let me pass freely and you need not feel the edge of my sword."

The Kalborean smiles but says nothing. Instead he pulls a scroll of parchment from his pocket and brandishes it towards you. You cannot read it but the thick red line that runs down one edge is all you need to see. This man is a Bounty Hunter and the paper he holds is a Detainment Order. You have no reason to believe that the order is specifically for you, more likely for any Dwarvendim found at large on the frontier, but it all means the same thing. In the curious parlance of the Union to "detain" someone requires only that you bring their body back for reward. From his demeanour you can see that he has no intention of bringing you in alive.

At the run the Bounty Hunter charges, his long dagger aimed squarely at your chest. Standing in front of Pallenten you ready yourself, and gesture for him to come and meet his fate.

This Kalborean Bounty Hunter will kill you if given the opportunity. With a combat value of 16 and an endurance of 13 he will provide you with a tough fight. If you defeat him turn to section 301. He carries no equipment or food that you can find, except for his dagger that you may take with you if you wish. (If you do, record this dagger on your character sheet). If however, the Bounty Hunter is too proficient a fighter, then it will be here on these wild grasslands that your quest will end. Be assured that in a latter life you may find better luck.

340

After twenty minutes you find your first clue to the origin of these tracks. It is the body of a Hresh Warrior, dead and obviously the victim of a violent confrontation. Four arrows protrude from his neck and chest, his body covered in cuts and bruises.

Quickly you search your surroundings, but there is nothing but the bootprints to show what has happened here. The body has been stripped of all its equipment and it appears to have been dumped. You can find no indication that a fight occurred here. For a moment you consider what you should do next.

Is the body enough evidence for you? If so turn to section 297. If you wish to follow the tracks further turn to section 355.

341

With the grasslands open before you, you secure your equipment and push Pallenten onwards. As the Faeron recedes at your right shoulder you turn the huge horse towards the rising summit of the Devkraager Tor and take the time to consider your next move. Of most concern is the approaching night. In the gathering dusk you will need to find a safe camp, preferably one that will provide an easy route to the foothills on the following morning. If your memory serves you correctly there is a farmstead roughly a half hour's ride ahead. It has proven a safe and secluded place to spend the night in the past, but you will need to find it before it gets too dark.

Swiftly you ride into the face of the setting suns, the red horizon sharply edged with the looming grey silhouettes of the Krodestaag mountains. Beneath Pallenten's thundering hooves the plains give way inexorably to areas of scattered woodland, stands of Beech and Deodar rising from soils much thicker and more fertile than the grasslands you have previously crossed. Within these woods you weave a crooked path, keeping a rough westerly course as you search for the farmstead. For some time all you discover is the desolate remains of other farms and fields, overgrown from nature's slow reclamation of these abandoned lands.

With the last glimmers of daylight fading in the west you reach a series of low, crumbling stone walls that once served to fence a collection of paddocks and grazing fields. At the centre of this tracery of old stone you find the farmstead you are looking for. Made almost completely of sandstone blocks, and roofed in heavy slate tiles, it is an imposing and solid structure, but one that has lain abandoned for many years. It will however, serve as a safe camp for the night and one that is certainly needed in this part of Kalborea.

Overhead the sky is beginning to cloud once more. The few stars that have awakened to the demise of the day are quickly obscured by a high overcast, one that brings upon its heels strong winds and a chilling air. Buffeted by this rising bluster you can feel in its cool touch the expectation of more rain to come. Carefully you search the horizon for an approaching storm but find most of your view obscured by the crowding trees. It is good, you think, that you have found such a sturdy shelter.

Leading Pallenten through the front courtyard, you turn her towards a wide porch area and then into the house proper. Within its stone walls you discover quickly that the farmhouse has been recently

used by other travellers, and the evidence of their occupancy remains as a large fire pit dug into the centre of the main living area. It has been roughly gouged into the dirt floor and edged with a shallow wall of stones. Within the ash-filled pit you can see charred Sempaca bones and a number of items of burnt clothing and scorched food leftovers. From these remains you can estimate that the pit was used only in the past few days.

Not willing to remain within the larger living area you find a small bedroom at the back of the house and lead Pallenten inside. The door is broken but you jam it shut, effectively locking you both in. The smaller room will be easier to warm and there is less chance that you will be noticed in the dark hours to come. With luck the night will pass without incident.

Outside the shadows of dusk close in, the rising strength of the northerly bluster whipping at the nearby trees. In the gloom of the evening you settle Pallenten and organise yourself for your stay.

Do you wish to light a fire here? If so turn to section 319. If you would rather not risk an open flame turn to section 354.

342

You are surprised to see any sign of activity on these wild plains, but you do not have the time to spend on investigating these tracks. The prints appear to move off to the south-east, one set of prints very different from the other and obviously following the first with a purpose. A quick look at the series of impressions shows there are probably eight to ten individuals in each group. The first group are definitely soldiers, their heavy boots leave deep patterns in the soft earth, the second group are shod more for hunting or scouting. All would have passed this way no more than half a day previously.

Stopping only long enough to ascertain these details you flick Pallenten's reins and ride on.

Turn to section 359.

343

As you ride further on towards the Devkraager Tor the trees become thicker and the ground more hilly. Before you the trail ascends, a series of rises ahead that build higher and higher towards

the base of the mountain proper. As the forest closes in about you the way forward becomes obscured, and you find that to advance you have to use the many animal and wagon trails that criss-cross the woodland. Although you have some knowledge of this region you have never journeyed this close to the mountain itself. Carefully you guide Pallenten through the trees, hopeful that some of these trails will lead ultimately to the base of the Devkraager Tor and Stoneholme.

After a good hour's ride you find yourself at an intersection of a number of different trails that come together within a small clearing in the trees. Before you lay the foothills of the Krodestaag mountains, and rising high into the clouds is the clear snow-capped outline of the Devkraager Tor. Although you attempt to urge her on Pallenten comes to a halt in the middle of the clearing and will go no further. You try to coax her on but she will not move. Dismounting, you stand before the great horse and look into her eyes. Immediately you sense that she is unsure of her next move. It is as if someone is whispering in her ear, commanding her to do something she does not wish to do. Stepping back from Pallenten you think for a moment as to what could be wrong, and then you remember the Tak Lovar's words.

Turn to section 269.

344

From a distance the Toll bridge did not appear as large as this. To properly explore such an imposing structure will take more time than you have. It will be better left for another time. Turning Pallenten to the left you skirt the tower and ride down and over the dry riverbed. Years of wind and rain have left its banks eroded and lightly sloped so it takes little effort to get across and up the other side.

For a moment you look back at the Toll bridge and make a decision that one day you shall return to this place and better determine its secrets.

Turn to section 312.



345

As you gaze northwards you can see the power building in the storm. For some time it has held off, great towers of cloud crowding together in a line, but now it moves in your direction. Even from this distance you can see arcs of lightning jumping between the clouds and hitting the unprotected earth below. After a time rolls of distant thunder rumble through the air, underlining the fact that this storm will do all in its power to harm the unprotected. Within the hour it will hit and you will have to find shelter before it does.

Finding shelter should not be difficult though. There are a number of abandoned buildings further to the west that will provide you with protection, however you must also make as much distance as possible before the storm arrives. Tempests such as these can be murderous, this you know from long experience, but they can also be relatively short. If you can stay beyond the storm for as long as possible it should not delay you unduly.

With one eye on the worsening weather you ride on, Pallenten a magic carpet skimming the grasslands and devouring the leagues before you effortlessly. With the great horse on a westerly course you find the marshes retreating to the north. Overhead the sky has darkened to gloom and a solid wall of rain and mist is advancing straight towards you. Looking around you see an abandoned cattle shed nestled between two old gnarled trees. It still has a roof and sturdy walls.

Do you wish to shelter here? If you do turn to section 317. If you would like to try and find something better further to the west turn to section 351.

346

The trail cuts through the forest like a narrow street alley, the undergrowth on both sides of the track an impenetrable wall of green. All your experience in the wilds tells you that this is the perfect place for an ambush but you cannot slow your advance. Time is not on your side. Carefully you scan the forest as you run, looking for any sign, any disturbance that may signify a possible attack.

If you possess either the skill of Huntmastery or Bushcraft turn to section 472. If you possess neither of these skills turn to section 501.

347

The Morg slowly make their way from the cover of the trees and form a rough semi-circle around your position. You stand on the edge of a cliff face with no way to escape except a sheer drop to the trees below. Here you will have to make a stand.

Drawing your sword you ready yourself for the fight to come, knowing you have little chance of survival. As you wait for the inevitable assault more and more of the small creatures emerge from the forest, deepening the line of combatants that edge slowly towards your narrowing area of movement.

From the wicked smiles and even crueller daggers of the Morg you know they will not let you leave this place alive. Your only way out is through them. Raising your sword above your head you shout at the diminutive creatures and attack. With some luck you may survive.

The Morg must be fought as one large group. They are small creatures and unlike other Hordim of this type you have seen are only lightly equipped. For the duration of this melee they have a combat rating of only 17, but due to their numbers have a combined endurance of 42. You will indeed be lucky to survive this combat. Many of the Morg will die, however they will wear you down. If you win this combat turn to section 327. If the Morg overwhelm you then it is here, on this cliff's edge that your quest ends. In a latter life you may find better luck.

348

As you run through the forest, dodging the trees and trying not to be tripped by a multitude of exposed roots that arch chaotically out of the forest floor, you notice for the first time that the forest is silent. No animals scatter as you run, no ground birds launch themselves into the air as you charge through the woods; it is deathly quiet and very unnerving. For all you know there are Hordim everywhere in these forests, so you slow your pace and try to move as quietly as possible. Only the slight noise of equipment moving in your pack can be heard as you head directly west towards the base of the Devkraager Tor.

The remainder of the morning passes slowly as you make your way over what seem to be an endless procession of hills and vales. It is just after midday that you encounter the solid barrier of a cliff face and find that you will not be able to go any further to the west. Stepping back you crane your neck upwards and survey this new barrier. The

cliffs extend above you for hundreds of metres, a sheer wall caused by the collapse of a large part of the mountain side into the forests below. What remains is a vertical rock wall that runs along the side of the mountain for about two hundred metres on either side of where you now stand. You are quite sure that Stoneholme lies to the south, hidden somewhere within the many gorges and fissures that fracture this ancient mountain at its base. This is the way you will go, but for the moment it is best that you rest.

With the sun overhead it seems a good time to have a meal. Lunch must be a simple affair though. You are too close to Stoneholme for fires so some dried meat and a few uncooked vegetables will have to suffice. As you eat you rest in the shade of an overhang of rock and take in the fine weather that has developed whilst you were in the forest. Taking all things into account you feel tired but thankful that this part of your journey is almost over. (If needed you may return six points to your endurance level after eating and taking a short break).

The early afternoon is spent negotiating the rocky base of the mountain. Its weathered face is cracked and broken, strewn with rockfalls and enormous flows of gravel that trickle noisily down from the high cliffs above. The forest has grown thickly in places up to the base of the Devkraager Tor, and you find you have to make a number of wide detours to get around falls of rubble that have brought down large areas of the surrounding timber.

In the end your persistence pays off. Some two hours into your circumnavigation of the mountain, and just as you are making a difficult detour around a huge tangle of fallen trees, you are confronted by the impassable obstacle of a stone platform some ten metres high. It extends from the side of the mountain and out into the surrounding trees. Although the stones are worn, and vines and other creeping plants have grown into its chiselled joins, you can see that it is Dwarvendim-made and exactly what you are looking for. Retreating back into the forest you make your way carefully about the platform's edge, then out into the trees to find a spot from which you can properly consider what you have discovered. Amongst a clump of small pines and low brush you find a hiding place from which you can survey the platform better.

Through the thick bushes you peer out at the massive entrance to the fortress of Stoneholme. Although showing the effects of long neglect the entrance remains awe-inspiring. Shaped as an archway carved directly into the face of the mountain, the images of two

immense Dwarvendim Warrior-Kings have been sculpted, arms raised as if they are holding the weight of the Devkraager Tor on their huge shoulders. Under these images the open cavern that is the entranceway is black, the light of day swallowed completely in the darkness of its interior. From the entrance a wide polished stone platform extends outwards for more than fifty metres, at each corner the intricately carved statue of a Dwarvendim warrior stands in full battle armour. A long flight of white marble stairs rise from the green grass of a large clearing at its base and reach upwards to the stone platform. In times past this marble staircase would have met a road leading to the east, but this has long since disappeared. Gleaming white balustrades of carved stone border the platform and stairs on all sides.

Leaning back against the sturdy trunk of a young pine you relax for a moment and take in the rough grandeur of the Imperial Entrance and the encroaching greenery of the forest that surrounds it. Within this dark treasure-house, somewhere deep within its cold, silent halls lies the Tellandra. It seems a pity to squander the remains of such a fine day by attempting to enter this great fortress but you know you must.

After your efforts in finding this entrance you decide it is a good time to again take a meal. Only the gods know when you may have another opportunity to feed yourself, so you take a ration from your pack and rest in the shade of the Pines as you eat. (Withdraw one ration from your pack and record this on your character sheet. The rest you take will restore all endurance points you may have lost in the course of your journey so far.) Upon finishing your meal and taking the time to rest, you pack away your meagre equipment and, by keeping to the edge of the clearing, make your way to the stone platform and the base of the marble stairs.

You must move inside quickly. Turn to section 197.

349

Momentarily stunned by the unexpected fall you fight to regain your footing. In the quagmire the earth has become you struggle to your feet and peer into the storm that lashes at you like an unrestrained monster. Unprotected and disoriented you stand before the full power of the tempest. About you it tears and rips at the

grasslands, showering debris and stinging hail upon you. Caught without cover the icy rain hammers at your body, knocking you to the ground as forking blasts of lightning light the sky.

In the actinic glare of the storm you recover your senses and begin a quick search of your surroundings. Pallenten is not with you. Somehow the great horse has been lost to you in the fury of the storm, and it is a grievous loss. Subduing a moment of panic you call out to her but the tempest takes your cries and carries them away upon the howling winds.

Staggering back to your feet you are assailed by a tremendous roll of thunder, one that splits the sky and sends tremors running through the ground beneath you. But as you try and keep your footing you notice that the tremoring is more than just the echoes of the storm's fury. Too late you realise that you have been toppled into the remains of an old, silted river bed. Before you have the opportunity to clamber up its eroded bank you are hit by a wall of rushing water that sweeps you away. Unable to remain afloat in this swirling mass of mud, plant life and water you struggle for your life, tightly bound equipment and fatigue conspiring to make any chance of survival impossible.

Within the dark, surging waters you fight for breath, but it is a battle you cannot win. Overwhelmed by the power of the surging waters you drown, your body lost to the storm. Here, in the raging surge of a flash flood your quest ends. It is now to a latter life that you must look for the wisdom to complete this adventure.

THE END

350

The horseman charges towards you, striking the sides of his mount's neck with its reins in a determined effort to obtain greater speed. Even before the man reaches for his sword you know that he means you no good, and if you are to escape his charge you will need to act quickly. The soldier is a Ranger of the Watch, he is neither a messenger nor a scout sent to find you for some unknown purpose. If you have come to his attention it is only because he means to kill you.

Turning Pallenten away from the Kalborean you consider what you should do. You could try and outrun him, but Pallenten has been at the gallop for some time and you do not know how fresh the Ranger's mount may be. It would be a mistake to try and outdistance this

attacker without knowing you have the reserves needed to maintain the chase.

Instead you decide on another strategy and turn Pallenten directly into the marshlands. There is a chance that within the maze of bogs, streams and dark meres you should be able to lose the Ranger. It seems the better option and before the soldier can get any closer you make for it at the gallop.

Turn to section 576.

351

If your memory serves you correctly there is a set of old farm buildings only a short distance further to the west, probably no more than ten minutes ride. One of these buildings will definitely provide better protection from the storm to come.

With the first large drops of rain slapping against your face you ride quickly towards the farm that you are sure lies directly ahead. In a slight depression in the almost flat landscape you find what you are looking for. It is a low, stone-built livestock shed, abandoned but still solid and weatherproof.

Over your right shoulder the storm approaches, an all consuming wall of grey mist and a deepening dark, that will soon assault the unprotected earth upon which you now stand. Pallenten needs no urging and follows you into the structure. The entryway is just large enough to allow passage for the horse, and you quickly find an empty stall within which you tether her and settle down to await the storm to come.

Turn to section 328.

352

You are trapped! About you the Morg form a semi-circular wall of bodies, arms gesticulating wildly and screaming unspeakable curses as they close in. As far as you can you back up to the cliff's edge, the look in the eyes of these tiny creatures as murderous as any you have ever seen. Tightening your grip on your sword you ready yourself for a battle you know you cannot win.

As you stand awaiting the inevitable combat you feel a strange,

painfully hot, sensation at your side. To your surprise the searing heat is coming directly from the dagger you acquired previously on your journey. For a moment you forget all about the dozens of Hordim and instead attempt to desperately pry the blade from your belt. Before this spectacle the Morg appear as confused as yourself, all their bloodlust evaporating as they watch you jump from side to side trying to wrest the smoking knife from its sheathe. With a deft flick of your fingers the red-hot dagger falls to the ground and buries itself up to the hilt in the solid stone of the cliff's edge. Breathing heavily you look closely at the dagger, feeling its heat and massaging your slightly burnt hand. About you the Morg move in, they too are staring intently at the strange weapon, but it is a curiosity that quickly turns to terror.

With a shudder that knocks all who are close to the ground, the knife begins to change, forming itself into a misshapen stone beast that towers over the diminutive Hordim. Quickly you find yourself standing amongst the Morg, watching as the elemental beast grows before you, drawing the stuff of its existence from the bare rock. It is a hideous churning mass of liquid stone that pulses and shudders as it changes. In a matter of seconds it stands independent of the rock it has formed from, and in that moment you realise that it only has violence in its nature.

With one wild swing of its arm it slices through the dumbfounded Morg, spinning shattered bodies and broken equipment into the bordering undergrowth. In a torrent of screams and shouting the Morg advance upon it, intent on bringing the creature down, but it is no ordinary beast. Here you have found a force of nature that will not be stopped, and there is no point staying around to find out what happens. Quickly you turn on your heel to run but too late you realise that you are the object of its rage. With one enormous swing of its arm it tries to crush you.

Test your agility and luck attributes. If you are successful with both these tests turn to section 496. If you fail either of these tests turn to section 434.

353

As the trail leads higher into the foothills the trees about the narrow path begin to thin out slightly. At this higher altitude the cool of the season has left most of the trees without their foliage. Great

banks of dried leaves have been gathered by the grip of the recent strong winds, and as you walk the breeze continues to blow them about in mesmerising swirls of brown and yellow. If you were a child, you muse, these banks would have been a great diversion, but now you find they cover the trail and it is necessary to plough through knee deep drifts of this dry humus to make any headway. If only this was your biggest problem you think, smiling at the idea.

A sharp noise to your right stops you in your tracks. Standing silently in the centre of the path you strain your ears in an attempt to determine what might have caused it. Almost immediately the noise repeats, and above the quiet rustle of the wind you recognise it for what it is. It is the sound of a foot crushing a dried twig.

Turn to section 337.

354

Although the warmth would be more than welcome you believe it far too risky to light a fire here. There are many dangers on these plains, and some will be attracted by any light that burns brightly in the dark. It is a risk you choose not to take.

In the uncomfortable chill of the evening you try and settle, but the events of the past days crowd your mind with questions and the possibility of answers to dangerous to contemplate. Mostly you think about your quest, the distance travelled and the hard road still to follow. You have no doubt that you will complete your quest, life has been hard for you and there have been many times when only your intelligence and strength have stood between life and death, however you have always won through. This quest will be no different.

The Kalboreans bother you though. This is probably an understatement, they have been the bane of the Dwarvendim for a century and there is nothing about them that commands either respect or loyalty. It is interesting though as to what they believe the restoration of the Tellandra will bring. There has been more than one ancient voice that has expressed the view that the Kalboreans do not fully understand the real power of the Tellandra. Since their pilfering of its power from the Dwarvendim they have known the EarthMagic only in its diminished form, a lesser power tortuously extracted from a pillar of stonewood that legend says was already broken by the Dragon Windhammer before the Kalboreans' defeat of the Stone

Kingdoms. When you do restore the pillar to its fullness they will be wholly unprepared for its true potency. Unable to control it, the EarthMagic will be lost and the Dwarvendim Loremasters will take it back as their own. When that happens the Dwarvendim will have the tool they need to throw off the shackles of oppression and reclaim the Kingdoms that are rightfully theirs.

You know the Kalboreans are unaware of this and you will complete their quest, but you do it for the good of your people, not your oppressors. The aftermath of the loss of the Tellandra will not sit well for you. Realising what has happened the LoreMages Guild will come after you, there is a hope though that they will be far too busy to worry about your sorry hide. You hope anyway.

Outside the wind picks up its strength and the rushing air howls like wolves at midnight through the cracks and holes of your shelter. Without the benefit of a warm fire you toss and turn for some time before the inevitable fatigue of the day takes hold and you fall into a restless sleep.

The next morning arrives without incident. Woken early by the sound of a wild boar snuffling about the other side of the shelter you stretch cold, numb limbs and prepare for another day. At first you do not see Pallenten but you can hear her grazing on the grasses just outside the entrance. With no time to spare you eat a quick, cold breakfast and then call Pallenten to your side. In the cold of the early morning you start out on this next leg of your journey.

Turn to section 311.

355

Now your curiosity is truly aroused. A flood of questions fill your thoughts. How could this Hordim have made it so far into Kalborea? Why is he here, dumped in the middle of nowhere and why are there no other signs of a fight? Only by following the tracks will you be able to find out.

Urging Pallenten forward you continue to track the footprints to the south-east. As you pursue the answers to your unsaid questions, the flat terrain of the plains gives way to an area of rolling hills. As soon as you crest the first of these hills you ride unexpectedly into the middle of a Hordim camp. Before you can respond a heavy fist punches you in the back with such force that you are thrown from

Pallenten and roll down into a depression on the other side of the rise. All the Hresh warriors jump to their feet, weapons ringing as they prepare for battle. One of these soldiers immediately rushes towards you as the rest of the camp's attention is turned suddenly towards the northern edge of the depression. Staggering to your feet you draw your own sword and stand your ground.

You are caught in the middle of a situation you will only survive by some divine miracle. The Hresh Warrior has a combat value of 17 and an endurance of 18. If you survive for two combat rounds, turn to section 322. If you do not then it will be here that your quest ends.

356

Some parts of the old cobbled roadway still remain and for the want of a better path you stick to it, galloping away from the toll bridge and hopefully still out of sight of the Kalborean patrol. Luckily the road keeps the bridge between yourself and the soldiers and you find no pursuit as you hurry on westwards.

After a short time you come to a cross-roads. You call it a cross-roads, but it is nothing more than an intersection, where the road ahead and a road from the north meet but then disappear into the grasses no more than a stone's throw from a weather-beaten signpost that leans crookedly at their junction. The signpost shows all the marks of long exposure to the harsh suns and even harsher weather of these plains. A closer look finds it is so faded it is hard to tell the directions it was made to deliver. It does seem to be indicating a town only a short distance to the north. With one eye on the approaching storm you consider whether it might not be worth a look.

Do you wish to go north and find shelter from the storm? If so turn to section 276. If you would rather continue on westwards, turn to section 308.



357

As you look out over the expanse of the marshes you consider which will be the best way to go. The way south around the wetlands is the best route if you wish to avoid any possible trouble. Previous travels in those parts has shown you that it is a wild, uninhabited place fraught with its own dangers, but for those who know the traps and difficulties it can be a safe passage. Following the northern boundary of the marshes however, is a more direct route. There is more chance of encountering Kalboreans, especially the bandit gangs that sometimes infest the abandoned settlements that can be found here. At this time of year is it unlikely though, the encroaching cold of winter tending to send them scurrying for the warmth and shelter of the larger towns and cities to the south. You decide that your best course of action is to follow the northern boundary.

Flicking Pallenten's reins you move off, following the contours of the wetlands and keeping to the more stable ground a stone's throw from the edge of the marshes. You find the soft earth no impediment for Pallenten and she moves through the sometimes treacherous terrain with ease.

With the Faeron Marshes passing quickly on your left shoulder you can find no sign of recent human activity. It is a lonely part of the world, devoid of the sounds you can usually hear as you travel. It is however, full of the remains of settlements, small villages and isolated homesteads, all testament to the attempts men have made to settle the edges of these wetlands. The ferocity of the weather, and the strange manner in which the marshes spread and recede have ensured the failure of every enterprising family that has tried to live here. Always the marshes would win, time was on its side.

With Pallenten set on her course you check your horizons. The storm you noticed before has built up dramatically, an ominous dark wall of towering cloud and rain. It is now moving your way.

Turn to section 334.

358

With the collar at your neck a constant reminder of your need for haste you leave the shattered wagon at the edge of the trail and ride on towards the Devkraager Tor. Only a quick look at the remains of the wagon is all you need to show that you should not stay long on these narrow paths. The dead bullocks laying at the head of the

wagon, butchered by some powerful foe, and the shredded cloth and clothing laying about its mangled wreck are enough to spur you on your way.

Luckily the soft earth deadens the sound of Pallenten's hooves as she thunders down the trail, it should not be long before you reach the foothills and the entrance to Stoneholme.

Suddenly there is a movement to the right of the trail. A huge, rough hand grabs at Pallenten's halter and wrenches the reins from your grasp. Simultaneously two equally huge shapes rush you from the left, barrelling into Pallenten's side and knocking her to the ground. With the horse dragged down you are pitched headlong into the brush at the side of the trail.

Turn to section 284.

359

Turning Pallenten to the south you continue on your journey. The tracks are an unwelcome sign, one that underlines your need to be careful. It would appear that this route to the Devkraager Tor may not be as lonely a path as you would have wished for.

Leaving the tracks behind Pallenten gallops on, the leagues disappearing beneath her hooves as you skirt the boundaries of the marshes. It is a process that requires care and a certain amount of local knowledge about the nature of the Faeron. Although the marshes are well defined, they harbour a multitude of dangers to the unwary. The edges of the wetland hold areas of loose earth, quagmire and curious patches of bubbling water that reek of festering mould. All these dangers must be avoided and it takes a practised eye to spot them before the unwary fall within their grasp. It is all the more difficult due to the haste with which you must travel, but on you speed, every minute important to the success of your quest.

By mid-afternoon you reach the southern edge of the wetlands and you turn Pallenten to the west. In the distance the Devkraager Tor looms ever larger, now growing ahead of you, it dominates the western horizon. For a short time you rest Pallenten and take the time to survey the four horizons. To the north a huge storm is brewing, gaining power as it moves slowly southwards towards you.

Turn to section 345.

360

The old toll bridge stands on the plain somehow out of place. In the wide expanse of the grasslands this reminder of times past is an anachronism, the remains of a period when men had tried to settle the edges of the marshes, and when this location had been an important part of the trade routes that once existed to the Stone Kingdoms. It picks at your curiosity until you decide that you must have a closer look.

Turning Pallenten towards the twin towers you find the remains of an old cobbled road somewhat submerged beneath the grasses that have overgrown it. As you get closer you discover the toll bridge is in remarkably good condition for its age. Both towers are still completely intact, the arch of the bridge itself made of solid stone and still spanning a dried-up watercourse beneath it.

Following the old cobbled road you are soon standing before the eastern entrance at the base of the east tower.

Do you still wish to enter? If so, turn to section 330. If you think it better to continue on westwards turn to section 344.

361

Looking down the south road you realise how long it has taken to detour around Baellum. Keeping out of sight has taken up far too much time, and the collar at your neck makes each second spent on this journey seem a second closer to an untimely end. For a moment you pull Pallenten to a halt and consider what would be your best move. The road to Miller's Crossing is the easiest route, but it takes you a good distance to the south before turning west. The Devkraager Tor and the smaller peaks of the Krodestaag Ranges sit on your horizon to the south-west, a silent unmoving signpost pointing directly to your objective. This way across country is harder, but the distance to travel is considerably less. With no further hesitation you turn Pallenten towards the mountains and leave the road. Although there are a few farms nestled close to the main south road, you avoid these and strike out instead for the wilderness beyond. Ahead lay a wide, open terrain of grassland, some small patches of forest, and the stark remains of many attempts at settlement of these lands.

Nudging Pallenten forward she breaks into a trot and then to a gallop. Directly ahead lay a number of low stone fences, the remains of a farm long past. These are no barrier to the great horse, she jumps

them easily and soon you are out in open country, the farmlands left behind and the Devkraager Tor looming ahead. You know in your heart that this is a better way to go. Out in the open you will be more exposed, but there is little chance that you will meet anyone on these plains. They are seldom travelled and those men that do tend to keep to themselves. Only the mighty Laneslem River will provide you with any real difficulty as you make your way to the south-west.

Turn to section 378.



362

With the bridge becoming more and more unstable you dismount quickly from Pallenten and carefully lead her for the remainder of the crossing. Although it was not evident from the bank, the centre of the bridge is slowly being undermined by the raging rapids below. With the pylons loose in their foundations, the bridge sways precariously from side to side, the combined weight of you and your horse enough to set it in motion. Above the roar of the rapids you can hear Pallenten snorting her anxiety as she makes each hoof fall against the unstable planking. Below, the water can be seen clearly through the ever widening gaps in the bridge. It looks icy cold and capable of pounding any unfortunate soul who might fall into oblivion. Drowning in such an uninviting torrent is the last way you ever thought you would die. You resolve that today will not be the day for such an untimely end.

Holding tightly to Pallenten's reins you guide her from timber to timber, and it is only with the greatest care that you are able to finally make it across. With yourself and your horse back on firm ground you take a moment to consider your lucky escape. The bridge's uprights sit in their seatings loose and unstable, the pressure of the fast flowing river slowly taking advantage of their growing weakness. It will not be long before the power of the river will topple the bridge completely.

Although you can do nothing about the other bank you find a piece of discarded timber and scratch a quick warning to any soul travelling this way to avoid the bridge. It will surely not survive another crossing. With the timber jammed firmly into the soft ground before the entrance to the bridge you remount Pallenten and continue on your way to the Devkraager Tor.

With Pallenten again set on her course you look forward to the far horizon and the imposing bulk of the great mountain ahead. Behind you, masked by the rumble and crash of the rapids, you are unaware of the destruction of the bridge taking place as you ride away. With the river digging ever deeper into its foundations the bridge cannot hold. Its centre pylons gone, its supporting timbers broken, it collapses in a flurry of water, smashed wood and gouged river sand. In the tumult of the bridge's destruction all that remains is your hastily written warning, one that will no longer be needed.

Turn to section 392.

363

Your curiosity has been aroused and it is a call you do not normally resist. You know something of the history of these mines, and it is a fact of that history that none of these old delvings are worked. To some extent they have become a part of the mythology of the frontier, a mainstay of the fireside stories told by travellers as they pass the long nights of winter, and it is the coming chill that makes the billowing smoke all the more interesting. The encroaching cold of winter, and the powerful weather generated in the high mountains to the north, ensures that the wild areas of northern Kalborea are traversed only by those who believe they are experienced enough, or foolhardy enough, to survive it. You are intrigued as to who might have taken shelter here, and for a number of reasons the smoke rising from this old mine strikes you as something to investigate.

Leaving Pallenten to graze at the entrance, you draw your sword and carefully make your way inside. Beyond the opening the mine quickly angles downwards, opening out into a small cavern that runs for about 30 metres before breaking into three separate tunnels. Each of these tunnels has a thin pall of smoke running along its roof, and a deepening blackness that extends far into the gloom beyond. The tunnels themselves are nothing more than mine shafts, buttressed with wood siding and thick support timbers. Footprints and a number of drag marks cover each of the tunnel entrances. Here is definite

proof that these tunnels are being used by someone, or something. Although smoke rises from each of the tunnels ahead there is no clear indication which will lead to the source.

Which tunnel will you take? If you wish to take the left, turn to section 371. If you believe the right tunnel more likely turn to section 404. To take the centre tunnel, turn to section 390. If it all appears too dangerous for your liking and you would rather return to Pallenten and continue on your way, turn to section 400.

364

After the exertions of your journey you bring Pallenten to a halt and let her drink from the stream. Dismounting you also take a few handfuls of the clear liquid and give your face a wash over. The water is as good as it looks, cool and fresh.

Standing next to Pallenten as she muzzles the surface of the water, you survey the banks of the watercourse and watch the undulating grasses beyond for any hint of danger. It does not seem necessary though. Apart from a gathering wind that blows from the north you can see no movement on the surrounding plain, nor any sign of recent activity. It appears that you are completely alone.

As Pallenten drinks you lay back against the soft bank and relax. The ride has been tiring, the way ahead uncertain, but a moment to rest will not hurt. Looking to the sky you see nothing except a vault of blue in the south and the first wisps of high cloud above signalling the onset of approaching weather. As you lay there watching the sky, a thin veil of smoke floats across your field of vision. Sitting up you follow the smoke as it moves south-east. The wind has veered more from the west now, and you follow a number of similar trails of smoke back to their source. It appears to be only a short distance further in that direction, somewhere on the other side of the stream, and no more than a couple of hundred metres away.

Do you want to go and have a quick look to determine the source of this smoke? It may be no more than an untended campfire, or the smouldering remains of a lightning strike, but an uncontrolled fire on these plains can be a killer, something any traveller should try and prevent if possible. If you wish to have a look turn to section 405. If you would rather continue southwards instead, turn to section 391.

365

With the storm bearing down it does not take long for you to decide it prudent to have a look at the old silo. If luck is with you it should provide the cover you need. Turning Pallenten towards the low, sturdy-looking building you make your way along an overgrown path that leads into the farmyard. As you reach the silo you feel the sharp sting of an icy rain upon the back of your neck. The raindrops are so cold they send a shiver along your spine.

The silo does not look as promising up close as you might have hoped. From a distance it appeared relatively intact, but a closer inspection shows the far side of the structure to be partially collapsed. There is not enough shelter here to protect you effectively from the power of the storm. Luck is still with you though. A small hut sits squarely against the side of the silo, out of view until now, and probably once a toolshed or some type of tack room. It does however, have both a roof and four solid walls.

The building is in a ramshackle condition but it has obviously survived many years of bad weather. If Providence is with you it will survive this storm as well. In the distance you can hear the steady rumble of thunder and the murmur of the approaching rain. As you stand near the hut's doorway the ground beneath your feet begins to vibrate, the light of day vanishing into a gloom that quickly engulfs all four horizons. Grabbing Pallenten's reins you size up whether she will fit through the door. As you do so a number of tiles from the silo slide from its roof and fall into the ruins of its interior. The crash of the masonry is followed by an enormous clap of thunder that rattles your surroundings and vibrates again through the ground you stand upon.

All your options are now disappearing as quickly as the light of day above, and there is no time to delay. Pulling Pallenten into the open doorway you find a corner that is not exposed to any of the windows, and get ready for what is to come. With yourself and your horse safely ensconced within the shed you await the coming tempest.

Turn to section 384.

366

Still winded by the fall you watch the Hresh charge at you, your head pounding from a blow sustained when you hit the ground. Your immediate danger forces you to shake off your disorientation, but it takes a moment to collect your thoughts and prepare yourself for the

battle. Luckily you need only a moment. The combat is a bloody contest of crashing metal and the sickening bite of sword against flesh, however it is one you cannot afford to lose. The creatures wield their scimitars with great skill but when it ends the Hresh lay dead, sprawled and silent in the long grass. Looking about you see Pallenten returning to your position, she is sweating heavily but looks no worse for wear. Without her help the Hresh would have been upon you before you had a chance to recover from the fall. You thank Providence once again that, if nothing else, the Kalboreans had the foresight to equip you with such a steed.

After a quick look over the battleground you remount Pallenten and leave the area. With Hordim in the vicinity you can be assured that more will be lurking close by. It will be prudent to put distance between yourself and the Hresh.

With the Hordim left behind you gallop on for the west road and take stock of your position. If your estimations are correct beyond this plain you will find both the highway and Melem's Fork. The village will be a good place to find water for Pallenten, and there is an inn there that will provide a decent meal for yourself. If you do not reach the settlement until evening you should be able to find a bed for the night there as well.

As Pallenten gallops on you look about the grassland, searching for any further sign of the Hordim. It is an impossible task even from Pallenten's broad back, the plain extends for a great distance to the west and east and apart from yourself the whole expanse seems empty. To the north the storm that has been building most of the day has developed into a wall of black cloud, hung low with the heaviness of rain and exchanging huge bolts of lightning with the ground below. Even from this distance you can hear the vibrating rumble of thunder as the storm moves your way. Before this day is out you are going to have to find shelter.

An hour passes as you ride and the plain slowly turns again to areas of scattered forest. Here you find signs of tree-felling and large herds of domesticated Sempaca grazing within cleared ground. If your bearings are right the village of Melem's Fork should not be too far ahead.

Breaking from the trees you find the village, as you had hoped, directly ahead. It stands out from the verdant green of the landscape as a collection of white walled buildings, thatched with dried grass and surrounded by Sempaca farms and rows of neatly ploughed

fields. Something is desperately wrong though. You catch your breath as you realise Melem's Fork is on fire. Bringing Pallenten to a halt you survey what lies ahead. The village is burning fiercely, villagers are running about trying to put out the flames and a number of bodies lie prostrate upon the main road. Smoke billows upwards, almost disguising the orderly retreat of a large group of Hordim that are making off to the south-west.

Do you wish to help the villagers fend off the Hordim? If this is your choice turn to section 116. If you would rather avoid any confrontation with the Hordim turn to section 258.

367

The Faeyen gestures as if he knows you and has something important to say. You have never seen him before but he has such a look of urgency on his face that it impels you to see what he wants. The man is dressed in the manner favoured by the Faeyen, all flowing robes and bright colour, but the concern he is expressing draws you to him. When you reach his position he says nothing but grabs you by the arm and pulls you into a side alley. Immediately you confront his attempt at secrecy.

"Hold it right there Merchant, I am a man of honour going about lawful business. What is it you want of me?"

The Faeyen looks out into the crowded market and then turns to look directly into your eyes. "I am sorry for the affront my friend, but I must speak with you quickly about your position here in this town."

He again looks to the square then continues on, his manner even more furtive.

"You are truly in great danger my friend. The battle to the north has been reported here only as rumour and half-truth. Nothing has been heard from the town authority and most of the Crossing's residents are getting very anxious. They see their hard-won prosperity being taken from them by the coming war and they wish to blame the Dwarvendim for not keeping the Horde at bay."

You look at the Merchant and consider his words. "How can they blame my people for something that has not yet occurred? As we speak my people are fighting and dying upon the ramparts of Maenum. Surely word has spread of the desperation of the battle being fought?"

The Merchant grabs you again by the arm, "Unfortunately nothing has been told of the battle. The Kalborean authorities are keeping all information to themselves and in this vacuum people are starting to create their own. The Dwarvendim are not here, and it is at their door that the townsfolk lay the blame for their concerns."

"You have been lucky my friend. Your horse and travel cloak have so far disguised your Dwarvendim background, but it is only a matter of time before someone will recognise you and attempt violence upon you."

For a moment you think on this. It is a common response for people to blame the dispossessed. Perhaps coming to Miller's Crossing was a mistake. There is one thing you need to clear up though.

"Tell me why you should care for my welfare Faeyen. These would be dangerous times for anyone seen helping one of my people."

The question brings a smile to the Merchant's face, "A fair question considering the times. I help because I covet the profit of trading with the Kalboreans far less than the loathing I feel for them. They are a crude and unsophisticated lot. Anyway, the Faeyen and Dwarvendim have a lot in common. We both have been suppressed by the Kalborean Union; we gave in before they destroyed us, you fell beneath their sword. In the end we both have suffered for it."

"All I can say now is get out of here as quickly as possible. Use that hood on your cloak to hide your features and make for the south gate. If anybody recognises you it will go very badly indeed."

With that the Merchant walks out into the square and disappears into the crowd. You are left to ponder your choices.

If you wish to take the merchant's advice turn to section 383. If you still wish to stop at the tavern first before leaving Miller's Crossing, turn to section 398.

368

From somewhere ahead you hear an argument in progress and the muffled sounds of a struggle. It is enough to compel you forward. Although there might little to be found here, it is information that you seek most. Whether it be news of the frontier, or rumour on the whereabouts of the many bandit gangs that roam the plains in the warmer months, it is information that is most useful to anyone crossing the frontier. It is your hope that whoever might reside within

these rough walls can provide it.

Following the dim lanterns you continue on down the tunnel, sword at the ready, eager to satisfy your curiosity and then return to the surface. The tunnel goes ever downwards, veering to the left and then again to the right as it searches out an ancient vein of metal ore.

Carefully you descend, following the disordered tunnel as it buries its way into the earth. Deeper and deeper you scramble, making your way quietly over a sloping floor of loose rock and discarded shoring timbers. After a hundred metres of long, dim tunnel you come to another sharp right hand turn and then bring yourself to a halt. At this turn the tunnel ends, opening into a large cavern beyond.

Quietly you wait in the shadows, carefully listening for any clues to the nature of the voices that have led you to this threshold. It seems that beyond the turn there is a fire burning, its flickering light illuminating the end of the tunnel with a bright reddish glare, and you can hear the sharp crackle of fat as it drips upon an open flame. The sounds of many voices can be heard beyond the bend and you know that this is also the source of the smoke. As you wait another argument erupts and in the heat of the dispute the voices become clear. To your dismay you recognise then that they are not human, they are instead Hordim and there are many of them. The information you seek cannot be found here.

If you would like to peer around the corner before retreating back up the passage, turn to section 376. If you now realise that it may not have been a good idea to come this far turn to section 402.

369

The old bridge is in worse condition than you remember and it is the only crossing point for some distance. With no other way across you have little choice but to attempt it. Dismounting from Pallenten you draw her forward carefully, checking the state of the bridge's supporting pylons and wooden planking as you go. Pallenten does not appear convinced that the footing is safe and you can hear her snorting in disapproval as you lead her forward. She follows though, the occasional grunt or snort a warning that she has felt the bridge sway under her weight. Luckily for both of you the bridge holds.

After a careful traversing of the old wooden structure you find yourself on the other bank of the river. Looking back at the bridge you

are not absolutely sure that it would have held your weight if you had ridden across. You are sure though that if you must cross this river again you will do it at Miller's Crossing. The massive arched stone bridge there will not afford you the same difficulty. Remounting Pallenten you turn her to the south and continue on your way.

Turn to section 392.

370

With one eye on the weather building in the north-west you urge Pallenten onwards, setting her course squarely for the Devkraager Tor and the legendary entrance to Stoneholme. The mountain itself hangs in the haze of the horizon to the south-west, still a great distance away but already growing to dominate the landscape. Truly it will be a wonder to behold when you are close enough to explore its fringes.

As you ride you continue to search the horizon ahead. It is as you expect for there is little in the way of habitation here, old farmsteads and the occasional gaping maw of a long abandoned mine are all you find as you pass swiftly over the lush grasses of the plain. The lack of human occupation has kept these lands wild and hard to survive. To look at the verdant growth of the plains, and the rich stands of forest that lay scattered across its wide reach, it is easy to see why the early settlers considered this the perfect place to build their homes and farmlands. It took only the passage of a few years to show that only the hardiest of men can extract a living from its soils.

The warmth and fine days of the summer months are a deceptive lure to those wishing to farm here. It is a hard truth of the frontier however, that the summers are not long enough, and the onset of winter brings with it a severity of weather that can be withstood for a year or two, but no longer. In the end only those farmers who could protect their livestock over the long cold months survived for any length of time, and even then only those who had access to all-weather roads could properly make a living. It spelt ruin for many families, the failures of the earlier settlers ensuring that few Kalboreans now remain. Their legacy has endured though, scattered about the plains and forests as crumbling buildings and stone fences, silent monuments to the many attempts made to make this frontier a home. Perhaps one day others will try again.

After an hour's hard ride you come to a small stream, almost hidden from view by a slightly raised embankment and a low hedge

that runs along both banks. The stream flows roughly west to east and is about two metres wide. The waters appear cool and clear.

Do you wish to stop for a moment and let Pallenten drink? If so turn to section 364. If you would rather push on and water Pallenten later, turn to section 381.

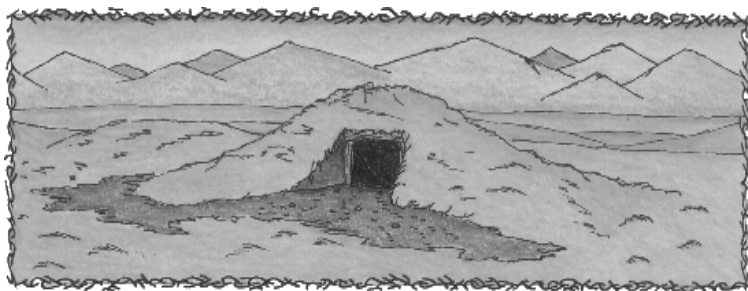
371

None of the shafts give any compelling reason as to why it should be the one to take, so you choose the left and make your way into its darkness without hesitation. As you descend, the tunnel begins to veer slightly to the right, a small amount of illumination being given by a series of evenly spaced lamps that rest within carved insets in the walls. After a short distance the wooden shoring on the walls disappears, replaced instead by the rough hewn tunnelling of the mine itself. Finding your way forward is not difficult, the small lamps are set within the same carved insets and there are enough of them to make for an easy, if rather gloomy, descent into the bowels of the mine.

For some minutes you continue on, checking each turn in the tunnel and carefully making no sound as you endeavour to find the source of the voices. It would appear that whoever they are must be some way ahead, the further you descend the thicker the smoke becomes, and the louder the noises of both conversation and movement. You cannot yet tell whether the voices are Human or Hordim.

Shortly you arrive at a junction of this tunnel and another that extends off to the right. From this right hand shaft the smoke is thinner, the shaft slanting upwards, probably returning to the surface and the fresher air of the plains.

If you wish to continue following the shaft downwards turn to section 368. If you have had more than enough of the old mine and would like to return to the surface turn to section 393.



372

Straight through town and out of the south gate seems the best option. The ever-growing crowds should provide you with the cover you need to get away, and there is a good chance that you can make the gates without coming to the further attention of the town's guardsmen.

Pushing your way through the struggling masses you keep your head down and try to look the part of a stooped cripple, leading your master's horse to some important destination. With your travel cloak's cowl pulled low over your head you should be able to get through Miller's Crossing within the half hour.

For a time your deception works, the turmoil of the afternoon markets and the stream of people and wagons entering from the south gate all work in your favour. Large wagons and open carts are surrounded on all sides by people, both buyers and sellers, eagerly making their way to the town square for the afternoon sales. Amongst this skirmish of humanity your bent, seemingly crippled form goes unnoticed and unchallenged. With luck on your side you are able to make your way out of the town square, and succeed in getting some distance along the south road before you are hailed by a single guardsman. He stands squarely in the middle of the thoroughfare and is gesturing directly at you.

Will you stop and see what the guard wants? If so turn to section 410. If you would rather bluff your way past the guard turn to section 401.

373

Before you do anything rash you wait to see what happens at the gate. The soldiers appear very systematic in their search of incoming travellers, both goods and clothing subjected to a quick scrutiny. What they are looking for is not readily apparent. The arrival of the excited guard from the centre of town changes all that. With the shouting of a single command the guards stop the flow of traffic through the gates and then begin the same careful search of everybody now leaving town. You cannot be sure whether they are looking for you for anything may have happened in Miller's Crossing that would have the soldiery on edge. It seems evident that any opportunity you had for a quick exit has ended though.

With nothing to lose you make your way to the gate, carefully

keeping yourself out of view of the guards. When you are only a matter of metres from the gates you throw yourself onto Pallenten's back and nudge her with your heels. In that instant she lunges forward, crashing through the remaining crowd near the gate and charging directly for the open archway.

Taken by surprise the soldiers stand dumbly by, watching you gallop for the exit. A few attempt to get in your way but they are pushed aside by Pallenten's bulk and are flung backwards into the cold stone of the archway. By the time you are beyond the gates a number of the guards have made it to their own horses, but with the lead you have it will be difficult for them to catch you.

Ahead the road forks in two directions. If you wish to head south towards Das Frontiere turn to section 193. If you would rather head west towards Melem's Fork turn to section 154.

374

On your ride as the remains of the morning disappear beneath Pallenten's pounding hooves. Across the plains she flies, inexhaustible in her stride, eager to have you to your destination and the completion of your quest. By midday you have covered half the distance between Baellum and the west road that connects Miller's Crossing with Melem's Fork, and the distant Faeyen Provinces beyond. If your path is correct you should cross the road somewhere between Melem's Fork and the ancient Ring of Stones. From there it will be due south to the Devkraager Tor and the more difficult task of finding the entrance to Stoneholme.

Lost in thought for a moment as you map out the remainder of your journey, you do not at first notice the unusual hump in the grasses ahead, nor the wisp of smoke that floats upwards from it, twisting and curling as it is caught in the northerly winds. A second belch of black vapour is enough to make you pause and look closer.

The "hump" is in fact the entrance to a long deserted mine. From the rear it appears as a slight rise in the ground ahead, but as you swing around to its southern side you can see the wide open maw of a mine entrance. Such old delvings are dotted all about the north. With the expansion of farming came also prospectors and a number of short lived, but in their time, very lucrative mining ventures. When the minerals ran out the miners left, leaving these old workings to slowly

collapse over the years.

As you watch the entrance another puff of smoke fumes from its interior. Then another thicker belch pushes a cloud of ash and dust up into the air above. This is unusual to say the least.

Do you wish to investigate the source of the smoke? If so turn to section 387. If you would rather carry on southwards turn to section 396.

375

The sounds of voices are louder now as you approach the far end of the cavern. Still too indistinct to be able to identify, but definitely coming from the tunnel ahead. Overhead, the brilliant points of light start to move together, surging in a flowing pattern of waves, concentrating slowly as you watch into a single orb of blue light that gathers far above your head. Within the cathedral-like atmosphere of this subterranean cave the slow motion of the orb throws a myriad of shadows about the cavern, transforming the space from a quiet series of rock formations into something that appears as if it is moving, even alive.

As you stand mesmerised by this strange display your boot nudges something on the ground in front of you. Looking down you see a large stone, strangely shaped but somehow recognisable. In the gloom you reach down to pick it up and with it in your hand you see what it really is. It is a skull, cleaned of all flesh and pierced by hundreds of small puncture marks.

From above a high-pitched screech jerks you upright. Reaching your sword you scan the cave, trying to find the source of the unnatural sound, but the only movement comes from the glowing orb. Slowly it descends towards you, spinning and twisting as it falls, changing shape and taking on a redder hue as its speed increases. Suddenly the orb explodes, a silent eruption of many points of light that begin to swirl around your position. They stay far enough away that they are outside your sword's reach, but close enough to make the hair stand up at the back of your neck.

You try to move towards the tunnel exit and the swarm moves with you, they will not allow you to leave. Desperately you search your memory trying to remember anything you may have heard about these strange lights. Unfortunately you do not have long enough to consider your position before the swarm attacks.

A searing pain in your left calve makes you spin to face what must be an attacker. There is nothing there, but as you look down at your leg you see the source of the pain. An insect the size of your fist, with a strange glowing abdomen, has latched onto your leg and has jabbed a long needle-like proboscis deep into the muscle. It looks like it is drinking your blood. Striking at it with your sword you knock it to the ground and stamp it to mush. From the swirling cloud more of the insects dive, hitting you in the shoulder and arms, trying to find a way inside your clothing. These insects you also crush but this only sends the cloud of swirling insects into a frenzy. There is no way you can fend off the attack that follows. Unable to stand under the hammering you receive from the diving insects you fall on to one knee and try to lash out at the swarm with your sword. Dozens of the insects fall, cleaved into pieces by its blade's sharp edge, however the numbers inevitably overwhelm you. Writhing under a blanket of drinking insects you die. The secret of this cave will remain safe for the arrival of the next unsuspecting victim.

Here your quest ends, your life taken on the points of a thousand razor-sharp needles. Perhaps in a latter life Fate will afford you better luck.

THE END

376

With great care you move to the turn in the tunnel, peer around the corner and gaze out into a huge cavern. Here you find the answer to all your questions regarding the mine. Deep below the surface you have found a large excavation, partly natural and partly cut from the solid bedrock. In the centre of this open space burns a huge fire. Turning slowly over this conflagration is the remains of a Sempaca beast, held on a metal spit, and supported above the fire by a number of strong timbers. It is being turned with great difficulty by a small Morg, who is concentrating on basting the Sempaca's massive carcass as he rotates it slowly over the sputtering embers.

Around the fire sit another two dozen or so of the diminutive creatures, eating and generally engaging in a sometimes violent argument over a cause you cannot fathom. As you watch you find yourself shuddering at the unrestrained energy of their gibbering and fighting. All of the creatures wear the same diminutive armour, dulled

leather edged with dark red trim, and all seem emaciated almost to the point of starvation. It is a scene of unrestrained chaos, without apparent leadership or control, and even as you strain for a better look the behaviour of the Hordim degenerates further. In the light of the fire the Morgs' eyes sparkle with a brilliant red gleam, the play of light and shadow twisting their already cruel faces into hideous masks. These small creatures are not the worst of what resides within these stone walls however. As you survey the cavern you see, sitting in a far corner, two enormous Jotun. They are massive creatures dressed in battle armour and eating quietly, apparently uninterested in the wild gesticulations of the Morg.

For a moment you are engrossed in the scene, trying to imprint clear impressions of everything you see in your memory. Although you can do nothing about it now there will come a time when you will have to let someone know of this incursion into the lands of Men. To have such a group within the borders of the Four Nations can only lead to violence and death. As you lean against the cold stone you cannot know how soon that may actually be.

Suddenly you are grasped harshly by the shoulder and shoved out into the full light of the roaring fire. Two dozen pairs of eyes turn in your direction and the cavern becomes silent. In the quiet that follows only the crackling of the cooking Sempaca can be heard...

Turn to section 389.

377

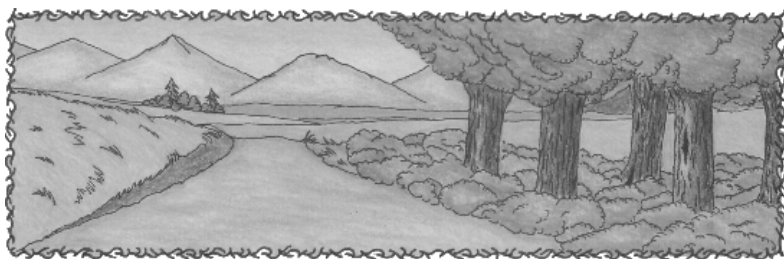
The stand of trees is a bare cover at best but at least you will have some shelter. Drawing Pallenten into the centre of the copse you tether her beneath a sturdy branch, and then find a spot amongst the spreading roots of an ancient Oak for yourself. Overhead the branches of the trees intertwine into a dense canopy that still holds most of its foliage. Hopefully it will be enough.

Swiftly the storm overruns your meagre shelter. Like a thick blanket descending on an unprotected land the tempest lays siege to the plain and unleashes its fury upon it. As it rages you can feel the immense power held within the storm clouds, all about you the trees groan as they are twisted and bent in the wind, the rain quickly turning to hail as a growing crescendo of lightning and thunder assaults the ground below.

Looking up you can see nothing but the thrashing of the trees, highlighted in the frequent blasts of lightning that spread great arcs of destruction over every standing thing on the plain. Hail smashes through the treetops, cutting away pieces of foliage that rain down upon you and Pallenten. Amongst the turmoil you can do nothing but huddle further into the side of the old oak and just hope that Pallenten will survive.

Then, from directly overhead comes a bolt of lightning so massive that it stuns you with its violence. Arcing out of the blackness above, it crashes down through the upper reaches of the trees and strikes the old Oak, splitting it neatly in two. Jumping out of the way you avoid the main part of the falling tree, but you are not quick enough to evade a branch that whips out and down across your face and left shoulder. Knocked senseless you fall limply to the ground.

Throw one dice and turn to section 408.



378

Soon the grasslands are disappearing beneath the rhythm of Pallenten's hooves as she thunders southwards. The great horse moves with an uncanny grace and a breathtaking velocity that takes each dip and break in the smooth carpet of grasses with ease. Holding tightly to her reins, you need do nothing but sit upon her huge back and consider the swiftly passing vista of the countryside. Through patches of trees and across the wide plain Pallenten gallops, scattering herds of deer and startling numerous ground birds as she passes.

Ahead a series of small hills rise, and are then left behind, as Pallenten takes each easily in her stride. From the crests of these undulations you only have a brief opportunity to spy out the way ahead, and it is at the highest of these hills that you find what you are

looking for, the deep cut and tree line of the Laneslem River ahead. It is enough to get your bearings though. Turning Pallenten slightly more to the south you scan the nearing tree line for a familiar gap, a break in the trees bordering the river that will give you access to an old wooden bridge, one that should still span its raging waters. This bridge you have used a number of times before, mostly when you have been hunting out here on the plains. You have never crossed with a horse though. Luckily the break in the trees does not take long to find.



:caadru nar dehr dreya:

Slowing Pallenten to a canter you parallel the river and watch for the familiar landmarks that mark the location of the bridge. To your right you can hear clearly the rush and murmur of the river as it flows through a series of boulder strewn rapids from its source in the northern mountains. You learned long ago that the Laneslem is one of the longest rivers in Arborell, but at this point it is relatively narrow and easy to cross, especially if you have a bridge available for the crossing. Further south this is a much more difficult task. A number of tributary streams feed the river before it reaches Miller's Crossing, turning this fast flowing collection of rapids into a deep, wide barrier that cannot be easily forded.

Within the passage of a few minutes you find the break in the trees you are looking for, and follow a winding path that descends a short way to the steep, eroded banks of the Laneslem. Below you, some 10 metres down, the waters of the river crash and froth over a jumble of smoothed boulders as they flow southwards. Spanning the rapids is an old wooden bridge, its structure somewhat the worse for wear since your last crossing. Constructed as a series of huge upright timbers thrust deep into the bed of the river, each connected by thick sawn lengths of wood and capped by an unstable flooring of weathered planks. For a moment you look at the state of the bridge. It is certainly in a worse condition than you remember but it should still serve as a safe way across.

Will you ride across the bridge? If this is your choice turn to section 388. If you would rather lead Pallenten across by her tethers then turn to section 369.

379

The faint slap of a boot stepping in water is all the warning you need. Turning quickly about you see the dark shape emerge into the light as a raggedly dressed bandit brandishing an ugly looking curved dagger. You recognise him immediately as the third bandit you chased off outside Miller's Crossing. Realising that he does not have the advantage of surprise he says nothing, just gestures for you to hand over your money pouch. You do not wish to cause a disturbance that will bring notice to your position, but it is just as likely that if you hand over your pouch he will try and kill you anyway.

What will you do? Hand over your money pouch? There isn't a lot in it, but if this is your choice turn to section 407. If you would rather fight him off turn to section 403.

380

At first you are able to put some distance between yourself and the patrol, but then the crowd deepens. In the confusion of wagons, and a steadily growing tide of market-goers, you find it difficult to make any further headway. The crowds do work in your favour in one respect. Amongst the mayhem of market traffic you find it easy to avoid the patrol and merge easily into the background activity of the town.

As you make your way slowly southwards you see a small side street that you know will provide an easier way to the south gates. The main road is choked with wagons and people, and now that you are not being pursued a less crowded route may hasten your arrival at the town's southern exit.

For a moment you stand within the milling crowd and consider what you should do. It is then that you notice a large scroll being posted upon a wall at the edge of the road. You recognise it as a list of persons wanted by the authorities.

If you would like to view this list turn to section 436. If you do not see any value in doing so and wish to take the side road instead turn to section 409. If you decide it will be better to remain within the crowds and continue south turn to section 372.

381

It is too soon to stop and rest. With mid-afternoon approaching it will be better to continue on and cover as much ground as possible before taking a break. You are quite sure that better opportunities for water can be found further south anyway.

Breaking through the hedges bordering the stream you set Pallenten again on a southerly course, letting her powerful strides take you swiftly forwards. About you the terrain changes, the open plain giving way to large areas of lightly wooded forest, interspersed by wide areas of grassland and the occasional deserted homestead. With little to slow your progress you negotiate the woods easily, the trees are scattered sparsely, the undergrowth very thin. It does not take long at all before you find yourself breaking out onto a further plain, unobstructed by trees and covered in long, coarse grasses.

This new area of grassland is a vast expanse, uncut by any natural feature or even an isolated stand of trees. The only point of reference is the distant peak of the Devkraager Tor, closer now but suspended within the haze of the horizon like a brooding apparition. You look at the peak and realise that if you have judged the terrain correctly you should soon reach the west road that connects Melem's Fork and the Ring of Stones with the far provinces of the Faeyen. Hopefully you will cut the road near the village of Melem's Fork. It will be a good place to spend the night, and should leave you close enough to the mountains to make the Devkraager Tor within daylight tomorrow.

Pallenten pounds on, leaving huge tracts of the featureless plain behind as you race onwards. For a time you find your mind wandering, mesmerised by the rhythmic pounding of Pallenten's hooves, your thoughts straying far from any consideration of the looming dangers of your quest. Suddenly there is movement ahead.

Turn to section 395.

382

With the crowds becoming larger and more difficult to negotiate you edge your way to the side of road and consider your position. The afternoon markets are always the busiest, and the large number of merchants you see is a testament to their popularity. In this traffic your best bet is to take one of the small side alleys that lead off from the main road. The maze of back-streets and dark alleyways will provide good cover until you reach the south gate.

As you stand by the roadside you see a Faeyen merchant gesturing furtively to you from the front of a small shop to your right. He has a look of concern upon his face.

Turn to section 367.

383

You thank the merchant for his concern and promise to leave the town as quickly as possible. It is only as you leave the alley that you realise you have indeed become an object of notice. The busy life of the markets go on but you feel the eyes of the crowd following you as you lead Pallenten on towards the gates.

There are two ways that you can leave town. The first is to continue down the main thoroughfare towards the south gate, the second is to leave the road and take a number of back streets that lead to the south gate and the road to Das Frontiere. To take the main road turn to section 372. To take the back streets turn to section 409.

384

You do not have to wait long. Within minutes a wall of heavy rain overtakes the farmstead, lashing at its crumbling buildings and assaulting the unprotected walls of your small shed. Huddled against the strongest wall you listen to the crashing of the rain as it hammers against the roof. Looking upwards you can see each bluster of wind shifting the shed's beams and uprights, the roof shingles shuddering with each impact of the relentless gale. It seems that at any minute the roof will break free of its supporting walls and disappear upwards into the maelstrom. Then comes the sleet and hail. Standing there against Pallenten you feel a sudden change in the temperature of the air about you. Pallenten's breath turns to long gusts of vapour as you feel the ground vibrating under you with a new vigour.

When the hail hits it is more than the shed can do to withstand its fury. Buffeted by the wind, and stressed to its limit by the relentless hammering of a tumult of fist-sized hailstones the roof buckles. Luckily you stand beneath the strongest part of the shelter. To your right the roof gives way, dumping a slew of hail and slush onto the shed's floor. Before you can move the wall at the far end of the shed collapses into a pile of rubble. With nowhere to go you press yourself

further into the corner and watch the remaining piece of roof as it bends and twists in the gale.

You are still out of direct contact with the storm but you feel its effects nonetheless. The hail does not abate, nor does the ferocity of the winds or the pounding concert of lightning and thunder. Unable to move your world dissolves into a whirlpool of bright light, and a deafening symphony of hammers and drums pounding without mercy in your ears.

For an hour or more you wait as the storm vents its fury on the unprotected land and your small, collapsing shelter. It is when you think the storm cannot possibly grow stronger that you begin to notice something. It is not much at first, but with each burst of lightning you begin to see more, and as it unfolds you press closer to Pallenten and take a firmer hold on your sword.

In the buffeting tumult of the storm the apparitions appear first as a series of moving shadows, out on the edge of your vision, a strange illusion probably caused by the fine spray of rain that is slowly soaking you to the bone. The more you look though, the more you see. First one, then another, then dozens of them, forming and reforming like dark grotesque phantoms, running along the edges of walls, or crouched low, hands raised as if worshipping the storm itself. Somehow they are there but then gone with the next flash of lightning. Their very lack of substance sends a chill down your spine and there is something in their wild abandon that is both frightening and terrible. Before their fractured dance can come to an end you are convinced that if they see you, you will die.

The strange ethereal dance of the phantoms continues until, as quickly as it came, the storm passes. As the stormfront moves on, so does its shadowy denizens, disappearing with the rain and wind southwards.

In the aftermath of the tempest you take some time to recover. Moving out into the open you lead Pallenten slowly. Your enforced confinement has left both you and your horse stiff from the cold, and it takes time to get feeling back into your fingers and toes. Pallenten recovers quickly though, a rub down and some water from an overflowing trough all she needs before giving you a nudge to move on. As there is nothing to keep you here, you remount and again set Pallenten directly for the snow-capped summit of the Devkraager Tor.

With the storm gone the ground is saturated and soft underfoot. Pallenten takes this all in her stride however, and you are soon

crossing from the remains of the grasslands into areas of sparse forest. Dodging between the stands of trees you make your way forward, steadily getting closer to the west road and an opportunity to get your bearings. Onward you ride, afternoon turns to evening and as daylight wanes you realise that you will need to consider where to spend the night. With sunset approaching you finally meet the west road, and here you find that you have actually travelled much further west than you would have expected. Once you get your bearings you see that the village of Melem's Fork lies far to the east, too far to backtrack and too far out of the way to be a good place to spend the night. A shorter distance to the west lay the ancient Ring of Stones. Your objective is still many hours journey to the south but the Stones may make a good place to camp.

If you wish to turn towards the Ring of Stones turn to section 257. If you would rather continue on southwards turn to section 412.

385

The food is tempting but you have enough in your pack to get you to Stoneholme. Some of the few silver coins you have will be better spent on a jug of ale for yourself and some decent water and hay for Pallenten. Across the square you spy a tavern, one you have frequented before, and one that many have said sells the best ale on the frontier. There is a watering trough at its door and an eager looking young boy sitting upon a stack of hay bales, who you know will feed Pallenten while you drink. It takes only a second for your dry throat to win out, and you are soon pushing your way through the crowd with Pallenten in tow, a quick pint of ale your goal.

As you make your way towards the tavern's door you see a Faeyen merchant standing upon a small upturned crate and trying to get your attention. He is gesturing for you to make your way over to where he stands.

If you are interested in talking with the Merchant turn to section 367. If you would rather ignore him and make your way to the tavern turn to section 398. If however, you possess the skill of Brigandry turn to section 449 first.



386

With the fire out and Pallenten again galloping on to the south you look back with trepidation at the storm. To the north it has built into a murderous wall of black roiling cloud that is veering south in your direction. Your hope had been that it might continue on eastwards but it has chosen to turn and pursue you instead. Still, you ask yourself, when has anything you have done ever been either straightforward or easy. Even now the weather conspires to delay you.

Flicking Pallenten's reins you urge your horse to greater speed, eager to keep ahead of the advancing storm front. Although it is impossible to outrun the tempest, it will serve you well to put as much distance as possible between yourself and its centre. Such weather as this must always be avoided if possible, its ferocity is legend in most of Arborell, and it can leave no trace of any hapless traveller who may cross its path unprotected. The reason for the power of these storms is unknown, it is as much attributed to Fate's fickle hand as to anything natural, but it is surmised that the proximity of the massive Rift Mountains to the north, and the cold air that gathers there over the autumn months is the key. Regardless of its source it must be avoided. If such a storm catches you in the open it will be very difficult to survive, and because of this you will need to find shelter quickly.

For a further hour you ride southwards. Pallenten gallops on and you cover a considerable distance before crossing a small trail leading slightly to the west. Pallenten instinctively veers onto this path and before you can turn her back to the south you crest a rise that quickly falls away into a depression on the other side. To your surprise you find before you the remains of a farmstead; a house, barn and other small buildings are spaced neatly about a central yard, bordered by a low stone fence. Most of the buildings are just collapsed rubble, but a small brick outbuilding, something like a grain silo remains intact, and looks like it might make an effective shelter from the approaching storm.

Behind you the horizon has disappeared within the darkness of the storm. It can be no more than twenty minutes from where you sit upon Pallenten's broad back.

It should take only a minute to investigate whether the old silo will make an effective shelter. If you want to have a look turn to section 365. If you think better shelter may be found further to the south turn to section 394.

387

Pulling Pallenten to a halt you dismount and begin a careful survey of the mine entrance. The fact that smoke is now steadily rising from the blackness within gives some indication that the mine is inhabited. The grass at the entrance reveals very little, it is trampled flat and there are signs of a large object, or possibly an animal having been dragged into the opening recently. Standing there at the entrance you can now also smell the distinct odours of meat cooking, and the unmistakable sounds of something heavy, moving ponderously in the darkness beyond. Backing up for a moment you stand silently, listening intently for any other clue as to what may lay within. Then quite distinctly you hear voices, distorted by distance but voices none the less.

Do you still wish to enter? If you do turn to section 363. If you wish to remount Pallenten and go on your way, turn to section 400.

388

The bridge is old but should still allow for a safe crossing. Urging Pallenten forward you slowly move across its weathered planking, keeping to the left hand side of the bridge where its timbers appear strongest. Pallenten seems unsure of her footing and the creaking of the planks as she lays her weight upon them does nothing to allay her growing anxiety. Still she pushes forward. The combined weight of yourself and the horse is a heavy load to support but the bridge appears strong enough to cross.

By the time you reach the centre of the bridge you can feel it is starting to sway. Stopping Pallenten momentarily you feel the slight movement of the span, it is not much but it is enough to notice. Looking over the edge of the bridge you can see more clearly the cause of the movement. Two of the centre supports have been undermined by the fast flowing river and no longer have a secure foundation. It will be best to cross the remainder of the span as carefully as possible.

If you would like to dismount from Pallenten and lead her the rest of the way, turn to section 362. If you see no reason to dismount and wish to continue turn to section 399.



Caught completely by surprise you stumble forward, and are then pushed further into the view of the cavern and its occupants. Quickly you regain your footing and stand before the red glare of the fire, looking into the faces of the Hordim as they recover from their own astonishment. It is a hesitation that does not last long. Against a backdrop of flame-thrown shadows they spring into action, the Morg spreading out, covering the only exit from the cavern, and your only chance of escape. From the moment you felt the shove in the back you knew you were dead, and it seems all the more likely as you realise fully what you are up against. It is certain that the Hordim are not going to let you leave this place alive, and that given the chance the Morg will ensure your death will be long and painful.

From beyond the circling Morg one of the Jotun pushes forward, an enormous warhammer hanging loosely in its hands. With nowhere to go you draw Than'durion and stand your ground, unsure as to why these Hordim have not already attacked. As you wait for the inevitable assault the Jotun turns to his compatriots and motions them to silence, then he looks directly at you.

"Come vehmin, tell us how it is that you find yourself here." It is a question spoken in fluent Dwarvendim, and delivered even with the heavy accent of your people. At first you cannot decide what is the more surprising; that he can speak your native tongue, or that he speaks it so well.

Swinging your sword in small arcs you back up towards the far side of the chamber and smile awkwardly at the enormous brute.

"All the usual reasons. It was such a nice day I thought I'd go for a walk. Saw the smoke and figured someone had meat on the table. There was a chance I might find hospitality here, but instead I have found you."

The Jotun smirks wryly. He knows the plains are mostly deserted at the turn of the seasons and that no-one travels upon them without good reason. In an expansive gesture he extends his arms as if embracing his fellow Hordim.

"And such it was for us. The day demanded a walk in the countryside and we have found both clean air and good food for our trouble. Who could have thought that a little entertainment might also stumble our way."

You know this banter is meaningless, it is simply a ploy to give the Jotun enough time to size you up. For your part no time is required.

The Jotun is at least three and a half metres tall, encased in an armoured breastplate and shrouded by a long leather cloak. In the firelight the warrior is enormous, his brethren holding back as he slowly moves towards you. As you look about the room you know that these creatures are toying with you, their only concern who will kill you first.



**:dehr treachersa mar u dr'math: cryel
tresh a' duel:**

As you are not disposed towards either a long or painful death you decide that the best option is a quick end, one that takes as many of the Hordim with you as possible. Taking Than'durion in hand you run for a clear area at your right that allows you to have your back against a wall. From this position you see a third Jotun, no doubt the creature that pushed you into the cavern. All three Warriors stand before you, two armed with warhammers, the third wielding a huge flail made of chain tipped with small steel spheres. Here you will have to fight for your life. Here you will probably die.

This is a battle that shall be difficult to win. The Jotun have a strict code of honour regarding single combat and because of this you will find that they will attack you one at a time, the most senior warrior going first. The three warriors must be fought in turn and if you are lucky enough to kill one of them, he will be replaced immediately by the next.

The first Jotun has a combat value of 18 and an endurance of 16. The second Jotun has a combat rating of 17 and an endurance of 14, the third Jotun a combat rating of 17 and an endurance of 13. If by some miracle you defeat these enormous foes then you will have achieved a great victory and should turn to section 411. If, however, their combined power is too much for you then it is here in this dark place that you will die and your quest will end. Perhaps in another life Providence will grant you better luck.



390

With no indication as to which may be the best way to go you take the centre passage and move forward. It is a gloomy, damp tunnel lit only by a series of small lamps that sit neatly in recesses cut into the solid rock of the tunnel walls. In this pallid light you follow the lanterns downwards and make your way carefully, deep into the bowels of the old mine.

For a good ten minutes you follow the twisting path, avoiding a number of small rockfalls and finding a large amount of discarded mining equipment and tools. At some point this mine must have been quite a significant enterprise, judging by the size and depth of the excavations a rich source of ore must have once followed the general direction of these shafts. No longer though, this mine has been long abandoned and its ore gone. If you had the time you could search the area surrounding the mine entrance and you would probably find the foundations of a number of buildings, miner's quarters, supply warehouses and the like. It would have taken a considerable settlement to support a mine as large as this. No doubt all have since been consumed by the grasslands.

Shortly you come to a junction between the tunnel you are following and a further tunnel that runs from the left and then descends even further below ground to the right. Looking out into this new tunnel you find the noises much louder to the right, the smoke thicker and more pungent. To the left the tunnel disappears into the gloom, only a vague line of lanterns showing the tunnel veers left and then ascends back towards the surface.

If you wish to follow the smoke and noise down the right tunnel turn to section 368. If you have had enough of these tunnels and wish to return to the surface turn to section 397.

391

You have no time to waste investigating this smoke. If it is a fire then the approaching weather will make short work of it. From the start of your journey you have had an anxious eye on the growing storms in the north and west. Although unpredictable, the rapidly building cloud fronts can easily turn upon an unwary traveller and overwhelm him with their fury. Up until now a quick, untroubled ride to Stoneholme has been your only consideration but the frontier never

remains benign. The storm has quickly become your main concern and as you wait for Pallenten to finish taking her water you can see that it will be no common tempest.

Black as the depths of a pit a wall of cloud is advancing from the north, sweeping across the grasslands as it is pushed by near gale force winds in your direction. Such storms have been known to generate violent downdrafts, propelling fist-sized chunks of hail with such force that they have crushed the skulls of horses, and laid many men in their graves. To be in the open and unprotected is surely not the place to be. You will have to find shelter quickly.

Without any further delay you mount Pallenten and turn her to the south. Upon the open plain you are exposed and vulnerable, and although shelter can be found it is scattered and unreliable. At your back a tremendous bolt of lightning crashes into the earth and the hairs upon your neck react to the static charge as rolls of thunder tremor the air. Flicking Pallenten's reins you urge the great horse to even greater speed. Southwards you gallop, trying to leave the storm behind but it is impossible. The faster you travel the quicker the approaching weather seems to gain on your position. At your back the wind has reached gale force, Pallenten finding it difficult to maintain her footing as the wind blows vast amounts of loose vegetation across the grasslands.

In the maelstrom of wind and slapping rain, that now falls like icy slush against your back, you remember tales of Men who have survived these storms. In their desperation most killed their horses and lay beneath them, shielded from the lethal hail by the dead weight of their animal's still warm bodies. But they were just stories, and there is no way you could do such a thing to a horse such as Pallenten.

Then, to your immense relief, you spy possible salvation. Ahead and to your right you spot a group of farm buildings, nestled amongst a stand of sturdy pine trees and surrounded by a low stone wall. Most of the buildings have crumbled into disrepair but one structure still stands. It is a silo of some type, probably for grain and sturdily built. Here you may find protection from the storm.

Do you wish to use this building as a shelter from the coming storm? If so turn to section 365. If you would rather continue on southwards, turn to section 394.

392

With the deep roar of the Laneslem receding into the distance you set Pallenten again on a course for the south-west. Ahead the country is open, a series of low hills and grass-covered flatlands interspersed frequently by small stands of trees. At the end of the growing season these grasslands are a swath of rich green, the air cool and fresh from the winds that blow down from the mountains. In this vista of wild beauty Pallenten's hooves ring a rhythmic drumbeat on the soft earth as you gallop on to the Devkraager Tor.

To the west, almost to the horizon, you can see the dark moving shape of a herd of grazing Sempaca beasts as they slowly travel southwards to the warmer weather of the grasslands. Drawn down from their normal range on the plateaus of the Rift Mountains these large animals find good grazing on the low plains, their migration an unchanging part of the life of Northern Kalborea.

Above the wandering herd you also see the more ominous sign of a huge storm front building in the north-west. You have seen such weather many times before and you can only hope it does not move in your direction. From Pallenten's back you scan the horizon at all sides, looking for any sign of approaching danger. The storm is your greatest concern but as you search the plain you see something else, a dark shape barely protruding from the grasses though definitely no fallen tree or dead Sempaca beast.

If you wish to investigate this shape turn to section 509. If you believe there is nothing that can be gained from such a diversion turn instead to section 374.

393

Why you are wandering around in this old mine escapes you. For a moment you stand at the junction of the two tunnels and consider what benefit may come from continuing to search for the source of the noises. It takes only a moment to realise that your curiosity has sent you on a futile search for something that may lead you into mortal danger. It is now time to cut your losses and get back on your way.

Turning up the right tunnel you follow its twisting path back towards the junction of passages that lies just below the main mine entrance. To your surprise you find that you have emerged from the central tunnel and you are much dirtier for the journey, smoke and ash having clung to your arms and face, your clothing veiled in the

same greyish tinge. In a bucket to your right you find a small amount of water which you use to clean your face and hands.

It is as you go about this task that you hear an appalling moan emanate from the right tunnel. The moan rises and then falls away, a sound so full of pain and sorrow that it freezes you in your tracks, leaving you shaken and ready to flee this accursed hole in the ground. Ahead the bright glow of daylight shines in from the mine entrance. It is the only reason you need to turn on your heels and make your way back out onto the plains. Emerging into daylight you look anxiously for your horse. Luckily she has stayed close and a short whistle is all that is required to bring her to your side.

Turn to section 400.

394

The crumbling walls and unstable look of these buildings does not fill you with confidence. You are sure that there are better opportunities for shelter a short distance further to the south. Without stopping you charge on, Pallenten galloping with all her considerable strength, confident that you know what you are doing. The storm is gaining steadily upon you though and it builds in power with each passing minute. Around you the grassland is beginning to flatten and whip in the increasing violence of the wind. The cold sting of icy rain upon your back tells you that you must find cover without delay. Then the wall of rain hits you and you know you have made an error in not finding a haven from the storm earlier.

You have no choice but to bring Pallenten to a halt. Further travel southwards must wait until after you have survived the storm, its power impossible to endure in the open. From what you can see there is only a thick stand of trees to your left that might provide any protection at all. Turning Pallenten towards this wood you make your way quickly into its protective canopy. With the storm almost upon you this will have to be good enough.

Turn to section 377.

395

Without warning three Hresh warriors jump from the thick grasses at your left. Clad in leather armour and wielding scimitars and wooden shields they run into your path, attempting to spook Pallenten

and gain a hold of her tethers. Pallenten veers out of their way, but they move with her and too late you see a fourth warrior leap from the cover of the grass and grab for her reins. The Hresh lunges towards the horse and finds a secure hold, but Pallenten's forward momentum drags him under the great horse and beneath her massive hooves. Caught momentarily under Pallenten the Hresh's body tangles itself between her legs, tripping her up and sending you both crashing into the soft earth.

Struggling back to your feet you try and gather your wits. The fall has left you winded and disoriented, but you can see that Pallenten has risen as well and thankfully has not been injured. The same cannot be said for the Hresh. The warrior may have succeeded in bringing you down but it has cost him his life. He lay near Pallenten as a crumpled heap, a huge gaping wound in his chest.

Almost before you can properly regain your composure the other three Hresh move through the grass towards you. Drawing your sword you stand your ground, awaiting the attack that will surely come. Pallenten does not wait. Kicking out with her hooves she attempts to strike out at the nearest Hordim and finds her mark. It is a crushing blow that smashes the Hresh's skull and topples him backwards into the grass. The other two Hresh are more alert. Waving their scimitars and shields they startle the great horse and send her galloping off to the west. With Pallenten gone they turn in your direction and charge directly for you.

Combat with the two Hresh warriors cannot be avoided. As one they rush you, striking out with their scimitars and screaming at you like servants of the Dreya. Here you must fight for your life, and in this contest the Hresh must be fought at the same time. The first warrior has a combat value of 15 and an endurance of 16. The second has a combat value of 16 and an endurance of 14. Conduct combat rounds for each in turn until either yourself or the Hresh are dead. If you defeat these warriors turn to section 366. If it is here that you die then you will have to look to a latter life to find greater success.

396

You have little time to waste investigating the source of the smoke, but you bring Pallenten to a halt anyway. The ground around the entrance to the mine is well churned, obviously someone, or

something, is using the old diggings as a home. For a moment you consider the abundance of tracks and the strange smells that emanate from the darkness within. Perhaps later you might return to this place and determine what is here, but now cannot be the time.

Flicking Pallenten's reins you set her again on a track southwards. Ahead the sky is clear, the terrain practically unbroken except for a few trees. As Pallenten gallops you check your horizons for any possible danger and see nothing, however in the north a storm is building. By nightfall you will have to find shelter.

Turn to section 370.

397

You have wasted enough time in these gloomy passages. Turning left you follow the tunnel as it winds upwards. The lanterns provide some illumination but the tunnel is a dank, dirty hole filled with fleeting, furtive shadows and discarded equipment. Whatever possessed you to make your way into this mine, and to put your quest at risk is now forgotten, the open plain a far more enticing prospect than this gloomy delving.

Picking up your speed you ascend higher towards the surface. As you expect the tunnel opens out at the junction with the other two tunnels near the main entrance. As you stand catching your breath you see that you have emerged from the left tunnel. Behind you lay the three shadowed entrances, ahead of you the way back to the surface and the waiting daylight of the plains. What comes next ensures your quick exit from the mine.

From somewhere deep within the mine-works below you hear a sound so frightening that it freezes you where you stand. It is a deep wail, a moan so dire and so full of pain that you turn on your heels and run for the light of day. It is time to return to the surface and the completion of your quest.

Turn to section 400.

398

You do not know the Faeyen Merchant and the prospect of a cool ale is something you will not pass up lightly. It takes only a few minutes to push your way through the crowd and soon you stand before the entrance to the tavern. Hitching Pallenten to a conveniently

placed post you flip a silver coin at the young boy, who climbs down from the top of the hay bales and begins the job of feeding and watering your horse. For a moment you stand at the doorway and take in the smell of roast meat and well-matured ale. It will be good to once again drink something other than water.

The tavern is quite dark compared with the bright light of day outside. It is a typical inn frequented by travellers and tradespeople. The furniture is heavy, the food cheap, but who you are is not important and that suits you very nicely at this time. It is remarkably quiet compared with the busy markets outside; all the commotion of the square effectively muffled by the tavern's thick walls.

A quick survey of the interior shows that only a few patrons have remained from lunch. On a busy night it could hold up to a hundred souls but today seems content with less than a half dozen. Without a crowd it is easy to find the innkeeper. He is a burly man, dressed in a drab set of clothes covered by a heavily stained apron. He takes one look at you, sniffs, then leans over the bar top and breathes into your face. His breath stinks of something familiar, rotten fish or something like that. It reminds you of Mattock, your jailer in Maenum.

"By the Fates, a stone-eater here in Miller's Crossing. You've got a hide showing your face here boy. Still your money's as good as anybody else's. What do you want?"

You order a plate of meat and a jug of ale. (The cost is two silver coins. Deduct this amount from your character sheet. If you haven't already, deduct a further coin for the cost of having Pallenten fed and watered.) Looking about the tavern you see a dark area in one corner that will afford you a certain amount of privacy and a good view of the entranceway.

With your plate of food and jug of ale you make your way to the table you have chosen. The meat is well-cooked and the ale every bit as good as you remember. After the distance you have travelled it is good to sit and relax, although you have a feeling this may be the last opportunity you will have for some time to do so.

Half way through your ale, the door to the tavern is pushed open and in walk two Kalborean soldiers. Neatly uniformed in grey and black they have the arrogant air of men who do not mind committing violence to get what they want. They look about the bar and dining area and then approach the Innkeeper.

"Whose horse is that outside?" The Innkeeper does not seem eager to give your identity away, but there is no way you can leave the

tavern without coming under their notice. Perhaps the letter given to you by the Prefect will prevent trouble? You stand and offer the letter.

"The horse is mine. I am on a mission commanded by the High Prefect of the LoreMages' Guild and I am under his protection. Here is my letter of authority."

For a moment the guards seem to hesitate, thinking carefully about whether they should give any weight to the letter that you hold before them. As they stand there, you see that they recognise immediately you are Dwarvendim. A lifetime of contact with men such as these has shown you that they do not pass up an opportunity to physically or verbally abuse your people easily. Indeed, you have yourself been on the wrong end of a beating on more than one occasion, but these guards do not seem interested. Instead they have become apprehensive, as if they are about to commit a crime for which their authority will not protect them. A crime that will require your death. Then you realise that their interest in you cannot be official, in fact they are not interested in you at all. As one of them looks back towards the entranceway you see in his eyes that it is your horse they want. They want Pallenten.

In one fluid movement you throw the letter into the air and draw your sword. For an instant the guards' eyes follow the piece of paper as it floats off to the left. This gives you enough time to throw over the table that stands between you and charge forward at the Kalboreans. One of them you hit squarely across the side of the temple with the flat of your sword. He collapses to the floor. The other guard turns, sword ready to parry your first stroke. To get out of the tavern you will have to kill this man.

Chairs scatter everywhere as the other patrons of the tavern make for the door. If you are to get away you must finish this fight quickly. (If needed the meal you have half-eaten will restore four endurance points to your endurance level. Be sure to record this prior to commencing combat.) The town guard has a combat rating of 16 and an endurance of 13. If you win this battle turn to section 406. If you lose then it is here that your quest ends. In another life you may have better luck.



399

As you move forward the structure begins to sway more and more. Although not evident from the near bank, the bridge has been seriously undermined by the fast flowing rapids below. Nudging Pallenten in the flanks you try and guide her carefully but with greater speed over the stronger parts of the bridge, hoping to make the far side before the entire thing collapses under your weight. You are not that lucky.

Within 10 metres of the far bank the bridge fails, support beams tumble from the centre of the structure, its uprights toppling over under the pressure of the rushing water below. With the uprights gone the middle of the bridge collapses completely and pulls the section of bridge upon which you stand backwards and down into the river. Pitched backwards by the collapse you have no chance to save yourself from the fall into the boulders below. For an instant Pallenten finds a firm footing in the falling structure and lurches sideways, attempting to make the far bank with one final lunge for safety, but it is all in vain. Hard rock and the icy mountain water of the Laneslem are all that await you both as you crash headlong into the river. Here you drown, caught in the chill grip of a river that slowly carries your body southwards, never to be seen again.

THE END

400

Many of your fellow Dwarvendim have remarked that it is your curiosity that will one day lead you to an untimely end, but today will not be that day. Whatever might be found within the mine will have to wait for another, less urgent time. The collar at your throat remains tight and you know that because of it you must move on.

Remounting Pallenten you quickly check your horizons for any approaching danger and set off again on a south-westerly track. To the north-west you can see that the storm is building quickly and it is definitely moving your way. Already a stiff wind rises from the north, and upon its bluster it brings a cold, moist chill that foreshadows a powerful tempest to come. At some time today this storm will overrun the plains, and when it does you will need to find shelter.

Turn to section 370.

401

A guard stands ahead of you, he is not calling you by name but he wants you to stop. Luckily the noise of the moving masses muffles his calls and it is easy to get lost amongst the multitudes. Feigning that you do not notice him you veer to the left and angle into a large group of townsfolk who are haggling over spilt goods. The guard attempts to follow but it is a simple matter for you to slip down a side street and wait in the shadows for him to pass.

For a few minutes you stand in the gloom of the small laneway and ensure that you are not being pursued. Pallenten is beside you, she seems to understand the need for quiet and waits patiently for the command to move. As you stare out into the bright daylight of the markets you do not at first notice the dark shape creeping up at your back.

Turn to section 379.

402

The voices are not human and your blood runs cold at the realisation of it. Above the whining gabber of a multitude of small creatures you can hear the bellow and growl of at least two immensely large Hordim. That these are Hordim you are certain for there are no other creatures in Arborell that make such distinctive sounds. Backing up from the turn in the passage you realise the danger that you are in, and know that only a fool would stay to test his luck further. It is time to put as much distance as possible between yourself and these creatures.

Turning about you cautiously retrace your steps back to the surface. From each tunnel entrance that you pass there comes more of the ominous voices, muffled and distant but Hordim nonetheless. Sweating in the cool depths you move as quickly as you are able, all the while attempting to remain silent and unnoticed. More than once you sense movement in the shadows, the flickering lights that line the passage throwing dancing shades across the rock walls. It is only now that you see the small signs that should have alerted you to the Hordims' presence here. Boot and foot prints, discarded pieces of torn clothing and crude cut marks made by carelessly carried weapons, all now recognisable and acute reminders of the danger that has proven so close.

At any time you feel you may be discovered but luck is with you, none of the mine's residents notice your passing and you are soon within sight of daylight. When you reach the mine entrance you are glad for both the comforting light of day and the reassuring bulk of Pallenten, grazing quietly in the nearby grasses. Mounting the great horse you turn her towards the south-west, leaving the old mine behind and the dangers that reside within.

Turn to section 370.

403

No matter what you do you have the sense that this confrontation will surely end with blood on the street. Drawing your sword you stand your ground and wait for his attack. Luckily it never comes. With the advantage of surprise gone the thief hesitates, the theft of your money pouch now requiring more than just the quiet slitting of your throat. At the first glance of your unsheathed sword the would-be thief's jaw drops. What he expected as an easy mark has not turned out to be so straightforward.

You can see the fear on his face, and all it takes is for you to move forward and he turns on his heels, bolting for the safety of the dark alleys at his back. For a moment you consider whether you should give chase and teach him a lesson, but you don't have the time. You do however have the last laugh. In his haste to leave he has dropped a pouch of his own, probably the ill-gotten gains of a previous theft. You pick it up and find that it holds fourteen silver coins. These you will keep for yourself. (Record this windfall on your character sheet).

With the thief gone you turn back to the busy road ahead. From the alley you can see that the volume of traffic has not diminished at all. Unfortunately this is as close as you can get to the gates, the rest of the way will have to be made along the main road. Looking out towards the gates you can see that the guards posted there are only checking travellers coming into the town. Hopefully you will be able to make an unnoticed exit.

Taking Pallenten by the reins you lead her out into the flow of wagons and pedestrian traffic. With your cowl pulled up over your head, you stoop like an old man, and hope this simple change in appearance will get you past the gate. It does take some pushing and shoving to make headway against the flow, but in a matter of a few

minutes you stand some thirty metres short of the gate.

Suddenly from your right you hear a shout. A guard is running down the street gesticulating wildly at the gatemen and pointing back towards the main town square. There is a chance that any hope of a quiet exit may have just been extinguished.

Turn to section 373

404

You cannot be sure but the voices seem to rise clearest from the right tunnel. Without any real evidence as to which might be the right way to go, this is the tunnel you take. From the junction the passage runs on for some distance before widening into a large open cavern. On both sides of this cave the roughly surfaced walls run with moisture, large stalagmites and stalactites grow from the floor and ceiling, forming huge twisted formations that sparkle in the dim light. The cavern is completely quiet except for the murmur of low voices that are difficult to identify or source.

For a moment you stop and pause. Although there is some smoke wafting through the cavern it is an extraordinarily beautiful place. The ceiling is covered in a myriad of small brilliant points of light, almost like stars in the night sky. These however, sway slowly from side to side, sometimes detaching from their fixed point on the roof and then travelling a small distance before settling again. What they are you cannot tell, but they provide a striking bluish light that is just strong enough to show you the way to the other side of the cave. Looking out towards the other end of the cavern you can see a further passage that provides a way out.

If you possess either the Bushcraft or Huntmastery skills turn to section 584. If you do not possess these skills turn instead to section 375.

405

The smoke rises slowly from its source in the west and is then whisked away by the wind. You are sure that there was no smoke before you stopped to water Pallenten. Someone has either just started a fire, or a fire, thought to be out, has rekindled in the wind. If the

latter is the case then you should put it out before it becomes a conflagration that could spread out of control over the plains. Remounting you head off towards the rising smoke that has thickened even from the time you first noticed it.

Judging by the thickness of its plume, the smoke column is rising from a fire only a short distance ahead. Turning Pallenten first to the south across the stream, and then slightly more to the west, you find your objective over a small rise, hidden within a bowl-shaped depression in the ground. Here there is the remains of a large fire and the butchered carcasses of three or four large deer. All the signs show that this has been someone's camp for a number of days, and that they have left in a hurry. A quick inspection also shows the fire to have been extinguished, but in their haste the embers had not been buried. With the coaxing of the breeze some pieces of partially burnt wood have burst back into flames.

Dropping to the ground you look more carefully about the camp and see that the hurried departure of its residents has provided you with a small boon. Within a discarded sack you find three strips of expertly dried Sempaca meat. Each has been carefully packaged and has not suffered at all from a day or two in the open. There should be enough food here for three extra meals. (If you wish to take these meals, record them on your character sheet.)

Turning your attention to the area surrounding the camp you find a number of clues to the nature of the campers who spent time here. The most significant of these lies in an area of soft ground. It is a clear set of footprints, each print as long as your forearm and around a finger length deep. They are definitely not human.

Quickly you return to the campsite and do what the Hordim should have done in the first place. With the use of a deer's shoulder blade you dig a small pit next to the fire and then shovel all the remains of the fire into it. An amount of dirt is all that is required to extinguish the flames, then you shovel in the remainder of the soil to fill the hole. The job takes but a few minutes and you consider it ample payment for the food that you have found.

With the fire no longer a danger you call to Pallenten and remount. A light flick of her reins is all that is needed to urge her southwards.

Turn to section 386.



406

Left alone in the tavern, with only the innkeeper cowering behind his bar, you fight with the guard. He is more bravado than skill and after a short battle falls beneath your sword. With the alarm now raised you have no time to do anything except recover the Prefect's letter from the floor and run for the door. Pallenten stands to the left of the entranceway, her head down in a pale of oats. To the right you can see a number of guardsmen forcing their way through the crowded market in your direction. This is one establishment you are going to have to vacate quickly.

Grabbing Pallenten's reins you draw her out into the crowd and towards the road that leads to the south gate. You cannot mount your horse for you will be too easy to spot, so instead you push and prod your way through the throng of the early afternoon markets. Quickly you realise that you cannot make much headway, all the traffic is moving from the south gate in your direction; and it is a tide of humanity, wagons and beasts of burden that will have you arrested if you stay within it. Looking about you see a side alley that leads into the backstreets of the town. At this time of the day you will only reach the south gate, and a way out of Miller's Crossing, if you can get off the main road and successfully avoid the guard patrol.

Turn to section 409.

407

The risk of causing a disturbance is too great. You throw him the pouch and he pockets it without checking its contents. To your surprise he turns on his heel and then disappears back into the gloom of the alleys behind. For a moment you stand with Pallenten and consider whether finding him and teaching him a good lesson would be worthwhile, but you have no time for it. You make a mental note to return to Miller's Crossing once this quest is done and hunt out this bandit. You have no doubt that he will pay for his audacity. (Adjust your character sheet to account for the loss of all your money).

Turning back to the main road you check there are no guards in the street and then move out into the light of day. The road itself is clear of soldiers, all you can see is the patrol at the gates. The river of people and goods has not slackened though. It is a struggle just to make any headway but the distance remaining is not great. The stone arch and heavy metal portcullis of the gate is no more than twenty

metres from where you stand.

It is then that you see the guard running down towards the gates, he is gesticulating at the soldiers and is causing quite a commotion. Your chances of getting out of Miller's Crossing may have just changed.

Turn to section 373.

408

The pain spreading from the side of your head and your left shoulder tells you profoundly that you are still alive. Lying under a pile of leaves and broken branches you try and move your arms, but you are so pummelled by the ferocity of the storm that you must lay still for a moment and recover.

(Take the number of your dice throw and subtract it from your endurance points. This is the amount of harm you have suffered from the blow to your side. If you are already low in endurance points do not reduce the number of your endurance points below 1 however. This blow has caused you harm but it is not enough to kill you.)

The falling branch has struck a painful blow but luckily has done no permanent damage. Looking out through the mass of twigs and leaves you can see that the storm has passed. You cannot have been out for too long though, the storm is still dumping rain upon the plains but its black heart has moved away to the south.

Struggling to your feet you lean against the mangled, smoking remains of the Oak and search out your horse. For a moment you cannot see her and a note of panic creeps into your voice as you call out, trying to ascertain where she is. You get no response.

Holding your side you walk out onto the plain and call again. All about you the ground is littered with broken wood, piles of leaf litter and slushy heaps of smashed hail. Within this desolation you cannot see her. But then you hear a welcoming neigh from the other side of the stand of trees. Pallenten bursts from the other side of the grove and comes to your side, she seems genuinely happy to see that you have survived. After finding your gear you give her a quick rub down then remount and continue on.

In the aftermath of the storm the air is cool and heavy with moisture. Pallenten has shrugged off any stiffness she may have had, and again races across the plains without any sense of fatigue or fading. You think to yourself that if you ever survive this quest you

will have a great tale to tell of her stamina and courage. All you have to do is survive for the telling.

As afternoon slowly turns to evening you find the open plains and scattered forest give way to an area of low grass-covered hills. If you were on course these hills should have been much farther to your west, but the weather has obscured the mountains and you appear to have veered too far westwards. Your plan had been to try and make it to Melem's Fork for the night. The folk there are well-known for their hospitality and you have a number of friends who would provide you with a comfortable bed. If you are too far to the west then nothing will be gained by trying to make the village however. It will be too far out of your way.

On sunset your suspicions are confirmed, you cross the west road between Melem's Fork and the ancient Ring of Stones, but you are indeed too far to the west. The village lies a good three hours to the east and is now too far to go. You will need to consider a different place to spend the night.

The Ring of Stones lies roughly an hour to the west. It provides both a good place to camp plus fresh water for Pallenten. If you would like to camp there turn to section 257. If instead you would prefer to travel further south and find a campsite on the plains turn to section 413.

409

Miller's Crossing is not a large town, but the security of its high walls has meant that it has become a crowded place; littered with narrow alleys, dark corners, and squalid-looking three storey buildings that block out any natural light from above. Luckily you have spent considerable time wandering these streets and know them very well. As you draw Pallenten into the nearest alleyway you believe it will be easy to navigate a path that leads you away from the crowds and towards the south gate.

Pallenten finds the narrow alleys and backstreets a less comfortable way however. Her broad back and high shoulders makes finding a route through the constricted lanes of Miller's Crossing somewhat more difficult. Keeping away from the regular town patrols is no problem, the horse's bulk however, forces you to take a maze of alleys that lead you deep into the squalor of the town's poorest quarter.

Here, within the close tenements of Miller's Crossing you are as

much at home as you could be anywhere else in Arborell. The long years of your childhood after leaving the Temple had been spent struggling for a bare living, and it was amongst these decrepit buildings that you had learned your trade as a thief. Even now you know that you could meld once again into the underworld of the town and never be found by the Kalboreans, but that would not be your fate. The metal collar at your neck would ensure that you would not live long enough to boast to any of your escape from execution. With your hand firmly on Pallenten's reins you take her southwards.

Apart from the time needed to make your way south the detour does work to your advantage. Rarely do guards venture down any of these alleys for they are more likely to be showered with the contents of a chamber pot than find any overt sign of criminal activity here. Because of this you find that your passage through the shadowed lanes remains anonymous and unnoticed. The cobbled streets are wet and slippery from recent rain and Pallenten's hooves make a curiously muffled clacking sound as you pass through the jumble of interconnecting lanes and footways. Carefully you find your way to a point just short of the south gate.

With Pallenten at your side you look out from a small alley at the steady stream of humanity that passes from the gate up to the town square. From where you stand you can see that the southern exit is guarded by a number of uniformed Kalboreans, but they seem most interested with those entering the town. People leaving are given nothing more than a cursory glance and then allowed to pass through. Perhaps it will prove easier than expected to get out of Millers Crossing.

As you stand in the shadows of the alley you feel Pallenten at your side nudging your shoulder. At first you take little notice, then you hear the sound of a soft footfall on the cobbles behind you. Glancing to the side of the alley you can see in the reflection of a slightly opened window that there is a dark shape creeping up behind you.

Turn to section 379.

410

The guard stands directly ahead of you. He is not calling you by name but wants you to stop. For a second you consider your options then decide it will be best to bluff your way through, even if that means having to talk to this Kalborean. As you get closer you see that

he is young, smartly uniformed and far more interested in your horse than in you.

"By the Fates this is a fine horse!" he says admiringly, "In all my years I have never seen such a powerful looking steed. What is her name?"

As the young Kalborean looks over Pallenten you answer his questions as best you can and learn that he was once employed as a stable-hand far to the south, long before being drafted and posted here as a guardsmen. You can tell by the boy's enthusiasm that he would much rather have remained as a lowly stable-worker, his knowledge of horses and obvious love for them at odds with his current duties.

Carefully you keep your face hidden and after a short exchange of goodbyes he sends you on your way, holding two silver coins he has given you to buy apples for Pallenten. (Record these coins on your character sheet. If the opportunity arises you can use them for this purpose in the future.)

With a sigh of relief you keep to your path and soon approach the south gate. As you near the stone arch of the gate, with its massive iron portcullis, you can see a number of guards searching travellers as they enter the town. It would appear they are taking no interest in those wishing to leave.

Pulling your hood further down over your head, you position yourself between two wagons heading for the archway, there is a chance that you will be able to slip out unnoticed. Suddenly from the crowd behind you, a guard runs for the gates, shouting commands and pointing urgently towards the town's centre.

Turn to section 373.

411

The battle is a violent and bloody one and with the blessing of Providence you have survived it. Looking about the darkening cavern you can see the three hulking bodies of the dead Jotun lying scattered and still, and in the silence you can truly say that you are amazed you have lived to tell the tale. It is a confrontation however, that you have not survived unscathed. The battle has left you battered, a nasty wound to your left shoulder oozing blood, the result of a glancing blow that knocked you cleanly to the floor. It was only luck that saved you from the follow-up blow that would have crushed your skull.

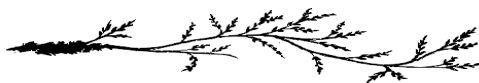
The Morg are nowhere to be seen and you are glad for it. As the battle raged the Morg looked on, a sense of expectation that here might be an opportunity for torture once the Jotun had finished with you. It was an expectation that quickly turned to confusion and then fear. When the last of your foes had fallen the diminutive creatures disappeared like smoke into the many tunnels and crevices of the mine. It is a truth it would seem, that the Morg are cowards, content only to harm the weak or unarmed, and as you try and recover your breath you know that the death of the Jotun has shown them you are neither. If luck is with you they will not stand in your way as you find a path back to the surface.

Quickly you apply a dressing to your shoulder and consider the purpose of the Hordim camp. Across one of the rough walls of the chamber there has been drawn a map scrawled in charcoal, and covered with a multitude of symbols and lines. It is crude but you recognise it as a chart of the frontier, covering the ground from the foothills of the Rift Mountains in the north to the West Road that leads into the Faeyen provinces. Although makeshift in nature this encampment seems to be a reconnaissance post and you can only wonder at the damage they may have already done.

Turning to the way out you survey the scene one final time. These were fine warriors, certainly not the slaving brutes you had been led to believe. It is a pity that it was necessary to kill them but it was their lives or yours, and you have a quest to complete; one that you must return to immediately.

The way back to the surface is straightforward. Following the smoke you retrace your steps to the main entrance and then back out onto the plain. Luckily Pallenten has remained close and it takes only a short whistle to bring her to your side. Without delay you remount and point her towards the waiting mountains.

The damage suffered to your shoulder will reduce your Strength attribute by one point for the duration of this quest. Your strength can only return to its proper level in the course of this adventure if you acquire a Nahla Potion and make use of it. At that time your Strength can return to its initial level. Record this change on your character sheet then turn to section 370.



412

Upon the western road you bring Pallenten to a halt and consider which way to go. The Ring of Stones can be a reasonable camping ground and fresh water for Pallenten is close at hand, but it will take you out of your way. To the south lay your goal and you know the closer you are to the object of your journey, the better you will feel. In the growing darkness you set out for the Devkraager Tor. It is a vast brooding shape sitting heavily on the southern horizon, its snow-capped summit still glowing red from the sunset. Ahead the landscape is open and wild, a vast grassland little travelled by Men and unknown to most. As you ride you can feel the effects of the storm, the ground is saturated with water, the air crisp and cool. On Pallenten's back the cold bites into your clothing, it is uncomfortable but in the growing darkness it helps keep you awake and alert.

With only the dark-red beacon of the mountains summit to guide you, and the dim light of the moon to find your way, you travel on. The plains are flat, an enormous expanse only rarely cut by small areas of forest, and lines of low hills that roll off to the west and east. In this darkness you will need to find a place to rest soon.

Suddenly to the east you see the glint of a reflection. In the glow of the newly risen moon something metallic has glimmered in the darkness. Coming to a halt you dismount from Pallenten and command her to the ground. Obediently she lowers herself to the soft earth and lays on her side. Crouching next to her you scan the grassland, trying to pick up some hint as to the source of the reflection. Pallenten lays silent, the sounds of many feet shuffling towards you clearly audible above the rustle of the grasses and the call of night birds.

Looking eastwards you see, cresting the rise of a low hill, a number of small creatures in two lines making directly towards your position. They are nothing more than dark shapes, silhouetted against the moon at their back, but they are unmistakably Hordim. Outlined by the rising moon you can see that they carry small packs and short spears. They are moving as an ordered patrol, and are being very careful not to leave any sign of their passing.

For some time you watch as they file towards you then abruptly stop. The lead creature sniffs the air and considers the available landmarks before making a short comment to one of his compatriots. A brief conversation ensues before the leader points off to the north-west and sends the patrol in that direction. Luckily they miss you by a

good two hundred metres and disappear slowly into the gloom of the north. Until you are sure that they have passed outside of your sight you do not move, but eventually you must risk standing on the plain and find that they have indeed moved on. Judging by their new direction you can guess that they are making for the Ring of Stones, for what purpose you cannot tell.

Raising Pallenten from the soft earth you remount and get back on your way. From the north a strong wind has started to blow, flattening the long grasses and sending an even stronger chill through the air. With Pallenten again racing across the plain you put as much distance as possible between yourself and the small creatures. It has been a long day though, and you know you will not be able to go on much further.

Turn to section 244.

413

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In the growing darkness you set out for the still visible bulk of the Devkraager Tor. It is a vast brooding shape sitting heavily on the southern horizon, its snow-capped summit still glowing red from the last rays of sunset. Ahead the landscape is open and wild, a vast grassland little travelled by Men and unknown to most. As you ride you can feel the effects of the storm, the ground is saturated with water, the air crisp and cool. On Pallenten's back the cold bites into your clothing, it is uncomfortable and it does nothing to help the dull ache that still radiates from your shoulder, but in the growing darkness it helps keep you awake and alert.

With only the dark-red beacon of the mountains summit to guide you, and the dim light of the moon to find your way, you travel on. The plains are flat, a vast expanse only rarely cut by small areas of forest and lines of low hills that roll off to the west and east. In this darkness you will need to find a place to rest soon.

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Turn to section 244.

414

Stunned by the sudden fall, you flounder upon the wet earth until you can get your bearings. Quickly you discover that you have fallen into a dry creek bed, one that is rapidly filling with water. Pallenten stands at the top of the bank looking forlornly in your direction, the

pounding rain obscuring her from view, only frequent blasts of lightning showing where she stands. Scrabbling up the bank you grab her reins and pull yourself out of the creek.

Standing there in the storm, saturated and miserable, you know you must find shelter quickly. When the full force of this tempest hits it will probably kill both of you if you don't. A massive blast of lightning brings with it salvation. In the bright light of the flash you see a boulder outcrop a short distance to the south. It is not much but it should provide a small measure of protection.

With Pallenten in tow you make your way quickly to the stone pile and find that you are in luck. Part of the outcrop has an overhanging table of stone that will protect you and Pallenten from the worst of the storm. It is a tight fit but you are able to get both yourself and Pallenten under it.

Crouching beneath Pallenten's enormous belly you wait, watching the full fury of the storm unfold upon the plain.

Turn to section 268.

415

The Ranger is a vicious fighter who gives you no opportunity to explain your mission. Forced to fight, you must use all your skill and remaining strength to defeat him. In the end he falls, struck more by luck than finesse across the back of the neck. Quickly you search his limp form and find a note, it appears to be a set of general orders from his superiors in Das Frontiere, ordering all Rangers on the frontier to detain any Dwarvendim found at large in the province. This explains why the Ranger has attacked you, for most of these soldiers the word "detain" has another, more sinister overtone - kill on sight and bring back the body.

Remounting Pallenten you leave the Ranger where he fell. You do not have the time to bury him and have no wish to be found by another of his kind. It is time to move on.

Turn to section 341.

416

The fight is short, and bloody. When you are done the two men lay crumpled on the roadway, no longer a threat to yourself or anyone else. For a moment you stand quiet and try to regain your breath. This

was a fight you did not seek out, but you take no pleasure from the violence that has left you standing, and these two men dead. As a thief yourself you know that both of these bandits will not be missed or mourned, but for your sake they must not be seen either.

Quickly you look up and down the road. No-one has been witness to the fight and you cannot afford the complications that will follow the discovery of these men. Within the cover of the trees you drag both into the undergrowth. For a moment you consider whether you should bury them, or simply leave them out of sight, but you know you do not have the time for any proper burial. As you listen for any traffic on the roadway you camouflage the bodies with bracken and then return to the road to find your pack. Pallenten is nowhere to be seen, but as you retrieve your belongings she trots out from beyond the bend ahead. Calling her to you, you mount and take one last look at where you have hidden the bandits. You take no pride in what you have done but it was necessary, and you cannot afford to delay any further.



**:dehr gwa'duine oel ren'wevim es bo'roth
mu'hae'el ahn:**

Turning a corner in the road puts you at the eastern end of a long stone bridge, looking across at the town of Miller's Crossing and its formidable fortifications. The entire town is surrounded by an impressive stone wall some 15 metres high and 10 metres thick. Upon this wall is a series of manned watchtowers and more gaudily coloured flags than you have seen on the battlements of any other fortified community. It is a good sign that even with war brewing in the north Miller's Crossing is doing very well indeed.

The bridge does not take long to cross. It is about 200 metres in length, built as a series of immense stone archways that span the width of the Laneslem. You have to admit that crossing this bridge is a new experience for you as previously you have always crossed on foot. On Pallenten's back it is quite unnerving. From the height of this vantage you can see over the high stone walls of the bridge, and it is a long way to the river below. One look at the length of the drop is enough for you. For the remainder of the crossing you find yourself focusing on the end of the bridge and the more welcoming entrance to the town. As you approach its far end you are met by a number of guards grouped loosely near the town's gates. They do not seem the

slightest bit interested in stopping you and to your relief you are soon trotting down the centre of the town's main thoroughfare. Here within the walls, the noise of commerce and town life is overwhelming. The crowds are heavy and it is difficult to navigate through the throng of the early afternoon markets. Giving up, you dismount from Pallenten then push and shove your way through to the centre of the town square. It is there that you spy a food stall loaded with a wide variety of fresh provisions.

Do you wish to purchase more rations? If you do turn to section 240. If you believe it will be better to continue on through the crowded market turn to section 259. If you would rather seek out fresh water for Pallenten and perhaps a pint of ale for yourself, turn to section 385.



417

There is no doubt that to follow the Morg any further is a risky business, but the appearance of these creatures has piqued your curiosity. What they truly look like, and more importantly why they have ventured into the lands of Men, are questions worth a small amount of your time. You will not take Pallenten with you, however. The trail leads onto higher ground, and you know enough of this area to know that you will move quicker on your own.

Carefully you tether the great horse to a branch a few metres into the trees and place your pack with her. For this short reconnaissance you do not wish to be encumbered, and after a short reassurance to Pallenten you leave her and move off into the west.

Alone within the forest you start at the run. Most of the tracks are still easily identifiable and without a need for careful tracking you move quickly, finding your own path through the trees. It does not take long though, for the tracks to run onto harder ground, and soon you find yourself testing the skills you have as a Huntmaster. The Morg have made no attempt to hide their progress, and as far as you

can determine there are more than thirty in the band. Such a number leaves a trail of more than just footprints.

Within the hour you find yourself ascending a series of steep slopes, that lead to a ridge of hard rock jutting from the crown of a long series of hills. Upon this jagged cusp of broken stone you make a singular discovery, and it stops you dead in your tracks. Exposed upon the bare rock is a body. It is one of the Morg.

Without thought of the danger you edge your way towards the Hordim. It is certainly dead, and as you approach you can see that it has been laid out to fulfil some form of funerary rite, its body posed with a number of objects and plants spread about it. There is a purpose to what has been done with the creature but the Morg itself holds your undivided attention.

You have never seen such a Being in your lifetime, and except for the Rangers of the Watch there would be few other men who would have either. The Hordim lies still, its skin an iridescent deep blue that changes colour as you move to get a better look at it. You have heard that all Hordim have long tails of hair that grow from the back of their heads but this one has had his cut and taken. Why you cannot say. Although it is arranged upon its side, with its legs folded up to its chest, you can see that it would have stood no more than waist height. What strikes you is the gaunt, emaciated nature of its body. Thin arms and legs, and a drawn skeletal ribcage gives you pause to wonder if this Morg has died of malnutrition, or if all of its kind maintain the same starved appearance.

For a time you stand over the remains and wonder as to why it is here. There are no wounds upon it, or obvious sign of disease, but there is a look about the creature that speaks volumes of the hardship of its last moments. The Morg appears to have died in great pain, its simple visage distorted in a grotesque mask of agony that has torn the life from it. You cannot help but stare at the Hordim and feel a sense of pity. No-one should die in such a fashion.

About you the wind rises up the hillside, pushing an invisible hand through the trees below you. The gust reminds you that precious time is passing, and for a further moment you consider the body of the Morg, then turn your attention to its belongings. Arrayed about the body are the few artifacts of its existence. A knife, a long handled stabbing spear, a few bags and an intricate set of beads, made from crystal and tree sap adorn the last resting place of the Hordim. You have no intention of taking any of these items, but piled a short

distance from the body is a few pieces of equipment that have obviously been previously stolen and then discarded.

Quickly you search through the items and find little that is usable. Amongst the detritus of this Morg's life you find a small flask, a water bottle, a piece of Faeyen jewellery, and a silver pendant on a long metal chain. To your surprise the flask contains beer, but it is old, stale and certainly undrinkable. Carefully you sniff its contents and wonder if it might have other uses. (If you wish to keep any of these items record them on your character sheet before continuing.)

Overhead the suns of morning have risen higher than you have allowed for this small venture. There is no point to going any further, and the Morg's body has sated any curiosity you might have harboured regarding the Hordim. With the wind blowing across the exposed crest of the hill, you turn and make your way back to Pallenten. The way down is quicker than the journey up and within twenty minutes you find yourself back at the clearing where you left her. Unfortunately your horse has been busy while you were away.

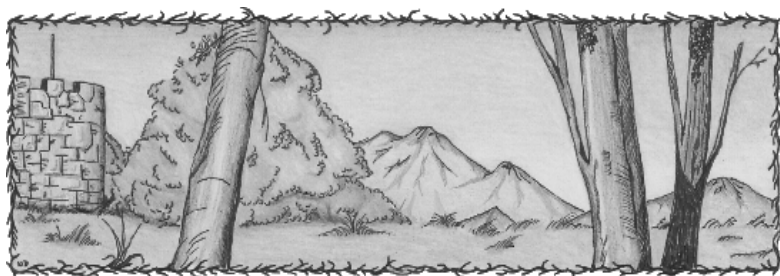
Having found the ferns where she was tethered unpalatable, Pallenten has nuzzled open your pack and spoiled all the prepared rations you held for your journey. For a second you stare at the horse, but she seems well pleased with herself and you cannot find any reason to blame her. You should not have left the pack anywhere near her and this has been the outcome. You will have to buy more when the opportunity arises. (Deduct all the rations from your character sheet. If you had Nahla bread in your pack this has not been touched.)

Lamenting the loss of your food you shoulder your pack and lead Pallenten along a new path into the south-east. Although you came into the forest from the east you know enough about the terrain, and the many animal trails that cut across its length, to know a short-cut out of the forest. It will take you further south but will be an easier path to travel. With the day wearing on you find the particular trail you are looking for and quickly use it to reach the edge of the trees.

Carefully you survey the open ground ahead and find it empty, a flowing plain of grass and the odd copse of acacia trees. As you stand within the last reach of the forest you look to the east and south and ponder what must be your next move.

You have two possible choices. At this stage of your journey you may either make for the South Road, or you can strike out to the south-west, and make your way cross-country directly to the Devkraager

Tor. If you wish to continue on the road to Miller's Crossing turn to section 438. If you would like to risk travelling across country, and gain some time by heading straight for the mountain, turn to section 492.



418

The Morg is in a deep sleep, and it proves easy to move around the pile of rotting fabric upon which it rests. In the cool silence of the hall you stand for a moment, then decide to turn and move closer to the Hordim for a better look. The creature is in no danger of waking, and although it must have been stationed here as a sentry it is not doing its job very well. Carefully you edge towards it and ponder the strange nature of the creature. In the shadows it is indistinct, nothing but a vague diminutive form, untroubled and at peace. You have not seen many of its kind but this one is as thin as any you have seen. Even in the dark its skin shimmers with a deep blue lustre, and as it breathes quietly it is difficult to believe the cruelty and barbarism that has been attributed to Hordim such as these. With a moment to consider its deceptive nature you think on whether you should kill it as it sleeps, but there is no point to such action, and every chance that it will lead to an alarm be raised. Instead you begin to back away, and it is then that you see the small key chain that rests upon the cloth next to the Morg. It has one large key upon it and it is definitely Dwarvendim in manufacture. (If you wish you may take this key. If this is your choice record it upon your character sheet.)

Any further consideration of the Morg is cut short however. From somewhere ahead there comes the muffled echoes of movement, and quickly you take cover behind a fallen piece of stone. Out of the darkness a series of dull impacts vibrate through the stone floor, and then just as quickly fall away into silence. It seems prudent to move on.

It is an easy decision to leave the Morg at rest, but the way ahead is a far more difficult proposition. As you move further north up the long reach of the King's Hall the piles of rubbish and debris become more awkward to negotiate. Mounds of mould-covered cloth, and tangled stacks of old furniture and ornamentation litter the floor. The Hordim seem to have spent considerable effort tearing down anything that reminds them of the previous occupants of this great fortress.

It takes some time before you find a position far enough away from the sleeping Morg that you can relax your guard and concentrate more on your surroundings. With the light cast by your meagre lantern it is difficult to see much of either side of the hall. The way ahead disappears into the gloom, the darkness of your path obscured even further by the rotting tapestries and furnishings. After much struggle you do, however, find yourself near the end of the hall. You are now a good 200 metres from the sleeping creature.

Turn to section 93.

419

The Hresh charges but you have an advantage it cannot defend against. Quickly you raise your sword, placing its sharp point directly before the face of the charging Hordim. In that moment the warrior's attention becomes focused upon the sharp edge of Than'durion and it is then that you perform the Shimmera. Moving swiftly to the side you trigger the deadly reaction that brings the Hresh to a standstill, its face changing quickly from a vision of grim determination to one of confusion.

Caught in a swirling vertigo the Hordim stumbles, reaching for the ground as it drops to one knee in an attempt to steady itself. Struggling against the effects of this lethal flaw purposefully built into the Hresh by their ancient masters the warrior cannot defend itself. Now helpless you have the one opportunity you need to deliver a single lethal blow. You take it, and the Hresh falls heavily to the floor, stricken with a gushing wound to its neck.

Quickly you search the body for any useful items and find that its leather armour is not a bad fit. If you do not possess armour of your own you may use it. This armour however, is not made for the use of men. If you decide to wear this armour it will afford a +1 armour bonus to your combat value, but will have a -2 reduction to your agility attribute during any agility tests. (Note this reduction in agility

on your status sheet and increase your combat value by 1 point to account for your improved protection). You also find a dagger and a length of rope. If you wish to keep any of these items record them on your status sheet.

After finishing this distasteful task you turn again to consider the curious words etched above the second door. As your sword drips onto the cold floor, you recall the old stories of how the Stone Kings collected taxes on goods that crossed their Kingdom's borders. This "Custom's House" must have been a collection point for these taxes. You sense the possibility of rials (silver coin) nearby.

Do you wish to try the door? If so, go to section 132. If you choose not to do so, go to section 14.

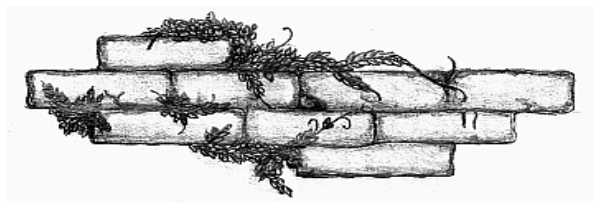
420

Even as you consider the thought three men rush from the undergrowth at your right, one grabbing at Pallenten's reins, the other two reaching for your arm in an attempt to pull you from your horse. It is a reckless attempt, but they have the advantage of surprise and succeed in dragging you from your saddle. In an ungainly tangle of arms and legs you fall heavily upon the bandits, laying them all low as each of you struggle to regain a footing. One punch is all you need to release the grip that one of the men has on your arm, and quickly you find your feet, drawing your sword as your assailants rise to meet your challenge. The fall has not been without cost however. You can feel the hot tendrils of a torn muscle in your left shoulder, but it is not serious, and undaunted you point your sword at the chest of the nearest bandit.

In that moment you feel the balance of the confrontation shift. The three men are a motley collection; two are young, probably no older than yourself, but they look unkempt and desperate. The third is much older, and as you stand your ground he looks furtively at the other two before turning on his heels. No word comes from the remaining bandits. Instead they spread out, keeping beyond the reach of your longer sword. They want your horse and whatever else you may have of value. You are not going to give it to them.

These bandits are too desperate to let you leave peacefully and you will be fighting at a slight disadvantage. The fall from Pallenten has come at a cost of 2 endurance points. Deduct these points from your

Endurance prior to beginning combat. The first Bandit has a Combat Value of 15 and an Endurance of 10; the second a Combat Value of 16 and an Endurance of 8. Each must be fought separately. If you kill these men you may search the bodies if you wish. If this is your choice turn to section 451. If you do not wish to do so you can move on quickly by turning to section 416. If however, it is you who succumbs to their blades then it is here that your quest ends. In another life you may have better luck.



421

It is an urgent truth that you must make haste southward, but in your mind a suspicion is forming, one that will need to be confirmed. Quietly you ready your sword and take a tight grip on Pallenten's reins. In the gloom of the forest you stand for a moment and consider how wise it is to follow these creatures, but you need to confirm what has done such damage to the trees. If it is indeed Hordim then how you continue with your quest will be determined by what you find. With Pallenten close you make your way deeper into the undergrowth, following the tracks as they make their way to the west.

Around you the forest grows close and silent. Above the rustle of the wind you can hear nothing. There are no bird sounds, nor sign of animal or insect. The woodland has fallen quiet, as if a great fear has come to rest here and all things living have gone into hiding until it passes. Except for the wind there is no sound but your own footfalls, and the sharper beat of Pallenten's hooves as you follow your quarry into the trees.

Some three hundred metres further into the forest you come across another clearing. This clearing is larger than the one you rested in, and it is vandalised with the same strange markings upon all the trees at its edge. Within the shadows you wait, searching for any sign of danger. The eerie silence is total, and there seems to be nothing moving. Apart from the bellows-like breathing of Pallenten at your side you appear to be alone. With no apparent danger at hand you

move out into the open, leaving Pallenten within the trees. There is nothing much to see, but on the grass at its centre you make an appalling discovery. Under a blanket of flies you pull apart a hastily made bark covering. It reveals a mound of ash and rotting, half-cooked carcasses; the remains you think of many different kinds of forest animals and birds, and at least one hapless soldier. Something has stopped here and taken the time to kill and eat everything that could be found in the area.

In the warmth of the morning the cooking mound is a stinking mess; at least three days old, and surrounded by a circular boundary of flattened and bare earth. Looking about you make sure you are still alone, then kneel and make a closer examination of the circle. It appears that a huge number of creatures sat here, tightly packed as they consumed their feast. It is between the ash-mound and the circle of bare earth that you discover something else as well. Embedded in the ground you find a small, broken hunting knife. Made of pure black crystal it is ornately carved, with a razor-sharp edge and a tightly woven handle of knotted hair. The blade however, is broken along most of its length and is unusable, but it tells you all you need to know. Its small size, and the four-toed impressions that you see all over the clearing leave no doubt in your mind that these creatures are indeed Hordim, and more specifically they are Morg.

How the Hordim could have made it into the lands of Men you cannot say. It is probable however, that the siege at Maenum has drawn the Rangers of the Watch closer to the great fortress, and this has left some of the mountain trails of the Great Rift open for the Hordim to cross southwards. But you know the reason does not matter, the fact that they are here is all that does. Before they are located and destroyed they will cause a lot of damage.

Standing, you call Pallenten to you and consider what you should do. The mound is a few days old, and there is a chance that the Morg have moved on, but you know little of them and cannot be sure. All of the tracks lead off to the west, once again disappearing into the forest, and you can see the terrain changes quickly, the ground rising into a series of wooded hills and hard earth. To follow the Morg any further will be difficult.

To continue to follow the Hordim will require the skills of a Huntmaster. If you have the Huntmastery skill and wish to follow the Morg turn to section 417. If you do not have this skill, or you can see no benefit in continuing westwards, turn to section 467.

422

For a moment you consider the door and then begin rummaging through your pack. Amongst your camp utensils is a small eating knife, and in the semi-darkness you take its thin blade and find that it fits neatly into the keyhole that sits squarely at the centre of the door. You have no particular skill in working such devices, but there is nothing to lose in making an attempt to unlock it. Crouched against the door, in the closed and cramped confines of the narrow tunnel, you desperately attempt to pick the lock. The door is of ancient construction and very well made, but after an hour of effort the barrel deep in the lock turns, and a loud grinding vibration heralds the drawing back of the heavy bars holding the door firmly in place.

Hands still greasy from the sweat of your endeavours you put your weight against the door and push. With almost no resistance the door springs outward, taking you completely by surprise. Before you have any opportunity to regain your balance you are pitched forward, straight out into...

Turn quickly to section 81.

423

The Elemental is a rising mass of tortured earth that looms over you, its form imbued with a malevolent hatred that you can almost smell in the dank air. It is indeed a creature born of EarthMagic, but of a type you have never felt before; and if it is magic you will need a weapon of like kind to defeat it. Before the Elemental can strike, you pull the Dragonclaw from its fastening and swing it in a wide arc. Instinctively the creature recoils and you know you have a blade that can cause it harm. Within the chamber the fight begins...

The Dragonclaw will provide a +5 bonus to your combat value for the duration of this combat. As previously stated the Elemental has a combat value of 19 and an endurance of 14. If you defeat the Elemental turn to section 63. If however, the creature overwhelms you and you are defeated, then it is here that your quest ends.



424

For a moment you stand back and consider the problem. Doors such as these present a particular difficulty because there are no identifiable locks or devices that might be worked upon. But this does not mean that it is beyond you. You have seen such devices before, they are sophisticated and cunning but all open in the same fashion. Somewhere along the edge of the doorway will be a hinged piece of stone. Depress it and the door will open.

Carefully you feel along the stone border, testing each for any sign of movement. It does not take long to find the trigger. At the base of the door a small piece of stone moves easily at your touch, and with no reason to believe it has been booby-trapped you push it firmly inwards. Immediately the door begins to slide upwards, disappearing into the wall above you.

Before you has opened a dark passageway. Quickly stepping over the threshold you walk into the corridor beyond. The passage is shrouded in shadow but you can see that it runs some distance ahead to the north. Just within the doorway is a metal bin, within which you find a number of old torches. Taking one of these, you light it and with the feeble illumination it provides make your way up the passage.

Record the use of this torch on your character sheet and then turn to section 210.



425

You have no time to waste but these runes are familiar to you, and you take a moment to search your memory. As the sounds of the Hordim grow closer at your back you remember where you have seen such carvings before. It is a glammer; a magical camouflage used to produce an illusion, usually covering a trap, or a secret entrance to a room or hidden passage. Usually the runes would be hidden as well, but the spell must be so old that it is starting to lose its effectiveness. It is just lucky that you can see them at all.

Carefully you place your hand upon the first of the steps, and feel it pass through the seemingly solid stone. Although you cannot be

absolutely sure what the glammer is hiding there is a good chance that a deep pit can be found here. You will have to jump the runes if you are to stay ahead of the Hordim.

Test your agility attribute. If you are successful turn to section 217. If you fail this test turn to section 41.

426

Carefully you handle the carved wood for you know what it is. This is a Healing Stick, an object of Hordim-made EarthMagic that will prove very useful to your quest. Although you have only heard of these talismans you know how they are used, and although it is old and worn you can feel some power remaining within it. In the right circumstances this stick will save your life.

(An Oera'dim Healing Stick can return all lost endurance to any creature who is aware of its power. This one is however, very old and almost depleted. It may be used only once, but will restore all lost endurance points to your character. At a time in your quest when you need its healing power most, it may be activated by laying its skull covered end across any open wound. The Healing Stick will bring your character back to full health and remove any strength or agility reductions you may have had from previous injury. The only restriction to its use is that it cannot be activated during combat.)

Quickly you place the stick in your pack and consider your next move. It seems prudent to take the time to care for your wounds, and the confines of this room appear as good a place as any to do so. Taking the Jotun's weapon you jam it into the door-frame, rendering it impossible to open from the other side, then attempt to drag the bodies of the Hordim into the corner. The Morg is easy, but the Jotun is a creature of enormous size, and he proves too much even for a Dwarvendim such as yourself. Instead you roll the Jotun out of the centre of the room, and settle yourself to tend the injuries you sustained in the fight. Luckily you have come out of the combat with less damage than you thought, and once satisfied that you have done all you can to salve your bruises and cuts you rummage through your pack for some food.

(If you have food add 6 endurance points to your endurance level before you continue. If you have neither food nor Nahla Bread you can cut a few strips of raw meat from the Sempaca carcass and eat that

instead. It is not as palatable but will restore 4 points to your endurance.)

After eating and then resting for a short time you feel your strength beginning to return. Now better able to go on, you rise to your feet, place your supplies into your backpack and quietly open the door. The Hall appears deserted.

If you haven't already done so will you;

Try the first door in the western wall? If so turn to section 173.

Try the second door in the western wall? If so turn to section 77.

Try the small open room at the end of the Kings Hall? If so turn to section 199.

427

The huge Jotun crashes through the furniture-strewn hall towards you. Like leaves in the wind broken tables and chairs are flung in all directions, the immense strength of the Hordim undeniable as it advances towards you. In the shadows you hesitate for only a heartbeat. There can be no doubt what you must do.

Quickly you ready your weapon and wait for the advance of the Jotun. It cannot be aware of what you are about to attempt, and in this light you can give it no chance to counter your assault upon it. When the Hordim is no more than five metres from your position you lift your weapon in front of you and wait for that moment when the Hordim's attention is focused upon it. When it comes you run to the left and slightly forward. On the debris littered floor the sudden movement has the desired effect, the Shimmera triggering the devastating vertigo that will bring the warrior down.

Caught by its own momentum the Jotun trips and falls heavily, its face a contortion of disbelief and anger as it desperately tries to regain control of its balance. In the gloom you see it shaking its head, its senses swept up in a spinning melee of vertigo and helplessness that it cannot overcome. It is the only opportunity you need to finish this combat. With one stroke of your blade the giant is dead, and in that lingering moment the hall becomes silent once again.

The Shimmera has worked but your quest demands that you move quickly. Turn to section 237.

428

It is a challenging leap, and one that on this day proves to be beyond you. With all the strength you can muster you throw yourself across the gaping chasm, a prodigious jump that even as you leap you know you have misjudged. Without any ability to help yourself you hit hard against the other side of the gap, your hands and feet scrambling for a hold on the cragged stone as your weight drags you back over the edge. One handhold you find, but even as you bear your weight upon it you can feel it coming away from the crumbling rock face. In a cloud of separating stone and earth you slip inexorably towards a certain doom in the abyss below.

Test your strength attribute once again. If you are successful turn to section 504. If you fail this test turn to section 520. Note that if you have chosen the Strong Back talent your character will automatically succeed in a test of this type, and if this is the case you should turn to section 504.

429

In the darkness you scabble around the edges of the rockfall, and find the wooden handle of your shovel caught beneath a press of heavy boulders. Choking in the dust you push aside the stones and drag the tool out of the grasp of the dirt and broken rock. At least with your shovel you will have a better chance of finding the remainder of your equipment. It is a job however, that will require care to execute.

Carefully you begin shovelling away the loose dirt that borders the rockfall. Above you, you can sense what remains of the stone ceiling shifting as you work, every shovel load changing the stability of what remains overhead. It is a painstaking business that takes you more than an hour to complete, but your labours are rewarded when you are able to pull the remains of your pack from the fall.

Quickly you check its contents and find everything covered in grit but luckily nothing damaged. At least in this matter Providence has been kinder to you. With your pack back in your possession you move further down the corridor and squat against its hard stone wall.

Dust from the trap lingers throughout the passage like a thin grimy fog. Breathing is difficult and your clothing is full of the remnants of the filth that had almost suffocated you. As the dust settles you decide it is best to get as clean as possible before continuing, and if you have

any left, eat some of your dwindling rations. There appears to be little chance of pursuit, but you realise you are in no state to defend yourself anyway. After getting rid of as much of the dirt from your clothing as you can you sit down for a short meal and rest.

(The food and rest will restore 6 points to your endurance. Remember that you cannot exceed your initial endurance value. If you do not have any food or Nahla Bread in your possession restore only two points to your endurance. The rest may not be much but it does allow you to recover somewhat from the effects of the trap. Record this on your character sheet before continuing).

After resting you prepare to move on. In your pack you still have a number of the torches you picked up from the passageway entrance. Taking one of these in hand you ignite it, and raising it above your head continue on eastwards.

Turn to section 104.

430

For a short time you crouch before the shining beam of light and consider its purpose. Your studies at the Temple tell you that this could be one of two things; an alarm designed to give away the position of unwanted visitors, or a Hordim device artificed to kill with a single touch. It is your understanding that both work in a similar fashion, and because of your training you know exactly how to disable them.

Carefully you follow the line of incandescent light across the width of the steps, to a small metal tube that extends slightly from the wall at your right. Without placing your hand into the beam you take an amount of dust from one of the steps and throw it into the steeply rising passage. In the confines of the stairway a slight breeze moves past you, a movement of air that propels the fine grit upwards. Immediately the dust glistens and smokes as it passes through a tracery of additional beams unseen in the darkness. This only confirms what you feared most, even a touch will bring a swift end, but thankfully the solution is simple. With the pommel of your sword you hammer the small tube flat, breaking the beam and dissolving away the web of hidden light.

Again you throw a small amount of dust before you, but this time

there is no sign of the deadly incandescence. Not for the last time do you give thanks for the foresight of your teachers at the Temple. You cannot waste any more time here however. It is time to move on.

Turn to section 59.

431

The Mutan is no easy opponent. Within the limited space it swings its axe, keeping you at bay as it attempts to force you backwards. It is a struggle that you must end quickly and you have little choice but to use the Shimmera to do so.

As the Hordim swings at you with its axe you point your sword directly at it, forcing the creature to focus momentarily on its edge as you rush towards it. At that moment you dodge to the side and watch as the Mutan stumbles, the induced vertigo of the Shimmera taking hold of the Hordim like a vice. Desperately it throws its axe out into the corridor as it staggers against the nearest wall, one arm against its head, the other trying to maintain a balance against the cold stone, but it is to no avail. The Mutan is helpless, caught in the swirling grip of an uncontrollable vertigo.

Without hesitation you end the fight, driving your blade through its heaving chest. In a spasm of pain the creature topples to the floor and lays still. The battle is over. In the quiet you lay aside your weapon and give yourself the opportunity to catch your breath. As you do so you hear something, a slight crackling sound that comes from the Mutan's dead form. Quickly you realise it is the Hordim's blood.

Deduct this use of the Shimmera from your character sheet then turn to section 128.

432

From your vantage astride Pallenten you wonder at the gall of the old woman, but you know there is a chance it will be money well spent. There is little that information brokers like Anawyn don't know about the comings and goings of the frontier, and it would not be the last time you would probably part with good money for their wares. Quickly you give over two coins and wait for Anawyn to respond. For her part she takes the silver pieces and hides them within the remains of her clothing, then points to the south.

"Heard from a number of travellers comin' north that the Army's all

over the place. Thugs all of 'em. I hear they been stoppin' honest folk, takin' stuff that ain't theirs, and generally makin' life miserable. Don't care myself really. Don't have any inklin' to make a trip south but you might want to know. West is a whole different kettle. Heard from some farm boys only yesterday that rumours are going around about the Horde. Seems a few of the outlyin' farmsteads near Melem's Fork have been hit bad and everybody's got the wind up. Don't like anybody's chances with those types hanging about. Bands of 'em roamin' the wilds its said; who would'a thought eh? Reckon I'd think twice I would if I was takin' the West Road."

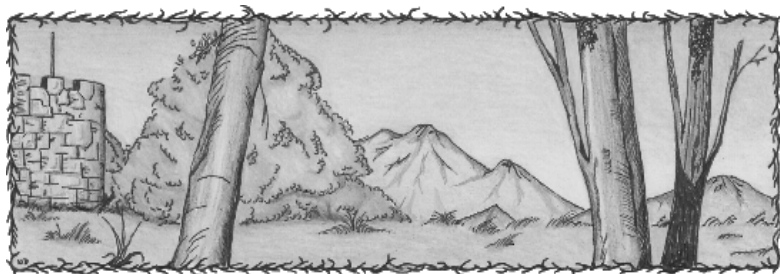
For a moment you think on Anawyn's words. The south has its dangers, as does the west, but in times such as these there can be no safe way forward. Quickly you come to a decision and thank her for her time.

"It has been good to see you again Anawyn. Try not to con too many passers-by of their hard-earned money."

Anawyn laughs and hands you a small bottle of beer. "Somethin' for the road Master Vesh. Keep safe if you can."

You smile and wave goodbye. Time is passing and it is something you do not have a lot of.

If you wish to continue on the South Road to Das Frontier turn to section 255. If you would rather take your chances on the West Road turn to section 225. If you feel that leaving the roads and taking a cross-country route to the Devkraager Tor is best turn to section 261. If you have not done so record the bottle of beer on your character sheet before continuing.



433

The morning brings with it a clearing sky and lighter winds. Deep reds and orange colour the horizon as you look out to the east, and for a time you stand in the knee-high grass watching the first of the rising suns as it heralds the new day. To the west you can hear ground birds running through the tall grass in search of insects but you take little notice. The stiffness in your cold joints takes up your full attention as you try to stretch your muscles after a restless sleep. Deciding to now risk a small fire you find a few pieces of wood and make yourself a hot meal. As you eat you can hear Pallenten grazing on the plains beyond the entrance to the outcrop. After clearing away your eating utensils you walk out into the field and call her. At first you cannot see her, and in those few seconds a small measure of anxiety creeps into your voice as you call again. Almost immediately an answering whinny comes from behind a pile of large boulders. After a moment the big horse trots out from behind the rocks and breaks out into a gallop before coming to a halt before you.

As the horse stands there you can sense that something is wrong. She is motionless, a look of unease in her eyes. Suddenly, as if by some distant command, she rears on her hind legs and turns and races for the far off forest road.

For a moment you do not understand what has happened, but then you remember Tak Lovar's words. Pallenten was only to take you as far as the foothills. Now the horse was gone, and the rest of your trek must continue on foot. For some time you watch the great horse disappear into the haze of the morning and the forests beyond. Your task will be all the more difficult now without her strength to aid you. It is easy to admit to yourself that you had come to depend upon that horse a lot.

Collecting your belongings you belt your sword to your waist, shoulder your pack and begin the last leg of your journey to Stoneholme.

The fitful sleep does not return much of your strength but the hot food makes you feel a measure better. Restore four points to your endurance rating and then turn to section 107.



434

You are not fast enough to evade the swing of the beast. With a blow to the chest that crushes the air from your lungs, you are flung over the edge of the cliff-face, falling towards the forested valley floor far below. In this short moment you know that you are about to die. In the rush of the wind you can taste blood in your mouth, and feel the trembling gurgle of a lung pierced by bone. Strangely there is no pain as your ragged body descends, but in those few heartbeats before you hit the ground a surprising calm settles upon you. You are about to die, and there is nothing that can be done to evade the impact to come.

In those moments of clarity you realise that you have been the victim of a Dweo'gorga, a shape-shifter of the Ancient World, and can do little but wait helplessly as the canopy of the forest below rushes up to greet you. Without emotion you search your memories for anything you can remember about the Ancient One that has killed you, but all you are sure of is that such creatures are the relentless servants of anyone who holds the talisman that controls them. Someone has set that beast upon you, and they have succeeded. In a bone-jarring crash of flailing limbs and scattering equipment you hit the trees and all goes dark.

It is said in the lands of the Faeyen that a man knows his true self only at that time when Providence delivers him from certain death. In this life you have a task to complete and, all evidence to the contrary, you are not dead yet. Turn to section 453.

435

To try and climb out of the pit seems too dangerous an enterprise and instead you look to the shimmering reflection of the waters below. Quickly you do your best to bind your pack and sword tighter to your body. With the smouldering remains of the nest sending a pall of ash into the air you take a deep breathe and jump from the side of the pit.

Without a sound you fall into the darkness, your body a plummeting shadow within the ever increasing gloom of the pit. As the dark waters below rush up to find you there is little you can do but prepare yourself for the blow, and it comes as a muffled explosion of water that embraces you firmly in its cold grasp.

For a moment you blackout, your senses reeling as you are dragged

down into the depths. Straining for air you push yourself upwards, reaching for the surface as you try and save yourself. No matter what you mean to live, and in that dark place you find the strength to make it to the surface, gasping for air as you rise out of the water.

There is little light and no warmth, and as you clear your eyes you can see that you have fallen into a wide natural cavern, filled with water and with only one obvious landfall. Upon the far edge of the lake is a narrow rise of land, nothing more than a pebble beach, but it will do. Purposefully you swim for the pebbles and find solid ground beneath your feet only a few metres from the cavern's edge. It is as you drag yourself out of the water that the real hopelessness of your position becomes clear.

At all sides the cavern is a huge arching chamber of crumbling stone. Even as you look into the darkness you can hear chunks of rock falling into the water. Each is a clear echoing crash of sound that reverberates through the chamber, being lost in the shadows as you stand against the water's edge. A quick survey of the thin strip of land shows that there is no way off the beach, and you have lost all your equipment to the dark waters. Without food you will not last a week in this cold. It dawns quickly as an unavoidable truth that you may have escaped the Arachnari but your fate has been sealed nonetheless. Quietly you sit upon the cold pebbles and wait. In this cold place you have a choice between drowning in the black waters or waiting for the metal collar at your neck to tighten. Either way your quest is over.

THE END

436

In a way you cannot help yourself. As a thief such lists have always been of vital importance as a source of information, but for reasons never considered by the Guild of Administrators who published them. To those who might peruse the lists out of pure curiosity they are a simple accounting of all who have fallen foul of the authorities. For the Guild they stand as a proud record of the effectiveness of the Kalborean Union in keeping its citizenry safe. Little could they realise how important the lists were to the very rogues they wished to eliminate.

It is a truth that it does not take much these days to find your way onto the lists, however for a thief they have long been a vital tool for

avoiding capture. Most of the banditry committed on the frontier has always been conducted under the loose control of a number of organised criminal networks. A thief's ill-gotten gains could be easily passed on to a network contact, and then moved through an underground smuggling operation that funnelled money and contraband to the more settled areas of southern Kalborea. There the goods would be properly fenced and a reasonable commission returned to those who stole them.

It could not be called a perfect enterprise by any means but it had served its purpose for generations, and the lists provided everyone who had goods to fence a clear understanding of which networks had been compromised, and who was currently safe to deal with. To read through the lists was a habit that the criminal element of Kalborea indulged in religiously. It was a hard habit to break and one that may help you now.

Quickly you guide Pallenten through the crowd and position her so that she might give you some space near the wall, and block most prying eyes from what you are doing. Carefully you trawl the lists, searching out names you recognise and hunting for any clue to whether any of the contacts you have in the south have become unsafe. Thankfully you find nothing on the wanted lists but a short addendum concerning current executions gives you reason to pause. Amongst a line of unfortunate souls that are about to feel the sharp edge of Kalborean hospitality you find one name that makes you wince. It is Dahl Anders and it is a poor pass he has found himself in.

Dahl had been your friend since you first found your way onto the streets. He had been much older than yourself when you had first met, one of the Brethren of the Deep Guild and a man with no love of the Union. On the streets you could not have survived alone, but he had taken you under his protection and it had been from him that you had learned the first important lessons of your trade. It is no exaggeration to say that you owe him a lot, and in the passing years had never found a good enough way to repay him. From what you can glean from the list he is to be held for one week pending transport to Das Frontiere, and then executed for smuggling. It is a situation that claws at your conscience, however the metal collar at your neck does not give you much in the way of options. To mount a jailbreak here in Miller's Crossing would require time and the right distractions to be successful. If you are to live to complete your mission there is no time to help your friend.

With Pallenten's reins gripped tightly in hand you turn from the lists and lead her back out into the growing traffic of the day. It is true that you can do nothing about helping your friend at this time, but you know that if you survive the days ahead you may yet deliver him from the tender mercies of the Kalborean Union. For the moment however, you must return to your quest.

Remember the name Dahl Anders. It is not important to your current quest but may prove of great value in the future. Now you must decide how you wish to make for the south gates. If you believe that there is merit in taking the side road turn to section 409. If you decide it will be better to remain within the crowds and continue south along the main thoroughfare turn to section 372.

437

If the object is of value it will be worth a few minutes spent retrieving it. Carefully you lower yourself over the edge of the well and begin to climb down into the shadows below. The descent is easy but as you lower yourself further into the depths you encounter a thick slime covering most of the well that reaches a few metres above the waterline. It is too slick to allow any further descent but you find a foothold against a broken piece of stone that may just allow you to reach down and pull the medallion from its resting place. It will require a measure of agility to reach it however.

Test your agility attribute. If you are successful turn to section 490. If you fail this test turn to section 486.

438

The evidence you have uncovered regarding the Morg gives you reason to consider carefully which way you should go. You have taken too much time finding your way through this forest, but the knowledge that the Hordim are so close is a truth better known than discovered too late. For a time you consider what you should do, but the choice has been taken out of your hands. Pallenten has eaten all your rations and you will have to get more before you can continue. Miller's Crossing must be your next objective. There you will find food and anything else you might need. It is a decision easy to make. Too

many times you have felt the pangs of hunger and you do not feel disposed to endure them again if there is an alternative.

Quickly you mount Pallenten and head into the south-east. The ground is open, a wide grassland of undulating rises that Pallenten takes to easily. It is your hope that by taking a heading south of east you will intersect the South Road a good distance beyond Baellum. There the road should be clear and your journey will be the easier for it. About you there is little to be seen though. The grasslands extend for a great distance in all directions, and but for a few old ruins, mostly abandoned farmhouses and other buildings, you can see nothing that might indicate you are anything but alone in these wildlands. For the moment that is exactly as you prefer it.

Upon the grassland Pallenten is a dark arrow, the world a rush of pounding hooves and wind-blown grasses. As the great horse thunders on you find yourself lost in your thoughts, the possibilities of your quest stretching out before you. It is a strange circumstance that you find yourself in, and there is much you believe the Kalboreans have not told you, not the least being how you will remove the metal collar when your quest is done.

It does not take long to find the South Road. Just to the south of a ruined homestead you cross the highway and come to a halt.

Before you stretches a clear road to Miller's Crossing. Turning to all four directions you scan the horizon for danger. All is clear except for the north-west where you can see storm-clouds building. It will be best if you can find shelter in town before the storm hits. Turn to section 251

439

There is indeed something familiar about the wood but it is Hordim-made and there can be no good to be found in keeping it. Deliberately you throw it against the far wall and settle yourself near the door. It seems prudent to take the time to care for your wounds, and the confines of this room appear as good a place as any to do so. Carefully you remove your upper garments and feel for damage. Luckily you have come out of the combat with less injury than you first thought, and once satisfied that you have done all you can to salve your bruises and cuts you rummage through your pack for some food.

(If you have food add 6 endurance points to your endurance level before you continue. If you have neither food nor Nahla Bread you can cut a few strips of raw meat from the Sempaca carcass and eat that instead. It is not as palatable but will restore 4 points to your endurance.)

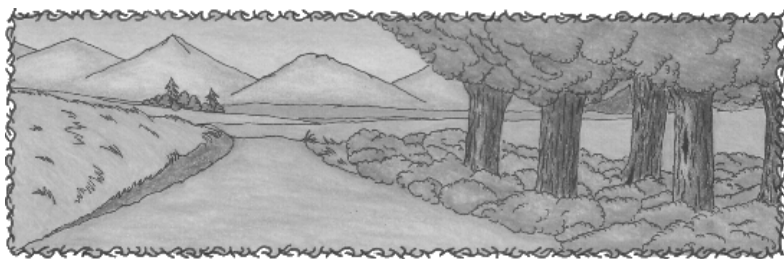
After eating and then resting for a short time you feel your strength beginning to return. Now better able to go on, you rise to your feet, place your supplies into your backpack and quietly open the door. The Hall appears deserted.

If you haven't already done so will you;

Try the first door in the western wall? If so turn to section 173.

Try the second door in the western wall? If so turn to section 77.

Try the small open room at the end of the Kings Hall? If so turn to section 199.



440

For a short time you stand amongst the trees and consider what you must do. The hardest part of your quest is now before you, however the Nab's touch is something that cannot be lightly discarded. You feel no pain, but the effects of the Trial have left you drained. The pain of your healing is a memory that cannot easily be forgotten, and as you wait within the cool shadows of the forest there is a strange lingering effect that you sense will require rest to shake off. As you check your body you see little sign of the torn flesh and broken bones that would have otherwise taken your life. In their place there now lingers a strange sensation, an uncomfortable weakness not unlike glue holding together pieces of wood that has not had time to set. With each passing minute you feel those bonds strengthening, and rather than start immediately you decide it will be best to take a few moments to rest.

Quickly you survey your surrounds for a safe place to wait out the

effects of the Trial. Ideally you would prefer being out of sight as you are in no condition for any further combat until your wounds are fully bonded, but as you look around it is clear that you must do something else first. All about you is scattered pieces of your clothing and other gear, spread through the trees and undergrowth, caught upon bough and bush as it rained down from above. You have no recollection of when you lost your pack, however its contents now lay strewn through the woodland, and it is best that you collect them before you relax. On the grass close to your position you find your sword buried almost to the hilt in the soft earth; a short distance into the undergrowth your pack hangs awkwardly from the jagged end of a broken branch. Thankfully it has sustained only a torn strap, and as you slowly search the area you find all of its scattered contents, some items the worse for the fall, but all still serviceable.

When you have recovered your equipment you turn to the easier task of finding a place where you might rest safely. Close to the clearing stands an enormous spreading Oak, and it proves your best sanctuary. Within the shadows thrown by its huge branches you find a narrow hollow between two delving roots and determine that there you can rest unseen. Quickly you organise yourself against its rough bark, settling yourself and equipment carefully into the tree's rough embrace. Within this small nook you attempt to relax. In the quiet of the forest you have to admit that it is a strange feeling. You cannot remember the last time you allowed yourself a few moments to do absolutely nothing, and as you listen to the muted sounds of the woodland you can feel yourself slowly being pulled together, the last remnants of the Trial acting upon you. But in this quiet place you cannot sleep. It is a luxury that you can ill afford, so instead you find yourself watching the flow of the wind through the trees, and listening for the small sounds of forest creatures as they go about the exertions of their own lives. In the shadows of the spreading Oak it is a moment of complete rest that you know will not come again.

As you wait for the effects of the Trial to lessen you notice also that the forest itself is changing. The colder months are close, and in preparation for the chill to come the air about you is filled with the detritus of the Autumn fall. The ground is already disappearing beneath a cover of deep orange and brown, and as you rest the wind begins to strengthen, a bluster touched with cold and followed with showers of browning leaves. It would be possible, you think, that in such a place one could forget what was ahead, and instead choose to

remain, safe from the imminent dangers of your quest, but the cold metal at your neck is a reminder that you cannot ignore. After an hour you know it is time to move on.

Quickly you re-shoulder your pack and sheathe Than'durion. Against the cold you pull your travel cloak close and look to the trail. It is somewhere ahead that Stoneholme must be found and with renewed energy you return to your quest.

(As you have allowed the Trial to complete its work you may restore your maximum endurance level to its initial value. You may also increase your strength attribute by 1 extra point if it is not already at the maximum value of 11. This will also increase your overall combat value by 1 as well.)

In the full light of day you find your way along the old pathway. It is clearly marked against the encroaching vegetation of the forest floor but is very old; a relic you think, of an age before Men came to this world. For some time it meanders through the forest, keeping a northerly heading before turning to the west. About you the woodland closes in, but the trees are not close and as you travel you can see the remains of large standing stones littered across the valley floor. Each has been placed upon a platform of flecked granite and rise out of the undergrowth as dark shapes hidden within the darker shadows of the forest. With these monoliths as your only companions you run along the trail, keeping to its ancient path as it winds upwards. Swiftly the terrain changes, the valley floor left behind as you begin to climb a series of undulating foothills. Without pause you keep to the trail and become more convinced as you travel that it is indeed taking you towards the entrance you seek.

In the hour after midday the trail veers again southwards and then runs parallel to a series of low cliffs that rise against the hills. For a time you follow the line of the cliffs, but within a narrow cleft bordered by steep walls of crumbling stone you find a reason to stop, the path turning towards a wide archway carved deeply into the cliff-face. It is a smooth arch of finely cut stone, rising from a wide threshold to a keystone high overhead. The curve of the arch is covered in pictographs and glyphs that are unknown to you, but certainly not Man or Hordim made. In the half-light of the deep fissure you inspect the strange markings but cannot determine what they might mean. The words however, are not the most unusual aspect

of what you have found. Reaching almost three times your height, the arch appears as a gateway but it is filled with smooth stone, as if it has been wrought to look like an entrance without actually being so. Within the shadows of the grotto you wonder as to its purpose, but there appears no reason to linger and once again you return to the trail.

Beyond the break in the cliffs the path again rises upon a series of heavily wooded hills, before emerging onto a narrow platform of stone. Upon this shelf of rock you come to a stop, confronted by a sheer cliff reaching many hundreds of metres above you. At your right the remains of a enormous rockfall blocks any movement to the west. Upon this ancient stone platform you can see the faded outline of your path meandering along the edges of a thin shelf of rock to the east, before turning out of sight. As you look upwards the massif of the Devkraager Tor rises beyond the reach of the cliff-face and you know that you have met the mountain upon its north-eastern edge. The entrance to Stoneholme should be found more to the south and following the path remains as your only option. Carefully you traverse the crumbling edges of the stone platform and take again to the ancient path.

The early afternoon is spent negotiating the rocky base of the mountain. Its weathered face is cracked and broken, strewn with rockfalls and enormous flows of gravel that trickle noisily down from the high cliffs above. The forest has grown thickly in places up to the base of the Devkraager Tor, and you find you have to make a number of wide detours to get around falls of rubble that have brought down large areas of the surrounding timber.

In the end your persistence pays off. Some two hours into your circumnavigation of the mountain, and just as you are making a difficult detour around a huge tangle of fallen trees, you are confronted by the impassable obstacle of a stone platform some ten metres high. Although the stones are worn, and vines and other creeping plants have grown into its chiselled joins, you can see that it is Dwarvendim-made and exactly what you are looking for. Retreating back into the forest you make your way carefully about the platform's edge, then out into the trees to find a spot from which you can properly consider what you have discovered. Amongst a clump of small pines and low brush you find a hiding place from which you can survey the platform better.

Through the thick bushes you peer out at the massive entrance to

the fortress of Stoneholme. Although showing the effects of long neglect the entrance remains awe-inspiring in its scale. Shaped as a huge archway carved directly into the face of the mountain, the images of two immense Dwarvendim Warrior-Kings have been wrought; arms raised as if they are holding the weight of the Devkraager Tor on their huge shoulders. Under these images the open cavern that is the entranceway is black, the light of day swallowed completely in the darkness of its interior. From the entrance a wide polished stone platform extends outwards for more than fifty metres, at each corner the intricately carved statue of a Dwarvendim warrior stands in full battle armour. A long flight of white marble stairs rise from the green grass of a large clearing at its base and reach upwards to the stone platform. In times past this marble staircase would have met a road leading to the east, but this has long since disappeared. Gleaming white balustrades of carved stone border the platform and stairs on all sides.

Leaning back against the sturdy trunk of a young pine you relax for a moment, taking in the rough grandeur of the Imperial Entrance and the encroaching greenery of the forest that surrounds it. Within this dark treasure-house, somewhere deep within its cold, silent halls lies the Tellandra and it has somehow fallen upon you to find it. It seems a pity to squander the remains of such a fine day by attempting to enter this great fortress but you know you must.

After your efforts in finding the entrance you decide it is an opportune time to take a meal. Only Providence knows when you may have another opportunity to feed yourself, so you take a ration from your pack and rest in the shade of the Pines as you eat. (Withdraw one ration from your pack and record this on your character sheet. The rest you take will restore all endurance points you may have lost in the course of your journey so far. If you have no food or Nahla Bread available only restore a maximum of four points to your endurance.)

When you have finished you ready yourself for what is to come. In the bright afternoon sun you organise your equipment and carefully survey the entrance to Stoneholme. There is only one way in, and after ensuring that you can see no danger upon the open ground, make for the stone platform and the base of the marble stairs.

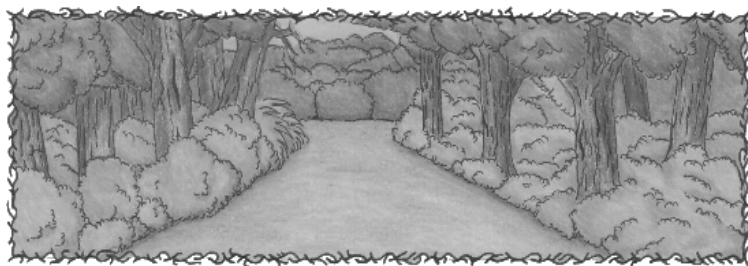
You must move inside quickly. Turn to section 197.

441

The Town Hall appears to be your best chance for shelter from the storm. Quickly you nudge Pallenten towards the crumbling structure and bring her to a halt at its front steps. With the rumbling menace of the tempest at your back you dismount and carefully urge your horse up the weathered steps of the building. In its day it would have been an imposing structure, a wide arched entrance covered by a large portico. On this day however, it stands as a broken ruin, but one that might just save you.

Through the archway you take yourself and Pallenten into a short entranceway and then into the half-demolished remains of a large meeting hall. It is within this open space that you begin to feel you are being watched.

If you have a small shard of stonewood in your possession turn to section 456. If you do not have a piece of stonewood turn to section 478.



442

Even as you consider the thought a set of tracks catches your eye. Impressed into the soft earth at the side of the road are three distinct sets of bootprints, leading from the edge of the harder road surface into the undergrowth at its verge. Even from your vantage you can see that they are fresh, maybe minutes old. Immediately you bring Pallenten to a halt and draw your sword, listening for some hint as to whether the owners of these boots are still close. Your answer comes quickly.

From the undergrowth at your right three men rush your position, one grabbing at Pallenten's reins, the other two reaching for your arm in an attempt to pull you from your horse. It is a reckless attempt, one you do not feel disposed to let succeed. In one fluid movement you slip

from Pallenten's back, your sword at the ready. All three of the bandits come to a halt, wicked looking short-swords pointing at your throat, but their advantage of surprise is gone.

In that moment you feel the balance of the confrontation shift. The three men are a motley collection; two are young, probably no older than yourself, but they look unkempt and desperate. The third is much older, and as you stand your ground he looks furtively at the other two before turning on his heels. No word comes from the remaining bandits. Instead they spread out, keeping beyond the reach of your longer sword. They want your horse and whatever else you may have of value. You are not going to give it to them.

These bandits are too desperate to let you leave. The first has a Combat Value of 15 and an Endurance of 10; the second a Combat Value of 16 and an Endurance of 8. Each must be fought separately. If you kill these men you may search the bodies. If this is your choice turn to section 451. If you do not wish to do so you can move on quickly by turning to section 416. If however, it is you who succumbs to their blades then it is here that your quest ends. In another life you may have better luck.

443

In an instant you decide that there is nothing to be gained by standing against the Arachnari. It is simply too big, and too lethal to fight. Instead you throw your torch at the beast and move quickly for the nearest wall. Without thinking you begin to climb, ignoring crumbling stone and showers of ancient grit as you try and put distance between yourself and the monstrous spider. It is an attempt that may succeed but for one unforeseen circumstance.

Behind you the Arachnari flicks aside the torch and moves after you. In a shower of sparks the brand hits the thick matted web and ignites its thick fibres. Before the huge spider can make it half way to the edge of the web the fire takes hold, spreading across the centuries of desiccated refuse and food scraps. It is a conflagration that erupts in seconds into an inferno.

Desperately you haul yourself away from the rising tower of flame, your hope that the spreading blaze will destroy the Arachnari before it can take you. Against the distorting heat you climb, and it is then that you hear the creature's death-cry. Out of the centre of the fire the

monster jumps for the wall only a few dozen metres from your position. Alive with flame the Arachnari screams into the burning pit and strikes out with its long arms, being consumed even as it attempts to kill you. In a thrashing spasm of pain the spider lashes out, before losing its footing and falling out into the pit. As you watch it falls, illuminating the edges of the great abyss as it plummets to its final destruction. The Arachnari Queen is gone, but you are not yet safe.

About you the fire builds, consuming the thick webbing and finding new paths into the many burrows that line the nest. Quickly each of these holes become new infernos and soon explosions begin to shake the edges of the pit. Whatever the Arachnari had hoarded over the years is now erupting in gushes of flame and smoke, and the fire is getting closer.

Before you can move more than thirty metres from the nest the flames reach you, consuming the fine meshes of web that cover all the stones. It is impossible to avoid the heat and as you reach out for a new handhold a massive explosion rocks the pit. In a rolling concussion of heat and flame you hang by one arm, your only chance of survival to be found in the strength of your remaining handhold.

Test your strength attribute. If you are successful you are able to hold on and should turn to section 479. If you fail this test the explosion shakes you from the wall, throwing you out into the abyss. If this is to be your fate turn to section 473.

444

You know enough of the lore of stonewood to recognise that shards of the precious wood react in this fashion to the close proximity of the Shan'duil itself. Possibly there is the remains of an old temple of the Ancient World buried somewhere beneath the streets of Kal Murda, or even a tributary of the River of Life itself surging in the bedrock below the village's tightly paved roadways. Whatever the reason your piece of Stonewood has sensed its presence and now radiates the power of EarthMagic that is the stonewood's to command.

Carefully you hold the stonewood between your fingers and watch as its pulsing energy settles into a constant blue aura that surrounds your hand. If your knowledge of lore is well remembered you need only speak a word of Haer'al across its surface to uncover whatever is the cause of its activation. To your surprise the word required comes

to mind easily and before you think on the consequences of what you are doing you whisper it.

:ne'epahl:

Even before the word fades against the backdrop of the approaching storm your world changes.

Turn to section 463.

445

In the violence of the battle you do not see any point in remaining within the power of the stonewood shard. Quickly you whisper the word "epahl" across the stonewood and watch as the terrible visage of the fall of Kal Murda dissolves into the more imminent reality of the approaching storm. Around you the ruins of the settlement are as you have previously found them but it takes a few moments for you to readjust. After the power of the stone dissipates you are left dazed, your thoughts overcome by what you have witnessed.

A powerful blast of thunder to the north shifts your focus away from the visions of the past to your pressing need for shelter, and you see quickly that there is none to be found here. You have seen the Town Hall in all its untouched glory but it stands now as a mere shell. With no roof it extends upon its foundations as nothing more than a facade and a few broken walls. Your shelter from the coming storm will have to be found elsewhere.

In the encroaching darkness you guide Pallenten along the western reach of the main thoroughfare and realise quickly that Kal Murda can provide no sanctuary. The relentless assault of Jotun hammers has left the town a desolation of crumbled walls and fallen stonework, and there can be no safe cover from the storm within its ruined confines.

Without any further hesitation you mount Pallenten and turn her towards the western gate. Nudging her forward you quicken her to a canter. As thunder rolls along the plains you can feel the growing power of the winds as they throw debris along the road ahead of you. It is within this melee of shifting gales that the village comes to life.

Within the bluster there are no shapes or ghostly moving forms, just the wind and the remembered cries of a thousand butchered souls

that echo silently through the desolate streets. Embraced by the power of the strengthening winds ill-defined and furtive shadows move at the corner of your eye, never seen in the open but there nonetheless. No matter the cause it is easy to imagine the restless souls of the dead drawing life from the storm and it sends a cold chill down your spine. With the tempest at your back you hurry Pallenten along all the faster, making a hurried exit through the western gate. As you pass out onto the plain you are glad to be out of the village, and equally glad that you made your journey through Kal Murda without having to confront any Hordim, real or not.

Turn to section 301.

446

You stand before the charging Arachnari and know you have no choice but to fight. Whether you jump, or try and climb away, you know this beast will not let you go easily. With Than'durion in hand you stand your ground, sure that it will be a miracle if you survive.

The Arachnari Queen has a combat value of 24 and an endurance of 18. It is an armoured monster that has only one weakness, and you hold it in your other hand. Your torch throws a dim light but it is enough to dazzle the night-sensitive eyes of the giant spider. Whilst you keep your torch in your hand you should increase your Combat Value by 4 points. If you lose three combat rounds in a row the torch will have been knocked out of your grasp and your CV must be returned to its normal level. If you win this combat turn to section 471. If you lose this battle turn to section 460.

447

To try and climb out of the pit seems too dangerous an enterprise so instead you look to the shimmering reflection of the waters below. Dwarvendim have been known to survive falls of this magnitude and with time pressing as urgently as the collar against your neck you decide it is the best way forward. Quickly you bind your pack and sword tighter to your body and tear a hole in the matted web with your bare hands. After a short prayer for Providence to be kind you jump.

Without a sound you fall into the darkness, your body a plummeting shadow within the ever increasing gloom of the pit. As the dark waters below rush up to find you there is little you can do but prepare yourself for the blow, and it comes as a muffled explosion of water that embraces you firmly in its cold grasp.

For a moment you blackout, your senses reeling as you are dragged down into the depths. Straining for air you push yourself upwards, reaching for the surface as you try and save yourself. No matter what you mean to live, and in that dark place you find the strength to make it to the surface, gasping for air as you rise out of the water.

There is little light and no warmth, and as you clear your eyes you can see that you have fallen into a wide natural cavern, filled with water and with only one obvious landfall. Upon the far edge of the lake is a narrow rise of land, nothing more than a pebble beach, but it will do. Purposefully you swim for the pebbles and find solid ground beneath your feet only a few metres from the cavern's edge. It is as you drag yourself out of the water that the real hopelessness of your position becomes clear.

At all sides the cavern is a huge arching chamber of crumbling stone. Even as you look into the darkness you can hear chunks of rock falling into the water. Each is a clear echoing crash of sound that reverberates through the chamber, being lost in the shadows as you stand against the water's edge. A quick survey of the thin strip of land shows that there is no way off the beach, and you have lost all your equipment to the dark waters. Without food you will not last a week in this cold. It dawns quickly as an unavoidable truth that you may have escaped the Arachnari but your fate has been sealed nonetheless. Quietly you sit upon the cold pebbles and wait. In this cold place you have a choice between drowning in the black waters or waiting for the metal collar at your neck to tighten. Either way your quest is over.

THE END

448

For a moment you peer back into the gloom of the well and wonder at the unusual position the medallion has wedged itself into. It is far enough down the shaft that nobody could have accidentally lodged it there, yet it protrudes from the wall as if it has been deliberately

forced into a crack. There is no doubt that the object has been placed there, and it is a tantalising thing indeed, but a voice in the back of your thoughts begs caution.

You have had some experience in the wilds of Kalborea, and the first lesson you ever learned had been that nothing is accidental. If the medallion has been wedged into the wall then it is for a purpose, and you wonder as to what that purpose might be. It could be nothing more than someone's last desperate attempt to hide something from the Horde before everything was taken from them, or more probably it serves as a bait for one of the Horde's lethal traps. Either is possible but experience tells you to tread warily.

If you would still like to climb down into the well and retrieve the medallion turn to section 437. If you believe that a careful traveller should listen to their gut feelings and move on quickly, turn to section 455.

449

Standing upon the crate the tall Faeyen is a comical sight to say the least. He seems to know you; at least he has picked you out of the crowd for some reason, but you do not know him. The Merchant is not one of your local smuggling contacts nor does he seem familiar from any previous meeting. You can only be sure that he is not a part of the town's criminal underworld and that makes it all the more curious as to why he might want to speak with you.

If you are interested in talking with the Merchant turn to section 367. If you would rather ignore him and make your way to the tavern turn to section 398

450

"Sire, wait!" The boy is running towards you, waving his hands wildly above his head. His sudden appearance is surprising to say the least, but there is something familiar about the child; something that triggers a memory long buried. For a moment you say nothing, your thoughts reaching back to a time when you yourself were young. It is then that you realise this is no child at all. It is what your teachers called a Nab, a messenger presented as the apparition of a small boy

dressed as an urchin of the streets. You know it can only be here if there is someone close who commands a great knowledge of EarthMagic. Before you can consider what you should do the boy is by your side, a small hand grasping Pallenten's reins.

"Please Sire, is your name Halokim Vesh?"

Surprised that this messenger should know your name you reply, "Yes, but what is your purpose here Nab?"

The boy does not answer your question. Instead he bows and points to the west. "I have been sent by my master, the Maturi Len, to ask that you experience the hospitality of his house prior to continuing on your journey south."

The boy hesitates for a moment as if he is listening to another unseen presence. "He says that it will be to your benefit to do so".

Even as the apparition delivers its message you can see it beginning to fade. Beneath you Pallenten becomes uneasy, the horse having sensed the change in the boy. Before you can stop her the horse backs up and begins to stamp her hooves, her nostrils flaring with anxiety. Upon Pallenten's back you can only struggle for control as the great horse rears up, her intention to strike out with one of her enormous hooves. Before this display the Nab remains unmoved, then disappears in a wisp of vapour. In that instant he is gone. Again Pallenten rears, and you are forced once again to fight her reins. As you do so there comes out of the air above you a soft, gradually fading voice. "If you wish to talk with the Maturi Len take the west fork to Kal Arbor. There you shall find him."

Spurring Pallenten on you ride quickly down the hill. Your horse seems eager to leave the rise and you have to admit that the encounter with the Nab is something you did not expect either. It is at the bottom of the incline that you find the fork in the road leading to Kal Arbor.

If you wish to take this fork to the west turn to section 227. If you have no time for what might be a dangerous diversion turn to section 232.



451

The fight is short, and bloody. When you are done the two men lay crumpled on the roadway, no longer a threat to yourself or anyone else. For a moment you stand quiet and try to regain your breath. This was a fight you did not seek out, but you take no pleasure from the violence that has left you standing and these two men dead. As a thief yourself you know that both of these bandits will not be missed or mourned, but for your sake they must not be seen either.

Quickly you look up and down the road. No-one has been witness to the fight and you cannot afford the complications that will follow if these men are discovered. Within the cover of the trees you drag both into the undergrowth and search the bodies for anything of use. At first your initial assumption that they were in dire need of money is born out by the lack of any personal possessions. As you search one of the bodies however, you find that the older of the two holds a treasure of surprising value. In a small cloth bag you discover a nicely crafted lock-pick set and four rials, but it is within a thin paper wrapping that you uncover a shard of white stone, smooth to the touch and very familiar to you. Immediately you recognise it as a piece of Stonewood, a remnant of the Silvan Tree, and one of the most sought-after relics of the ancient world.

Carefully you inspect the stone then turn to the prostrate body of the Kalborean you took it from. Where the bandit might have found it is beyond your knowledge but he could not have known the true value of what he held. Through the right traders this piece of Stonewood could have been sold to the Kalborean authorities for enough silver coin to buy a large home in Miller's Crossing. The Dwarvendim would have given him enough to buy half the town. Without knowing it he had his fortune in his possession all along, and instead lost his life for the promise of a few rials. No matter how you looked at it, it was a pointless waste of a life. (The piece of Stonewood is a valuable relic that cannot be left behind. Record this acquisition on your character sheet. If you wish to take any of the other items record them on your character sheet as well. The money does not count as an additional carry item as the coins can be placed into your own money pouch.)

Carefully you cover the bodies with bracken and return to the road. Pallenten is nowhere to be seen but as you retrieve your pack she trots out from beyond the bend ahead. Calling her to you, you mount and take one last look at where you have hidden the bodies. You take no pride in what you have done but it was necessary, and you cannot

afford to delay any further.



:caadru crysim iphar u ke'mahre:

Turning the corner in the road puts you at the eastern end of the bridge, looking across at the town of Miller's Crossing and its formidable fortifications. As one of the more important commercial centres in northern Kalborea the entire town is surrounded by an impressive stone wall some 15 metres high and 10 metres thick. Upon this wall stands a series of manned watchtowers, and more gaudily coloured flags than you have seen on the battlements of any other fortified community. It is a good sign that even with war brewing in the north Miller's Crossing is doing very well indeed.

The bridge does not take long to cross. It is about 200 metres long, built as a series of immense stone archways that span the width of the Laneslem. You have to admit that crossing this bridge is a new experience for you as previously you have always crossed on foot. On Pallenten's back it is quite unnerving. From the height of this vantage you can see over the high stone walls of the bridge, and it is a long way to the river below. One look at the length of the drop is enough for you. For the remainder of the crossing you find yourself focusing on the end of the bridge, and the more welcoming entrance to the town.

As you approach its far end you are met by a number of guards grouped loosely near the main gates. They do not seem to have the slightest interest in stopping you and to your relief you are soon trotting down the centre of Miller's Crossing's main thoroughfare. Here within the walls the noise of commerce and town life is overwhelming. The crowds are heavy, and it is difficult to navigate through the throng of the early afternoon markets. Giving up, you dismount from Pallenten then push and shove your way through to the centre of the town square. It is there that you spy a food stall loaded with a wide variety of fresh provisions.

Do you wish to purchase more rations? If you do turn to section 240. If you believe it will be better to continue on through the crowded market turn to section 259. If you would rather seek out fresh water for Pallenten and perhaps some ale for yourself, turn to section 385.

452

For a short time you look at the lettering on the stick and decide you will take it with you. Objects such as this are very rare in the world outside and you should be able to trade it for supplies if ever you find your way out of Stoneholme. There is something about the wood though that gives you pause to hold it for just a bit longer, your memory searching for some hint as to why it seems so familiar. The feeling passes without an answer.

Quickly you place the stick in your pack and consider your next move. It seems prudent to take the time to care for your wounds, and the confines of this room appear as good a place as any to do so. Taking the Jotun's weapon you jam it into the door-frame, rendering it impossible to open from the other side, then attempt to drag the bodies of the Hordim into the corner. The Morg is easy, but the Jotun is a creature of enormous size, and he proves too much even for a Dwarvendim such as yourself. Instead you roll the Jotun out of the centre of the room, and settle yourself to tend the injuries you sustained in the fight. Luckily you have come out of the combat with less damage than you thought, and once satisfied that you have done all you can to salve your bruises and cuts you rummage through your pack for some food.

(If you have food add 6 endurance points to your endurance level before you continue. If you have neither food nor Nahla Bread you can cut a few strips of raw meat from the Sempaca carcass and eat that instead. It is not as palatable but will restore 4 points to your endurance.)

After eating and then resting for a short time you feel your strength beginning to return. Now better able to go on, you rise to your feet, place your supplies into your backpack and quietly open the door. The Hall appears deserted.

If you haven't already done so will you;

Try the first door in the western wall? If so turn to section 173.

Try the second door in the western wall? If so turn to section 77.

Try the small open room at the end of the Kings Hall? If this is your choice turn to section 199.



453

Within a numbing darkness you struggle to find consciousness, your head a turmoil of vague images and the recurring nightmare of a desperate fall that somehow never ends. It seems that you are trapped in a void somewhere between light and dark, but there is also a certainty growing that if you awaken it will be to a world filled with pain. When you finally force open one of your eyes you realise that your face is covered in blood, and that you are lying on your back, staring up at the overhanging canopy of the forest. For a while you remember nothing of how you came to be here, but slowly the memories return and with their unveiling so comes the pain. With every breath you feel the agonies of a thousand knives stabbing at your chest, blood spattering about you as you struggle for each laboured gasp of air. Although you cannot see them your arms lay twisted and broken, your legs torn and crushed from the violence of your passing through the trees. It would appear that the fall has not yet killed you, but it is only a matter of time.

From high above you had fallen, your body a twisting form plummeting for the ground. The Dweo'gorga's sweeping blow had been enough to send you hurtling off the edge of the precipice and there could be no salvation from the fall. When you had hit the trees the upper branches of the canopy had thrown you sideways into the solid stone of the cliffs, before sending you tumbling into a scree slope of loose rock. In a spray of fractured granite and debris you had hit the incline before coming to a stop within the softer understory of the forest. Harsh timber and harder stone had torn and hammered at your body until you had finally found rest, and in the quiet of the forest there could be no help.

Struggling for breath you try and raise your head but cannot, your injuries are too severe. In the cool shadows of the overhanging trees you attempt to move any part of your body, but find yourself without feeling or movement. You are paralysed, struggling for breath and bleeding to death. There can be no doubt that in this lifetime your quest is over.

For what seems like hours you lay ragged and dying, the life-blood of your existence slowly seeping from injuries that can never heal. Unable to move you watch the wind move through the trees overhead, and listen to sounds of the forest. In its way it is a peaceful end that you find yourself confronting. Better you think than the prospect of execution in Das Frontiere, but edged with a numbing pain that has a

hold on your body like a vice. It will be only moments you think and you will be dead.



:oel dehr dreya'heim ka' es a'du ahda'ma:

Reconciled to your ultimate fate you begin to whisper a chant imploring Providence to end your suffering quickly, but pause when you sense movement in the trees near you. It is in then that you feel something at your side, a presence that is both familiar and disconcerting. As the sky above you begins to grow pale a face suddenly appears over yours. It is the young boy you met on the road south of Maenum.

"Master Vesh," the boy says quietly. "You have caused yourself a grievous injury. Please trust that what you are about to go through is worth what is about to be taken from you."

Before you can say anything the boy touches you on the shoulder and steps back. It is no more than a glance of a finger's end upon your skin but it sets in motion a conflagration that quickly envelopes your entire body. From your shoulder a heat erupts like a red-hot poker drawn across your skin. Immediately it spreads, a pulsing burn that rushes down the lengths of your arms, then engulfs your torso before reaching for your lower limbs. On the heels of the spreading heat rides an agony like nothing you have ever experienced; a grasping, tearing force that searches your body, laying open every wound, old scar or injury that you have ever suffered in your life. It is a meticulous and relentless energy, that works to a purpose as it thrusts you deep into an all-embracing ocean of pain. And when it is done opening your Book of Scars it then begins its real work.

As a tide might inexorably reach upon a shoreline the heat increases. In waves of pulsing agony you can feel the energy burning like the midday suns; bringing together splintered bone, fusing and re-knitting torn muscle and reaching deep into your body, taking all that was broken and making it whole once again. It is a trial that you cannot endure for long, and as the power goes about its relentless work you fall once again into unconsciousness.

When you awaken the boy is leaning against the trunk of the nearest tree, staring at you but not seeing you. Without thinking you raise your arm and find that you can turn your head.

"Everything is alright now," the boy says. "The Trial of Hallen'draal has been worked upon you and your Book of Scars renewed. Arise, for you are now whole."

Without a word you pull yourself up onto one elbow and feel your chest and legs. The boy is correct. Your clothes are torn and discoloured with blood but your body is healed. By what artifice it has been wrought you cannot say but you are not going to die.

Carefully you get up onto one knee and look about you. High above you can see the cliffs from whence you had fallen, and down the lower edge of the stone face you can see areas of blood where you had hit before falling onto the valley floor. The forest is thick about you but a faint trail on cleared ground leads northwards, before turning out of sight into the trees.

For a moment you try and get your bearings. If you are right, the entrance to Stoneholme should be somewhere further up the valley but you cannot be sure. You do not know how long you have lain here either; it may have been a few hours, or a day. You begin to laugh as you realise that you have survived, only to face the dangers of Stoneholme and the Hordim within.

In the shadows of the forest you turn to the boy, your intention to give thanks for your deliverance, but already he is beginning to fade. You move quickly towards him, however you have no chance to speak. In a quiet evaporation the image of the child dissipates and is gone. Without the opportunity to say thank you, you find yourself once again alone in the wilderness. You are alive and the remainder of your quest waits somewhere ahead.

(The working of the Trial of Hallen'draal has given you life but it cannot restore you to full health. There is a cost to its agonies that must be reflected in your character's endurance. Your endurance points remain at the same level as they were prior to the attack by the Dweo'gorga, but the Trial has weakened your overall endurance level. For the remainder of this quest your maximum endurance level must be reduced by 3 points. It is a consequence of the Trial that cannot be avoided and should be recorded on your character sheet before continuing.)

Sore from the rigours of the Nab's touch you look around the valley floor and consider what you should do next. Will you continue quickly along the trail ahead? If this is your choice turn to section 499. If you would rather rest first before continuing, turn to section 440.

454

The well appears to be in a usable state of repair, an old oak bucket lying discarded against its weathered stone surround. With one eye on the weather you draw Pallenten to a halt and dismount, your intention to determine if the well can indeed provide the water you need. Quickly you flick a small stone into its opening and hear the unmistakable sounds of water below. Your only concern as you stand and tether Pallenten is how to obtain a measure of it for your horse.

A quick inspection shows the bucket is still waterproof, but its rope is a rotting length of worn fibres that will not support a full load of water. If you are to haul up any of the precious liquid you will need to use another rope.

Do you have a rope in your possession? If you do turn to section 459. If you have no rope turn to section 491.

455

You can see no reason to tarry here any longer. Quickly you mount Pallenten and turn her towards the western gates. They stand only a short distance from your position and with the strange moan rising upon the winds at your back you urge her forward.

In the encroaching darkness you guide Pallenten along the western reach of the main thoroughfare and confirm quickly that Kal Murda can provide no sanctuary from the coming storm. The relentless destruction of the Horde has left the town a desolation of crumbled walls and fallen stonework, and there can be no safe cover from the storm within its ruined confines.

Nudging Pallenten forward you quicken her to a canter. As thunder rolls along the plains you can feel the strength of the storm heralded in the bluster of the winds as they throw debris along the road ahead. Within the growing noise of the storm you thread your horse around piles of fallen stone towards the smashed gates that will take you out of the ruination of Kal Murda. It is with the open plains in sight that the village comes to life.

Within the bluster there are no shapes or ghostly moving forms, just the wind and the remembered cries of a thousand butchered souls that echo silently through the desolate streets. Embraced by the power of the strengthening winds ill-defined and furtive shadows move at the corner of your eye, never seen in the open but there nonetheless. No matter the cause it is easy to imagine the restless souls of the dead

drawing life from the storm and it sends a cold chill down your spine. With the tempest at your back you hurry Pallenten along all the faster, making a hurried exit through the western gate. As you pass out onto the plain you are glad to be out of the village, and equally glad that you made your journey through Kal Murda without incident.

Turn to section 301.

456

Immediately you feel the presence of someone else in the hall but it is more than just a simple sensation. The Town Hall is a broken ruin, without roof or most of its walls, but there is a deep veil of malice here that grows all the stronger with the approach of the storm. Carefully you survey the remains of the hall and see marked upon the walls and stonework the signs of a great battle. You have heard that when the town fell to the Hordim they had to clear every building and every cellar at great cost to their own number. The residents of Kal Murda fought to the end and the testament to that struggle still remained etched upon the stone of the village. As you stand in the hall you know that this village is different from any other you have travelled through. Somehow after two centuries the desperation and violence of that day still finds a place here, and even your horse feels the echoes of those last hours keenly.

Quietly you try and calm Pallenten as you search out the dark corners of the hall for any sign of danger. Malice and fear lay as a heavy cloak upon the ruin and then a furtive but definite movement catches the corner of your eye in the broken stone ahead. Slowly you draw your sword and back up towards the entrance hall. You can see nothing but the feeling of being watched grows all the stronger. Loudly you call out into the ruins and wait for a response. It does not come, but an uncomfortable burning sensation upon your chest turns your attention quickly to your own clothing.

In the pocket of your shirt the small piece of stonewood smokes in its thin paper wrapping. Quickly you pull it from your pocket and lay open its binding. In the gloom of the approaching storm the small piece of white stone flickers with an aura of blue light, projecting indistinct shadows across the hall. In this place something is causing it to come to life.

If you possess the skill of Lorecraft turn to section 444. If you do not possess this skill turn to section 487.

457

With nowhere else to go you sit back against the rough wall of the tunnel and consider the door that now confronts you. It is old and very well made, but the lock itself is of a type easily picked, although only by someone who has the skill and equipment to do so. In the gloom you search your pack and find the set of lock-picks. They are a series of thin metal probes, extremely strong and shaped so that they can be inserted into even the thinnest of keyholes. In the light of your torch you look more closely and find that they are well worn along most of their edges. This is a set of picks that have seen considerable use.

Carefully you begin the task of moving the tumblers within the lock. The device is old but strangely it has been well maintained. As you work on its mechanism you can see a smear of newly applied grease around the keyhole, and it gives you pause to wonder what might lay on the other side. In the cramped conditions of the tunnel you believe anything will be better than this.

After only a few minutes effort the mechanism turns and you hear the tell-tale click of the door unlatching. Within its metal surface you can also feel a sustained vibration as long arms retract from the surrounding wall into the door itself. To open it requires that you now do nothing more than push on it.

With the lock mastered you place your picks back into your bag and re-pack what remains of your other possessions. Hands still greasy from the sweat of your endeavours you put your weight against the door and push. With almost no resistance the door springs outwards, taking you completely by surprise. Before you have any opportunity to regain your balance you are pitched forward, straight out into...

Turn quickly to section 81.

458

Struck by the sheer size of the Arachnari you know you have no chance of defeating it with your sword. With little option available to you, you decide to try something usually only the province of the foolhardy, or the desperate.

Quickly you open your pack and find a bottle of beer and one finger of your remaining Nahla bread. You have no time to prepare it properly but instead empty a portion of the beer out of its glass

container and stuff the Nahla bread into it. Even as you force the last of the finger into the bottle you can feel its smooth surface becoming hot, and know that within seconds the explosive mixture will detonate.

Carefully you cork the bottle and wait, trying to keep your balance on the undulating web as the huge creature advances towards you. But you cannot wait too long. When the Arachnari is at the centre of the web you throw the flask at its armoured hide and jump for the edge of the nest. What comes next surprises even you.

Turn to section 474.

459

Quickly you cut the old piece of rope from the bucket and retrieve your own from Pallenten's saddle pack. It is a simple matter to thread one of its ends through a series of holes in the buckets upper edge and tie it firmly. Against a backdrop of rolling thunder you lower the bucket into the well and draw up a full load of water. It is fresh and cool and after having some yourself give over the remainder for Pallenten to drink.

The great horse drinks all that you give her, then waits as you untie your rope and lay the bucket against the lip of the well. It is as you are laying down the bucket that the glimmer of something metallic catches your eye. It looks like a medallion, attached with a heavy chain and jammed into the stone wall of the well just above the waterline. If you are not mistaken it has the dull shine of tarnished silver.

If you would like to climb down into the well and retrieve the medallion turn to section 437. If you believe that there is no time and you should move on quickly, turn to section 455.

460

Upon a multitude of limbs the monstrous Arachnari hauls itself across the undulating web. Alone within the nest you stand your ground and thrust the torch into its many eyes. With a screech it backs up, then attacks again, intent of having you as its next meal. Within the thrashing legs you dodge and weave, blocking the wide strokes of

its armoured limbs as it attempts to bring you down. You are a skilled swordsman, and motivated by the need to stay alive but you are on its ground and it knows its own domain all too well.

With a flick of one of its back legs it breaks one of the thick fibres beneath it. Instantly the section of matted web beneath your right foot falls away, overbalancing you and sending your torch bouncing across the desiccated web. With the advantage gained the monster advances, a huge leg driving its way through your body before you can regain your feet. In a spasm of pain you lay pinned to the web, but as you die you see that the Arachnari may not survive the encounter either.

At your left your torch catches against a heap of desiccated refuse and bursts into life. With your last dying breaths you watch as centuries of dust and debris erupts into flames, the conflagration spreading quickly across the nest. As you close your eyes your last conscious memory is of the Arachnari Queen framed within an inferno of flame and smoke, its body ablaze as it tries to escape its own certain doom. Such things however, are of little moment to you. In this life the Arachnari has been victorious and your quest is over.

THE END

461

The stall holds little of interest to you. It is mostly a collection of old kitchenware and travel goods that have seen better days and there seems little reason to spend any money here. The old woman however, is a different matter.

"Anawyn Patrice I presume." you say to the woman as she acknowledges your approach. "It has been a long time."

The woman smiles and stands before Pallenten, hands on her hips. She remembers you as well.

"By the Hand of Providence. If it isn't Master Vesh, alive an' all. Rumour is you've been done by the Law and soon to lose some important pieces. It's a surprise to see you here in the flesh."

You look at the woman and smile more broadly. Anawyn had made her reputation along the frontier as a broker of information, rumour and all the gossip and idle-talk that no thief could do without. Even in your own ill-favoured career you had found need of her uncanny talent for gathering together small facts, and then piecing together the secret movements of money and precious goods that were the key to a

bandit's living. Indeed she was the best of her kind and had, in her younger days, been a tall and handsome woman, but the hard life of her vocation had not been kind to her. Standing in front of the dilapidated stall you cannot help but wonder what had brought her to such reduced circumstances.

"Come Anawyn, what is your purpose here. There can be no good money to be made from such an isolated aspect. Why are you not in town plying your trade?"

The woman points back towards Miller's Crossing and shrugged her shoulders. "It's nothin' but a minor affront caused to a local merchant that sees me here. Give it a little time to blow over an' I'll be back. But more importantly, what has delivered you from the clutches of the Law, eh?"

You shake your head and say nothing. Anawyn Patrice has been a help to you in the past but that does not mean she can be trusted. Instead of answering you ask a question instead.

"What might I find to the south and west Anawyn? Is there anything a traveller who wishes an untroubled passage might need to know?"

The woman looks down the South Road and then pats Pallenten on the nose before answering.

"Polite conversation can be given away for free Master Vesh, but information will cost you two rials. How much is such information worth to you?"

If you wish to pay the 2 silver coins turn to section 432. If you do not wish to part with any money turn to section 494.

462

The well appears to be in a usable condition but you have no inclination to stop here. Keenly aware of how exposed you are to the approaching storm you urge Pallenten on, your thoughts focused now only on finding an effective shelter.

In the encroaching darkness you guide Pallenten along the western reach of the main thoroughfare and realise quickly that Kal Murda can provide no sanctuary. The relentless destruction of the Horde all those years before has left the town a desolation of crumbled walls and fallen stonework, and there can be no safe cover from the storm within its ruined confines.

Nudging Pallenten forward you quicken her to a canter. As thunder rolls along the plains you can feel the growing power of the winds as they throw debris along the road ahead of you. It is then that the village comes to life.

Within the rising gales there are no shapes or ghostly moving forms, just the wind and the remembered cries of a thousand butchered souls that echo silently through the desolate streets. Embraced by the power of the strengthening winds it is easy to imagine the restless souls of the dead drawing life from the storm and it sends a cold chill down your spine. With the tempest at your back you hurry Pallenten along all the faster, making a hurried exit through the western gate. As you pass out onto the plain you are glad to be out of the village, and equally glad that you made your journey through Kal Murda without incident.

Turn to section 301.



463

In a detonation of light and sound the crumbling ruins of Kal Murda disappear in a blinding wash of energy. Thrown to the ground by the force of the explosion you feel the stones beneath you turning as if the world is realigning itself upon a new axis. Quickly you raise yourself from the cobbles and find yourself encased in a sphere of shimmering blue energy, a transparent shell through which the village of Kal Murda is transformed.

Gone are the devastated buildings and debris strewn streets. In their place you see Kal Murda on the day of its destruction, alive with townsfolk and troops engaged in those last few moments of desperate struggle before the settlement was overrun. In the sky overhead a barrage of stones and metal canisters rain down upon the defenders, and against the far eastern gates you can hear the terrible pounding of hammers as the last defences of the town are assaulted. You do not know how it can be, but the stonewood is making you witness the last

hours of Kal Murda.

As you watch the eastern gates fail, coming down in a thundering crash upon a number of hapless troops desperately attempting to hold them closed by brute strength alone. Through the splintered opening a wave of Hresh warriors fall upon the few men brave enough to stand against them, and as they fight dozens of Jotun wielding massive hammers set upon the buildings and structures of the town, crushing all who might cross their paths.



**:som phenath nalar u shen dehr jotuni: aphar
me'du scria'im:**

Above it all surges the sound of battle, the harsh crash of metal, and the screams of the dying. For you it is too much, the sight of the villagers being shot down as they try to escape a vision that you would never have sought willingly. But as you witness these last moments a thought grows in your mind that what you see is no simple reflection of past tragedy. You can smell the smoke of fires spreading through the town, and hear in all its gruesome detail the sounds of the battle raging through the streets. By the time the fighting reaches the central square you realise that what you are witnessing is not a mere representation of the past, but the past being relived by all those who took part in it. Without understanding why, you sense that what you are seeing is the same event somehow being replayed over and over again, the souls of the dead unwilling participants trapped in a cycle that they cannot escape.

Within the hue and cry of the battle a single Jotun warrior breaks from the melee and moves purposefully towards you. He is dressed in the ornate armour of a General of the March and as he advances he points the end of his long-handled hammer directly at your face. You cannot be sure but it appears that he can see you.

If you do not wish to risk any interaction with the Jotun warrior turn to section 445. If you are prepared to wait and see what the huge creature's intentions are turn to section 489.



464

Carefully you traverse the loose stonework and find your way to the shaft. It is no more than a roughly cut hole in the stone but it is wide enough to allow you to pull yourself out of the pit. With your equipment thrown into the hole before you, you take the time to rest before pushing your way further into the shaft.

Within the narrow tunnel you can see absolutely nothing, but with no other option available you force yourself forward, pushing your sword and pack before you as you delve further and further into the mountain. After a time the shaft becomes smoother, and gradually you notice a dim light growing in the darkness ahead. There is also the muffled sounds of activity, a commotion created by large creatures running through a long passage. It is indistinct, but a sure sign that you have found a way back into Stoneholme itself.

With a need to move quietly you edge forward and find yourself at a turn in the shaft that you guess veers to the north. Along this new arm the air is cleaner and some distance ahead you can see the clear outline of an opening, covered by a metal grill. Beyond this grating there comes the distinct sounds of large numbers of Hordim running, and every so often the harsh cry of an order being given. Something has stirred them.

It takes time but eventually you find your way up to the end of the shaft. Behind your pack you can see only the dim glow of a passageway and hear the sharp clack of metal-shod boots against cold stone. After the exertions of the past hours you decide the best thing to do is rest, and wait hopefully for the Hordim to move on.

Turn to section 37.

465

Against a backdrop of distant thunder you steer Pallenten along the edges of the stream, keeping one eye on the tracks, the other on the thick hedgerows that border the soft ground. It is not unknown for the Hordim to set rearguards, and as you follow the bootprints you notice two sets of tracks leaving the main group and disappearing into the vegetation at your right. Instinctively you know that something is wrong and in that moment of hesitation you bring Pallenten to a halt once again. Quickly you drop to the ground and draw your sword, sure that at least two of the Hresh are in the hedges. It does not take

long to discover that your hunch is correct.

From the thick undergrowth at your right one Hresh warrior rushes into the open. It is a huge creature dressed in leather armour and a dull-metal breast-plate. In the shadows of the approaching storm its skin seems almost dark grey and it glistens with sweat. With a long curving scimitar in one hand the Hresh takes up a combat stance and then without cry or challenge moves quickly towards you.

For a moment you size up the Hordim but there should be two of them and the other has not shown itself. About you the hedgerows thrash in the strengthening winds and you have to assume that the other Hresh is somewhere close. Whatever the purposes of these Hordim it is certain the other will join its brother soon enough and it comes as no surprise when it also makes its move against you.

Just as you are about to move forward to join in combat with the Hresh you see a glimpse of shadow moving swiftly behind Pallenten. Out of the hedges at your back the other Hordim lunges for your horse, grabbing Pallenten firmly about the neck in an effort to drag her down. Startled by the assault Pallenten twists against her attacker, forcing the warrior to lose its hold and slip under her neck. Caught upon her bridle the Hresh grabs for a long knife at its belt but the huge horse does not give the Hresh the opportunity to use it. Rearing on her hind legs she turns for the hedgerows and drags the Hordim into the bushes, intent on dislodging him within the tangled undergrowth. For the moment at least there is little you can do to help her.

You must fight the Hresh that now rushes towards you. The warrior has a combat value of 15 and an endurance of 14. If you win this fight turn to section 280. If it is the Hordim that prevails then it is here that your quest ends.

466

The huge Jotun crashes towards you, flinging broken furniture and stale food in all directions. For a moment you are frozen by the raw strength exhibited by the Hordim, its power undeniable as it advances upon you. In the shadows you attempt the Shimmera, the quick movement to the left that should induce the violent vertigo needed to bring it down. This Jotun however, has no intention of letting you play tricks with its mind. You have made the attempt too far from the towering giant and it sees what you are doing. Quickly it turns its

head away, rendering the Shimmera ineffective. Too late you realise your mistake, the Hordim's warhammer crashing down into the stone at your feet. If you are to kill this Jotun you will have to fight it.

The Jotun has a combat value of 19 and an endurance of 18. If by some miracle you win this battle you must leave the warrior's bloodied form behind and get out of the Mess quickly, turn to section 237. If you are defeated then it will be here that your quest ends. Do not be disheartened however, for at another time you may find better luck.

467

There is no point continuing after the Morg. Your journey lies to the south, and it is a diversion that can provide no further benefit for you. Quietly you take up Pallenten's reins once again and turn back to the east. In the absolute silence of the forest you work your way through the thick woodland, finding animal trails and smaller areas of open ground that lead you slowly but surely towards the South Road. It is as you are pushing your way through a dense carpet of knee-high ferns that you hear the first hint of something moving in the trees behind you. Like whispers in the dark you hear the slight crack of twigs underfoot, and the murmuring rush of creatures moving quickly and quietly towards you. In the depths of the forest you pause and strain your ears, searching out any clue as to what is behind you, but all your senses scream that it is the Hordim. Pallenten tenses as she also picks up the signs of the quiet approach of the creatures, cunningly melded with the rustle of the wind as it flows breathlessly through the treetops. Somewhere in the forest at your back you can hear the Morg, and they are coming after you.

At the run you force your way forward, all pretence at stealth abandoned as you strive for the safety of the open plains. At least upon the grasslands you surmise, you can mount Pallenten and ride away, sure that the Morg cannot follow. It is your hope, and your only goal as you crash through the ferns and briar tangles of the forest floor. When you meet the treeline you come to a halt. For a moment you look back into the forest. You can see nothing, but a chill runs over you like the touch of a hundred pairs of ice-cold eyes, watching what you are about to do. The Morg have not yet attacked, somehow you are sure that if you were further into the trees they would have had you quickly; but the proximity of the soldiery has stayed their

knives, and you must take advantage of their hesitation.

Quickly you mount Pallenten and turn her to the south. Given a choice between being chased by the Kalboreans, or being tortured to death at the hands of the Morg, you have decided you shall trust in the speed of your horse. From the verge of the forest you urge Pallenten to the gallop and let her fly as a dark arrow along its border. Only as you are sure of your escape do you turn to see if there is any pursuit. Against the shadows of the tree-line you can see the indistinct forms of a few small creatures leave the gloom of the forest before they are swallowed by it once again.

For a time you keep Pallenten to the edge of the forest before turning her to the south-west, your hope to intersect the south road some distance beyond the town of Baellum. The open ground allows Pallenten a free rein and she takes it, the plains flowing past as a rush of pounding hooves and wind-blown grasses. For an hour you ride, moving steadily towards the main road. It is only as you see the road in sight that you are forced to draw Pallenten to a halt.

Between you and the road lies the ruins of an old homestead, a ramshackle pile of broken rock and collapsed roofing. Many of these testaments to the hardship of life on the frontier can be found all over the north, and mostly they are nondescript and generally ignored, but this one is smeared in blood and it appears fresh. Without hesitation you slide from Pallenten's back and run for the homestead. As you make for the remains of its front door you draw your sword and begin a careful search.

Within the homestead's crumbling interior you find two bodies, young Kalboreans you think, but it is hard to tell. Blood covers most of the remaining walls, and there is all the signs of a deadly battle. The two Kalboreans are stripped of their weapons and equipment, but enough remains to indicate that they were Army Scouts, no doubt on reconnaissance before the main body of troops made their way north. Both have deep sword wounds and both succumbed to their injuries. They did not die easily.

Your first thought is that this is the work of the Morg, the Scouts the victims of their cruelty, but there is more to the manner of their death and you see it clearly in the soft earth. Around the bodies are the impressions of heavy boots, from creatures much larger than those made by the tiny footprints of the Morg. You do not have to be a Huntmaster to see that at least six large creatures engaged in the despoiling of the soldiers, and that they could only be Hresh, the

shape of their boots and the human sized prints leaving no doubt of this in your mind.

For a moment you look at the bodies and then turn back to Pallenten. The Kalboreans are a sobering discovery and one that changes your options for reaching Stoneholme safely. Away in the north your people are engaged in a lethal struggle with the Horde, and yet the presence of both Hresh and Morg shows they have already infiltrated into the south. There could be any number of marauding bands active along the frontier, and to be alone in the wilds leaves you open to the same fate as these hapless Scouts.

Quickly you return to Pallenten. A few hundred metres to the west the South Road is empty. Whatever movement of troops that had made their way to Baellum have now moved into the north, leaving the road open. Carefully you scan the horizon, looking for any sign of the Hordim. You can see nothing, but to the north-west black clouds are beginning to build, darkening the sky as they spread towards you. You have no doubt these clouds will soon develop into a storm. You have reached the South Road and you must now make a choice as to how you wish to proceed.

Ahead lies a clear road to Miller's Crossing. At this stage of your journey you may either keep to the road, or you can strike out to the south-west, and make your way cross-country directly to the Devkraager Tor. If you wish to continue on the road to Miller's Crossing turn to section 251. If you would like to risk travelling across country, and gain some time by heading straight for the mountain, turn to section 361.

468

The storm is too close to take the chance that you may be caught in the open. The pile of large boulders does not appear to be the best shelter to weather a storm such as the one approaching, but they are all that you can reach in time. With large droplets of painfully cold rain slapping against your face you turn Pallenten to the left and ride hard for the stones. When you are closer you make a surprising discovery. At some time in the past a number of the smaller boulders have been moved and placed in a roughly horse-shoe mound. From a distance the boulder pile looks like a random jumble of stones, but up close it has obviously been formed as a shelter of last resort by what would have to have been a very strong traveller indeed. As you

dismount from Pallenten you can see that a table-sized piece of stone has been laid across a few of these large stones to provide a simple roof. The arrangement of the stones forms a small protected alcove within the pile. Although it is not much it will be enough to give you cover from the worst of the storm.

Quickly you draw Pallenten into the stones and set to work. Within the few minutes that are left to you before the storm hits, you set about sealing as much of the rudimentary shelter as you can. With a scrap of abandoned iron you find within the outcrop you start cutting pieces of heavy turf out of the ground and then ram them into the larger spaces between the stones. You have no time for care, the sods of earth hammered with your gloved fist into any small space that might provide an access for wind or rain. When you are done you pull Pallenten beneath the stone shelf and wonder at how many times you have found yourself in this position; alone and awaiting the relentless power of a Treachersa to fall upon you. About you the storm rises like a wave, its energy a tingling anticipation in the air that is almost unbearable. After getting as much of Pallenten under the shelter as you can, you crawl in under her belly and await the deluge that is to come. You do not have to wait long.

In the course of a few short minutes the black wall of cloud covers the sky, the horizon disappearing in a heavy mist of rushing cloud and rain. Then the downpour begins. First as rain, and then sleet and hail, the storm hammers away at the earth, flattening the grasslands and laying down great piles of half-frozen slush about the boulders. Huddled under the rocky shelf you are safe from the full power of the gale force winds that howl about the stone pile, and the fist-sized pieces of hail that slam into the stones above, but these monoliths cannot protect you from the rain. Carried by the wind and spun into flurries of mist by the unmoving boulders, it finds its way into every part of your shelter, soaking you to the skin. Cold and miserable you can do nothing but wait as the storm rages about you. In the brilliant cacophony of lightning and thunder you crouch, thankful that you are not out in the storm, exposed to its full lethal power.

For what seems like hours the storm thunders down upon the defenceless grasslands. Caught in your barely adequate shelter you stand soaked to the skin, Pallenten no less affected by the cold icy tempest that rages about you. It is a release of power within which you can nothing except watch as it assails the grasslands. All about you the ground turns to pools of wind-blown water, barraged by hail

stones and quivering under the relentless push of the gales. Upon the heavy stone that protects you there is a tremoring vibration as each thunderclap drums out across the plain, and in the sky above the clouds ride as black as night in a stampede of roiling vapours to the south. It is an overpowering crash of sky against earth, and as you crouch beneath Pallenten you wish only that it will end.

But then, as quickly as it fell upon you, it does indeed come to an end. With little warning the storm moves on southwards, taking with it frequent flashes of lightning and deafening drum rolls of thunder. In the quiet that follows the storm's passing it takes a few moments to extricate yourself from the shelter. Standing stiffly in the chilled air, you coax Pallenten out from under the rock shelf and try and shake some movement into stiff, sore limbs. Looking about, you see that the storm has lasted long enough that it is now almost dark, the thin red glow of an approaching dusk prominent to the west.

Do you wish to stay here at the boulder outcrop for the night? If so, turn to section 288. If you would rather try and find better shelter further to the south-west, then you should turn to section 307.

469

The stone blocks that have been wrought to line the pit are both large and loose within their foundations. Carefully you take each hand and foothold, testing every stone before you place your weight against it. It is a laborious and exacting task that proves too much.

As you reach out for another handhold the stone you are supporting yourself against pulls free from the wall. In a shower of fractured stone you grasp desperately for another handhold but cannot find one before falling out into the pit. Overbalanced on the sheer wall you have no chance of saving yourself, and in the shadows you disappear into the embracing dark below. In this life your quest has ended. Perhaps in another you shall find better luck.

THE END



470

No matter the consequences you cannot leave someone to the mercy of the Hordim. Quickly you mount Pallenten and once again turn her along the course of the stream. On the soft ground you move carefully but within a few hundred metres the tracks leave the edges of the water and turn northwards, out of the creek bed and onto open ground. Before you is again the endless grassland and carefully you search the horizon for any sign of the moving warband. There is no hint of the Hordim, only the clear tracks of the creatures running directly into the advancing storm.

For a moment you bring Pallenten to a halt and search the way ahead more carefully. Only a short distance from your position there is a wide area of trampled grass and carefully you coax your horse towards it. What you find brings you no joy.

At the centre of the circle of flattened grass is a crumpled and bloodied form. It is a young Kalborean man, outfitted as a wagon-hand and no doubt the captive once held, and now discarded, by the Hresh. Carefully you turn the body onto its back and look closely for the cause of the man's death. The Kalborean is fit looking and suntanned but the drawn expression on his face, and the wounds he has received to his hands and heels tell a straightforward story of his demise. For some reason unknown to you the Hresh took this man captive then forced him to keep pace with them on their run northwards. There are few men who can maintain such a relentless advance and it would be inevitable that he would falter. The Hresh must have then dragged him, but only as far as they were prepared to take him. It takes only a cursory search of the body to find a single stab wound under the Kalborean's left armpit. Unable to keep up he had been executed and left for the crows.

Quickly you gather together a collection of large stones and build a shallow cairn of rock over the body. You have no time to bury him but the stones will keep the young man safe from all but the most persistent of scavengers. There is nothing more you can do except stand for a moment and ponder the harsh reality of your own mortality, before mounting Pallenten and turning her sharply back towards the west. Perhaps you think, your own death may lie somewhere ahead. It is a question however, that only the Fates have the answer for.

Within the grip of a strengthening wind Pallenten gallops on, the plains beneath her thundering hooves slowly changing as you rush

westwards. From the deep soft earth of the plains the ground becomes harder and the grasses sparser. To the south and west large, stony outcrops of boulders have begun to appear, huge piles of granite that thrust out of the plains like they have been discarded there by giants. There is still a long way to go and from the north the storm is starting to bear down. You will have to find shelter soon.

Turn to section 266.

471

Kept at a distance by the light from your sputtering torch the Arachnari Queen rears before you one too many times, and pays a lethal price as your sword buries itself deep in the monster's body. In a pain-racked spasm the creature collapses upon the matted web and dies. For a moment you keep at a distance, unsure that the Arachnari is actually dead, but a hesitant kick to one of its outstretched legs tells you that it has indeed gone. Quickly quiet returns to the nest, and as you attempt to regain your breathe you consider where your victory now leaves you.

At this juncture you have only two choices. The first is to attempt to climb upwards. At the edge of your vision you can see two exits from the pit. The doorway through which you have fallen, and a small ventilation shaft that opens at a much higher level above. The doorway is closed and has no visible way of being opened from this side. The other is a small ventilation shaft that should provide you with a way out of the pit. It is a long climb however, and one that may not be without its own dangers.

The other option is far more dangerous. Below you is a dark lake of water, a drop of perhaps two hundred metres to its cold waters. The state of the pit's walls below the nest will not allow you to climb any further down but you could jump. It is not unknown for a Dwarvendim to survive such a descent into water, and there is the possibility that the lake may offer another exit from this part of the mountain.

If you believe that the ventilation shaft is your best hope for continuing your quest turn to section 485. If you will risk the fall into the waters below turn to section 447.

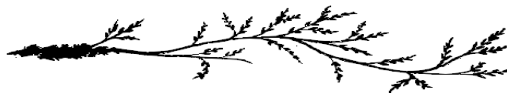
472

The forest crowds in about you as you run, long branches and creeping tendrils grasping at your clothing as you follow the trail northwards. There is little sign that anyone else has used the path for some time, but you keep a careful watch on the edges of the undergrowth and find the way slowly veering to the west and towards the mountain. Quickly you advance, your only concern that each passing hour puts you closer to the collapse of Maenum's defences and the inevitable tightening of the metal collar at your neck.

But you are not that concerned for the speed of your rush to Stoneholme that you do not notice the slight difference in the ground ahead. Upon the trail the leaves have been disturbed, their pattern and colour upon the track slightly different from the humus that surrounds them. Quickly you come to a halt and take a moment to catch your breath. As you settle your breathing you poke carefully at the edge of the leaves with a long stick and find a small hole opening in the ground as you move the detritus. It takes only a moment to find the edge of a deep pit and then uncover a fragile mesh of dried sticks and leaves that conceals it. Before you is a pitfall and in the shadows of its depths you discover neat rows of sharpened spikes reaching up towards you. It is well made and well concealed and you have no doubt that if you had fallen into it you would not have survived the experience.

With some care you drag the remainder of the pitfall's cover away and then carefully step around its open maw. Under other circumstances you would fill the hole in and save the next unwary traveller from a quick end, but you do not have the time. Instead you drag a few large branches from the undergrowth and place them across the path, effectively barring any further victims from passing over the pit without first coming to a halt and seeing the danger for themselves. For the moment it is all you can do. Without any further delay you turn back to the path and make your way westwards. Ahead the ground rises towards the Devkraager Tor and you run for it all the faster.

Quickly you leave the pitfall behind and continue on. Turn to section 353.



473

Without any recourse you fall into the darkness, your body a plummeting shadow within the ever increasing gloom of the pit. There seems little point in screaming, and as you descend you instead make peace with Providence and await the impact that must surely kill you. It comes quickly. As the dark waters below rush up to find you you can do little but prepare yourself for the blow, and it hits as a muffled explosion of water that embraces you tightly in its cold grasp.

For a moment you blackout, your senses reeling as you are dragged down into the depths. Straining for air you push yourself upwards, reaching for the surface as you try and save your life. No matter what you mean to live, and in that dark place find the strength to make it to the surface, gasping for air as you rise out of the water.

There is little light and no warmth, and as you clear your eyes you can see that you have fallen into a wide natural cavern, filled with water and with only one obvious landfall. Upon the far edge of the lake is a narrow rise of land, nothing more than a pebble beach, but it will do. Purposefully you swim for the pebbles and find solid ground beneath your feet only a few metres from the cavern's edge. It is as you drag yourself out of the water that the real hopelessness of your position becomes clear.

At all sides the cavern is a huge arching chamber of crumbling stone. Even as you look into the darkness you can hear chunks of rock falling into the water. Each is a clear echoing crash of sound that reverberates through the chamber, being lost in the shadows as you stand against the water's edge. A quick survey of the thin strip of land shows that there is no way off the beach, and you have lost all your equipment to the dark waters. Without food you will not last a week in this cold. It dawns quickly as an unavoidable truth that you may have escaped the Arachnari but your fate has been sealed nonetheless. Quietly you sit upon the cold pebbles and wait. In this cold place you have a choice between drowning in the black waters or waiting for the metal collar at your neck to tighten. Either way your quest is over.

THE END



474

With a deafening explosion the bottle erupts, showering tendrils of liquid fire in all directions. Against the side of the Arachnari the detonation tears at its carapace, spewing pieces of its body across the web, and shattering its abdomen. In a melee of flame and thunder the monstrous spider dies, its body mangled and smoking.

Deafened by the blast you stagger backwards, amazed at the power of your improvised explosive and grateful also that there is no need to fight the beast. Unfortunately your troubles have not yet ended. From behind the body of the spider a flame bursts forth, illuminating the nest and quickly building into a spreading fire. Fed by centuries of debris the conflagration grows rapidly, searching out the thick webbing and consuming everything it touches.

Immediately you see the danger before you and run for the walls of the pit, lunging for the safety of the stone and a possible escape from the flames.

Test your agility attribute. If you are successful turn to section 476. If you fail this test turn to section 481.

475

Without hesitation you remount and set Pallenten on a course directly for the south-west. Although it is difficult to leave someone in the clutches of the Horde there is too much at stake to waste any more time, and your persistence in following these creatures has almost led to your downfall. Still you did find out a few important facts that will aid you in your quest. Firstly, you know for certain that the Hordim are abroad and secondly, that they are here in organised bands. Well armed and well trained they will be a formidable obstacle to the completion of your quest, and there is no doubt the closer you get to the mountains the more of them there will be.

Pallenten gallops on, the plains beneath her thundering hooves slowly changing as you go. From the deep soft earth of the plains the ground becomes harder and the grasses sparser. To the south and west large outcrops of boulders have begun to appear, huge piles of granite thrusting out of the plains like they have been discarded there by giants. There is still a long way to go and from the north the storm is starting to bear down. You will have to find shelter soon.

Turn to section 266.

476

With a desperate jump for the stone you take a firm handhold as the web collapses behind you. As you watch the body of the Queen fall in flames into the darkness below, followed closely by the burning remains of the huge web. Against the side of the pit you look to the wall above and consider what you should do.

At this juncture you have only two choices. The first is to attempt to climb upwards. At the edge of your vision you can see two exits from the pit. The doorway through which you have fallen, and a small ventilation shaft that opens at a much higher level above. The doorway is closed and has no visible way of being opened from this side. The other is a small ventilation shaft that should provide you with a way out of the pit. It is a long climb however, and one that may not be without its own dangers.

The other option is far more perilous. Below you is the dark lake, glimmering in the shadows and with of a drop of perhaps two hundred metres to reach its cold waters. The state of the pit's walls below the nest will not allow you to climb any further down but you could jump. It is not unknown for a Dwarvendim to survive such a descent into water, and there is the possibility that the lake may offer another exit from this part of the mountain.

If you believe that the ventilation shaft is your best hope for continuing your quest turn to section 485. If you will risk the fall into the waters below turn to section 435.

477

Sleep comes quickly, but in the bitter cold of the night it proves fleeting. Within the protection of the stone outcrop you are sheltered from the worst of the bluster, however there is little comfort to be found. From the north the wind blows in a rising gale, sending ripples through the wide grassland around you, insinuating its cold touch through stone and clothing alike. With no fire to provide warmth you must rely instead on your heavy travel cloak, but the winds are relentless and a deep sleep eludes you. It is an uncomfortable night, and one that passes slowly because of it.

It is in the early hours of the morning that you are brought awake by an urgent feeling of foreboding, one that settles upon you like a cold hand at your shoulders. As you open your eyes you see Pallenten

staring out into the night, her dark bulk outlined by the barest glimmers of moonlight against an overcast sky. Her alert posture tells you all you need to know. Although you cannot see it there is something out in the darkness, and it is on the hunt, searching for prey. For a while you lay beneath the relative protection of your cloak and listen out into the night. Above the rattle of the grasses you can hear little, but as you focus on the rush of the winds you begin to identify the first sounds of something moving towards you. It is indistinct but punctuates the night air, and it is definitely getting closer.

Quietly you draw your sword and pull Pallenten further into the shadows of the outcrop. Your horse also senses that something is amiss, and as you stare out into the dark you can do little but wait. About you the wind grows stronger, pushing the overcast of the night in ragged streams to the south. In the darkness you begin to see stars and quickly the sky clears. It is then that you discover the reason for your anxiety.

Against the deep void of the night sky there is a dark shape moving from the south. Quickly it is joined by another, and as you watch the group veers slightly to the west. Although you cannot see them clearly you know that they are Kreal, and with this knowledge you pull Pallenten further into the boulders and take a firmer hold upon your sword.

From some uncharted nesting ground in the far Krodestaag Mountains the huge winged reptiles have arisen to search the dark plains for prey. Within the protection of the outcrop you watch as the creatures move quickly towards you, their fifteen metre long wings beating at the air as they make for the Sempaca herds that can be found in the north. In the shadows of the outcrop you can do little but watch, and hope that the Kreal take no interest in you or your horse. It is a truth that there are few Men that can say they have survived the attentions of such predators.

Caught in the close surrounds of the boulders you hold Pallenten and wait for the Kreal to pass. The huge flying reptiles soar high overhead, soundless as they glide upon the winds, before disappearing into the north-west. For a short time you watch them as they shrink into the darkness, then relax as you realise they have indeed passed. For once you surmise, Fate has given you a reprieve, and the appearance of the Kreal has proven little more than a further disturbance in a night that has thankfully passed without conflict.

Wide awake, there is little point in trying to return to sleep. For a short time you brush Pallenten down and attend to her watering. As you do so the first lightening of sunrise grows in the east and as the first of the morning suns rises upon the mists you spend a moment watching as the world comes to life. Deep reds and purples colour the horizon as you look out to the east, and as the sky brightens you begin to see the life of the plains emerge from their own refuges from the night. To the west you can hear ground birds running through the tall grass in search of insects, and to the south a solitary wild pig digging for roots at the edges of another boulder outcrop. These are sounds familiar to you, but in the cool air of the dawn you feel most keenly the after-effects of your night in the open. The stiffness of cold joints takes up your full attention as you try to stretch your muscles after the forced inactivity of the night.

Deciding to now risk a small fire you find a few pieces of wood and make yourself a hot meal. As you eat you can hear Pallenten grazing on the plains beyond the entrance to the outcrop. After clearing away your eating utensils you walk out into the field and call her. At first you cannot see her and a small measure of anxiety creeps into your voice as you call again. Almost immediately an answering whinny comes from behind a pile of large boulders. After a moment the big horse trots out from behind the rocks and breaks out into a gallop before coming to a halt before you.

As the horse stands there you can sense that something is wrong. She is motionless, a look of unease in her eyes. Suddenly, as if by some distant command, she rears on her hind legs and turns and races for the far off forest road.

For a moment you do not understand what has happened, but then you remember the Tak Lovar's words. Pallenten was only to take you as far as the foothills, and she has answered some unheard command to return home. Standing at the edge of the outcrop you ponder the uncomfortable truth that the rest of your trek must continue on foot. For some time you watch the great horse disappear into the haze of the morning and the forests beyond. Your task will be all the more difficult now without her strength to aid you. It is easy to admit to yourself that you had come to depend upon that horse a lot.

Collecting your belongings you strap your sword to your waist, shoulder your pack and begin the last leg of your journey to Stoneholme.

The fitful sleep does not return much of your strength but the hot food is a welcome balm to fatigue and the cold of the morning. Restore four points to your endurance rating and then turn to section 107.



478

Immediately you feel the presence of something else in the hall. Drawing your sword you move into the open and search out the dark corners of the building. There are few places that someone might hide and with the intention of confronting them you call out, challenging them to come forward. As you wait for a response you notice that Pallenten is on edge as well, but you cannot tell if she senses what you do, or is simply nervous due to the proximity of the storm. For a moment you wait but nothing seems out of place. There is indeed nothing here.

A powerful blast of thunder to the north brings your focus back to your pressing need for shelter and you see quickly that there is none to be found here. The Town Hall has no roof and extends upon its foundations as nothing more than a facade and a few broken walls. Your shelter from the storm will have to be found elsewhere.

Quickly you guide Pallenten back through the entrance and down onto the street. The town is a desolation of crumbled walls and fallen stonework, and there can be no safe cover from the storm within its ruined confines. Without any further hesitation you mount Pallenten and turn her to the western gate. Nudging her forward you quicken her to a canter. It is then, by some silent trigger, that the village comes to life. There are no shapes or ghostly moving forms, just the wind and the imagined cries of a thousand butchered souls that echo silently through the desolate streets. Within the power of the strengthening winds it is easy to imagine the restless souls of the dead drawing life from the storm and it sends a cold chill down your spine. You see

nothing that proves the village to be haunted, but you hurry Pallenten along all the faster anyway, making a hurried exit through the western gate. As you pass out onto the plain you are glad to be out of the village, and equally glad that you made your journey through Kal Murda in daylight.

Turn to section 301

479

Desperately you hang on to the stone wall as the effects of the detonation erupt around you. Buffeted by heat and noise you hold firm to the stone and watch as a roiling plume of fire and smoking ash rises into the pit above. With the fire raging at all sides you begin to climb, using the worn mortared cracks between the massive stones as vantages upon which to haul yourself upwards.

In the light of the conflagration you begin your ascent. Looking up you can see two possible exits from the pit. One is the doorway that you fell from; the other a ventilation shaft some distance higher. The doorway is no use for it is closed and has no visible way of being opened from this side. The ventilation shaft is different. Relatively wide, it is open and should provide some way out of the pit. It is not much of an option but it is all your have. With a way out in sight you climb all the faster.

Turn to section 485.

480

Your skin goes cold as you realise what you have found. It is something you have not encountered before but this must be sign of Hordim, and judging by the small prints it is most likely Morg. Never in your life have you seen such creatures but you have heard stories about them, of their love of knives and their liking for torture. Even as you grab for Pallenten's reins you know this forest is no safe place to venture alone. Quickly you retreat into the depths of the undergrowth, trailing Pallenten behind you as you force a path back to the edge of the forest.

As you work your way back to open ground you can hear the distant sounds of men on the south road, but there are other sounds as well. Like whispers in the dark you can hear the slight crack of twigs underfoot, and the murmuring rush of creatures moving quickly

and quietly towards you. In the depths of the forest you pause and strain your ears, searching out any clue as to how close the Hordim may be. Pallenten also picks up the signs of the quiet approach of the creatures, cunningly melded with the rustle of the wind as it flows breathlessly through the treetops. Somewhere in the forest at your back you can hear the Morg, and they are coming after you.

At the run you force your way forward, all pretence at stealth abandoned as you strive for the safety of the open plains. At least upon the grasslands you surmise, you can mount Pallenten and ride away, sure that the Morg cannot follow. It is your hope, and your only goal as you crash through the ferns and briar tangles of the forest floor. When you meet the tree-line you come to a halt. For a moment you look back into the forest. You can see nothing, but a chill runs over you like the touch of a hundred pairs of ice-cold eyes, watching what you are about to do. The Morg have not yet attacked you, somehow you are sure that if you were further into the trees they would have had you quickly; but the proximity of the soldiery has stayed their knives, and you must take advantage of their hesitation.

Quickly you mount Pallenten and turn her to the south. Given a choice between being chased by the Kalboreans, or being tortured to death at the hands of the Morg, you have decided you shall trust in the speed of your horse. From the verge of the forest you urge Pallenten to the gallop and let her fly as a dark arrow along its border. Only as you are sure of your escape do you turn to see if there is any pursuit. Against the shadows of the tree-line you can see the indistinct forms of a few small creatures leave the gloom of the forest before they are swallowed by it once again.

For a time you keep Pallenten to the edge of the forest before turning her to the south-east, your hope to intersect the south road some distance beyond the town of Baellum. The open ground allows Pallenten a free rein and she takes it, the plains flowing past as a rush of pounding hooves and wind-blown grasses. For an hour you ride, moving steadily towards the main road. It is only as you see the road in sight that you are forced to draw Pallenten to a halt.

Between you and the road lies the ruins of an old homestead, a ramshackle pile of broken rock and collapsed roofing. Many of these testaments to the hardship of life on the frontier can be found all over the north, and mostly they are nondescript and generally ignored, but this one is smeared in blood and it appears fresh. Without hesitation you slide from Pallenten's back and run for the homestead. As you

make for the remains of its front door you draw your sword and begin a careful search.

Within the homestead's crumbling interior you find two bodies, young Kalboreans you think, but it is hard to tell. Blood covers most of the remaining walls, and there is all the signs of a deadly battle. The two men have been stripped of their weapons and equipment, but enough remains to indicate that they were Army Scouts, no doubt on reconnaissance before the main body of troops made their way north. Both have deep sword wounds and both succumbed to their injuries. They did not die easily.

Your first thought is that this is the work of the Morg, the Scouts the victims of their cruelty, but there is more to the manner of their death and you see it clearly in the soft earth. Around the bodies are the impressions of heavy boots, from creatures much larger than those made by the tiny footprints of the Morg. You do not have to be a Huntmaster to see that at least six large creatures engaged in the despoiling of the soldiers, and that they could only be Hresh, the shape of their boots and the human sized prints leaving no doubt of this in your mind.

For a moment you look at the bodies and then turn back to Pallenten. The Kalboreans are a sobering discovery and one that changes your options for reaching Stoneholme safely. Away in the north your people are engaged in a lethal struggle with the Horde, and yet the presence of both Hresh and Morg shows they have already infiltrated into the south. There could be any number of marauding bands active along the frontier, and to be alone in the wilds leaves you open to the same fate as these hapless Scouts.

Quickly you return to Pallenten. A few hundred metres to the west the South Road is empty. Whatever movement of troops that had made their way to Baellum have now moved into the north, leaving the road open. Carefully you scan the horizon, looking for any sign of the Hordim. You can see nothing, though to the north-west black clouds are beginning to build, darkening the sky as they spread southwards. There can be no doubt that these clouds will soon develop into a storm, and with weather approaching you must make a choice as to how you wish to proceed.

Ahead lies a clear road to Miller's Crossing. At this stage of your journey you may either keep to the road, or you can strike out to the south-west, and make your way cross-country directly to the

Devkraager Tor. If you wish to continue on the road to Miller's Crossing turn to section 251. If you would like to try and gain some time by heading straight for the mountain, turn to section 361.



481

Even as you jump for the safety of the wall you know you are too late. Beneath you the webbing collapses and you lose your footing, falling against the stone wall and sliding down its rough edges. Desperately you grasp for a firm handhold but find none as you tumble out into the darkness.

Spinning end over end you cannot prepare yourself for the inevitable impact and it comes all too quickly. In an explosion of water you hit the surface of the lake and sink rapidly into its murky depths. Within the water's cold embrace you drop silently into the darkness, unconscious and helpless. In this life your quest is over. Perhaps in another life you will find better luck.

THE END

482

The impossibly thin line of blue glimmers before you, a strange flickering beam the like of which you have not seen before. Something tells you there is danger here, but you cannot afford such an oddity to cause you delay. Quickly you pull the small bag of flour from your pack and take a handful of the fine powder. Standing back you lightly sprinkle the flour across the beam and watch as it makes contact. Instantly the powder pops and crackles, each particle burning within the embrace of the light. Frowning slightly you pour more of the flour

across the beam, and take a step back as the strange incandescence hunts out the particles, consuming everything it touches. In the gloom you stand for a moment and consider the cunning artifice of the device, but as you watch you discover that there is much more here than this single beam. Within the cloud of powder you see illuminated a web of glimmering lights, criss-crossing the stairway for some distance ahead, flashing in the shadows with each ephemeral touch of the flour. You have little doubt that if you had chosen to disregard the beam you would now be dead.

Stooping low you follow the beam to its source and find protruding from the wall a narrow metal tube. It is from this device that the light emanates. For a moment you look back down the steps and search the darkness for any sign you are being followed. You can hear nothing, but you know that you cannot afford to tarry here any longer. Quickly you take your sword from its sheathe and use the pommel to hammer the metal tube flat. Immediately the light falters and then winks out. Again you throw a small amount of the flour out into the stairway ahead and this time see nothing. As sure as you can be that the danger has passed, you place the remains of your flour back into your pack and re-shoulder your equipment. It is time to move on.

Turn to section 59.

483

For a moment you carefully look over the chest. It is of a heavy construction, made of thick oak and banded by iron straps that come together against a large padlocked plate of a darker metal. Such a lock is not beyond you, but the inscribed glyphs that cover the plate tell you there is nothing good to be found here. This is a trap, made to look like a strongbox or personal chest, but actually the prison of some demented spirit, waiting for a curious hand to open it. Given the opportunity whatever is inside would kill you. It will be better to leave it alone.

Sheathing your sword, you pick up the items you have collected and move over to the door in the eastern wall. The door is secured with a large iron rod, which proves heavy though you find it can be removed easily. Opening the door you carefully survey the hallway and find it to be deserted. Without hesitation you step out.

Turn to section 100.

484

It takes only a cursory examination of the prints to identify that they are Hordim, and most likely Hresh. Carefully you feel the edges of the impressions and find that they are no more than twenty minutes old. It appears that they have kept close to the banks of the stream and used the cover of the hedges at its edge to move undetected. You feel the collar at your throat and ponder whether there is any benefit to be found in following them. As you look closer you see also that they are dragging something heavy with them, and that it had been struggling at the time. For a moment you consider what the Hordim might be doing, travelling so openly in the lands of Men; but whether you will follow them and find out, or continue on westwards, is a decision you will have to make quickly.

If you believe there is something to be gained by following the Hordim turn to section 321. If you would rather leave them alone and go west instead, turn to section 305.

485

Upon the cold stone you climb upwards, the ventilation shaft your only chance of finding a way out of the pit. It is a hard ascent that requires every measure of strength you have, and as you make your way over the huge stones you can feel the exertion working at your arms and legs until you are forced to rest. Between two of the stones you find a small hollow. Within its dark recess you give yourself the time to relax and take a meal. (If you have food you can restore six points to your endurance before continuing. If you have Nahla bread you may add 1 point for each piece eaten. If you have no food or Nahla bread two points may be returned to account for the rest.)

Once rested you continue with the climb, and quickly pass beyond the level of the doorway. It is still more than one hundred metres to the shaft but you press on, eager to find a way out. Some twenty metres from your goal the nature of the wall changes, and in the darkness it forces you to stop. Unlike the rest of the surface the stones here are unstable, many loose and all threatening to pull away if given too much weight to bear. For a moment you consider what you should do but there is little choice. It is a long way down and the shaft is only a short distance overhead.

You start to climb again but you must rely on both your strength and intuition to make it over this crumbling surface to the ventilation shaft. Test your strength and intuition attributes. If you fail either of these tests turn to section 469. If you pass both of these tests turn to section 464.

486

Carefully you try and find a position within the well that will allow you to reach out and take hold of the medallion. It is a hard task, one made all the more difficult by the slick walls and unstable stonework. After a few minutes of trying you realise that finding a way to reach the artefact is beyond you. To go any further will only put you into the cold waters below and then you will never see daylight again.

Disappointed that you could not retrieve the medallion you slowly climb back to the surface and find that you have emerged not a moment too soon. You have only been down the well for only a short time but the storm is now very close and there is no time left to tarry here. Quickly you mount Pallenten and turn her towards the western gates. They stand only a short distance from your position and with the tempest looming you urge her forward.

In the encroaching darkness you guide Pallenten along the western reach of the main thoroughfare and confirm quickly that Kal Murda can provide no sanctuary from the coming storm. The relentless destruction of the Horde has left the town a desolation of crumbled walls and fallen stonework, and there can be no safe cover from the storm within its ruined confines.

Nudging Pallenten forward you quicken her to a canter. As thunder rolls along the plains you can feel the strength of the storm heralded in the bluster of the winds as they throw debris along the road ahead. Within the growing noise of the storm you thread your horse around piles of fallen stone towards the smashed gates that will take you out of the ruination of Kal Murda. It is with the open plains in sight that the village comes to life.

Within the bluster there are no shapes or ghostly moving forms, just the wind and the remembered cries of a thousand butchered souls that echo silently through the desolate streets. Embraced by the power of the strengthening winds it is easy to imagine the restless souls of the dead drawing life from the storm and it sends a cold chill down your spine. With the storm at your back you hurry Pallenten along all

the faster, making a hurried exit through the western gate. As you pass out onto the plain you are glad to be out of the village, and equally glad that you made your journey through Kal Murda without incident.

Turn to section 301.

487

You know little of the lore of Stonewood but you know enough to recognise that there is something close that is affecting the stone. What it is you cannot see, and there is nothing about the ruins that would indicate Kal Murda had ever been a place of power. As you watch the stonewood pulses and then diminishes, turning quickly to a dull blue glow that generates no further heat. Carefully you place the stone back in your pocket and turn Pallenten to the entranceway.

A powerful blast of thunder to the north brings your focus back to your pressing need for shelter and you see quickly that there is none to be found here. The Town Hall has no roof and extends upon its foundations as nothing more than a facade and a few broken walls. Your shelter from the storm will have to be found elsewhere.

In the encroaching darkness you guide Pallenten back through the entrance and down onto the street. The town is a desolation of crumbled walls and fallen stonework, and there can be no safe cover from the storm within its ruined confines. The feeling that you are being watched is still strong and it provides you with more than enough cause to leave Kal Murda as quickly as possible.

Without any further hesitation you mount Pallenten and turn her to the western gate. Nudging her forward you quicken her to a canter. It is then, by some silent trigger, that the village comes to life. There are no shapes or ghostly moving forms, just the wind and the imagined cries of a thousand butchered souls that echo silently through the desolate streets. Within the power of the strengthening winds ill-defined and furtive shadows move at the corner of your eye, never seen in the open but there nonetheless. No matter the cause it is easy to imagine the restless souls of the dead drawing life from the storm and it sends a cold chill down your spine. You see nothing that proves the village to be haunted, but you hurry Pallenten along all the faster anyway, making a hurried exit through the western gate. As you pass out onto the plain you are glad to be out of the village, and equally

glad that you made your journey through Kal Murda in daylight.

Turn to section 301.

488

There is something about the noise emanating from the well that piques your curiosity. It sounds human yet cannot be so, and you wonder if the wind has found some way into the base of the well. Whatever the reason it will take only a few moments to check the inside of the shaft.

Carefully you peer over the stone lip and immediately feel a strong breeze blowing up from its depths. It is evident that the wind has found some access to the well's lower levels and is generating the unnatural lament as it forces its way through some unseen break in its circular stone facing. It is a mystery that has proved easy to unveil, but as you look deeper into the well you see the glimmer of something metallic jammed into its stone surface just above the waterline. Within the gloom it appears to be a medallion of some type, attached to a heavy silver chain and probably of considerable value.

The well is only a metre and a half wide and there are enough joins and breaks in the inner wall to allow a relatively safe descent to take the piece from its unusual resting place. You look to the approaching weather and then at Pallenten. Perhaps you can spare a few minutes to recover it.

If you would like to climb down into the well and retrieve the medallion turn to section 437. If you believe that there is no time and you should move on quickly, turn to section 455. If however, you have the skill of Bushcraft turn to section 448 first.

489

From within the confines of the blue sphere you watch as the Jotun approaches. He is a huge creature, spattered with the blood of battle and ferocious in demeanour as he makes for where you stand. It is only as he comes within a hammer's reach of your position that you realise he cannot actually see you.

"Show yourself *vehmin!*" the Jotun commands. "I know you are here even if I cannot determine how it is that you are."

"What is your name? Are you of the living?" the creature demands. It is the last question that tells you that something is not right here. You decide to answer.

"I am Halokim Vesh, a Dwarvendim of the Stone Kingdoms, and yes I am of the living."

With your answer the Jotun General lays down his hammer and approaches you with his arms outstretched.

"I am Aggamem the Elder, Chieftain to the Bruhaj and General of the March. How is it that you come to this damned place?"

Without thinking you move forward but find the blue sphere a wall of energy that you cannot breach. If you are to talk to the Jotun it will have to be without him seeing you. It is a situation you are not unhappy with.

"I cannot show myself Jotun, the power that has brought me here will not allow it. Why is it that you ask if I am of the living?"

The giant Hordim turns and points towards to the continuing violence of the battle. "We are trapped here Dwarvendim, and we are all of the restless dead. By some device brought about by either malice or accident those who fell in the battle for this town have remained here, the sparks of our existence caught in a never ending conflict that replays itself with every passing storm."

"I tell you *vehmin* that all the dead, Hordim and Man alike, are caught here; wraiths held without release and fated to die over and over again. I do not know anything of your customs but my warriors have earned the right to have their Book of Scars measured, and to then pass into Hallen'draal. They must be allowed to do so."

"And what of the men and women of Kal Murda?" you ask, "Why are they trapped in this place?"

Aggamem shakes his head. "I cannot tell you. All I know is that with the first strike of lightning to hit the plains all the dead of my crue and all the *vehmin* of this settlement must once again fight. It does not end until the storm passes and I can tell you that there is no glory in it."

You have seen the violence of the battle and go cold at the thought that the townsfolk of Kal Murda should have to continue to endure such a tragedy. There seems little that you can do however.

"I know nothing of what holds you in this place." you reply, "Is there anything that can be done?"

The Jotun General shrugs his shoulders and stoops to retrieve his hammer. "It is beyond my knowledge as well *vehmin*. I can only say that the Powers of the World cannot know of our plight for they would

not suffer such a travesty to continue if it was known to them. If you have any opportunity to do so, bring our need to their attention. Only the Shan'duil has the power to release us all from this torment. If this can be done my warriors will find their place in the Feasting Halls, and only then will your brothers and sisters find rest."

As the Jotun speaks the battle falls upon the marketplace as a melee of flashing iron blades and struggling bodies. Instantly the Hordim is swallowed within the uproar as a cloud of arrows rain out of the sky, bringing down all who stand beneath them.

You have seen enough. Quickly you bring the blazing stone to your lips and whisper the word needed to bring you back into the world of the living. In a gut-wrenching shudder the terrible visage of the fall of Kal Murda dissolves into the more imminent reality of the approaching storm. Around you the ruins of the settlement are as you have previously found them but it takes a few moments for you to readjust. When the power of the stone dissipates you are left dazed, your thoughts overcome by what you have witnessed.

A powerful blast of thunder to the north shifts your focus away from the visions of the past to your pressing need for shelter, and you see quickly that there is none to be found here. You have seen the Town Hall in all its untouched glory but it stands now as a mere shell. With no roof it extends upon its foundations as nothing more than a facade and a few broken walls. Your shelter from the coming storm will have to be found elsewhere.

In the encroaching darkness you guide Pallenten along the western reach of the main thoroughfare and realise quickly that Kal Murda can provide no sanctuary. The relentless assault of Jotun hammers has left the town a desolation of crumbled walls and fallen stonework, and there can be no safe cover from the storm within its ruined confines.

Without any further hesitation you mount Pallenten and turn her towards the western gate. Nudging her forward you quicken her to a canter. As thunder rolls along the plains you can feel the growing power of the winds as they throw debris along the road ahead of you. It is a melee of shifting gales that the village comes to life.

Within the bluster there are no shapes or ghostly moving forms, just the wind and the remembered cries of a thousand butchered souls that echo silently through the desolate streets. Embraced by the power of the strengthening winds ill-defined and furtive shadows move at the corner of your eye, never seen in the open but there nonetheless.

No matter the cause it is easy to imagine the restless souls of the dead drawing life from the storm and it sends a cold chill down your spine. With the storm at your back you hurry Pallenten along all the faster, making a hurried exit through the western gate. As you pass out onto the plain you admit to yourself that you are glad to be out of the village. You do not believe that you will ever return.

Your conversation with Aggamem the Elder has left you unsettled, but there seems little you can do about the plight of the residents of Kal Murda at this time. If you wish, record on your character sheet that you have spoken with the Jotun General then turn to section 301.

490

It is difficult working within the cramped confines of the well, but you are able to find enough of a purchase upon the slick stones to reach out and grab for the silver medallion. Carefully you take a hold of the artefact's heavy chain and then begin to prise it from of its resting place.

Within the close conditions of the well you struggle with the artefact. It is well jammed and requires all the strength you can bring to the task to slowly lever it from the wall. Unfortunately the medallion's unusual position within the well is not accidental and too late you realise your error. Even as you pull it finally from the wall you notice the difference in the mortar used to hold the stones around the medallion in place. Someone has reset two of the stones and it has been quickly, and roughly, done. Your blood runs cold as you hold the medallion in your hands. It is the trigger for a Hordim trap.

Before you can move it detonates. For more than two hundred years the device had waited for someone to remove its trigger and you have obliged. In a coruscation of exploding powder and shattering stone the entire well is engulfed in flames, a geyser of fire and ash bursting upwards, cracking the walls of the well and destroying everything within it.

On the surface Pallenten breaks from her tethers and gallops for the western gate. She will not return to this place but it matters not. In the embracing destruction of the Hordim's device you did not stand a chance of survival. In this life your quest is over.

THE END

491

Carefully you test the old rope and feel it give way, its fibres pulling apart easily in your hands. For a moment you consider your alternatives but you have no rope of your own, and therefore no way of being able to draw any water to the surface.

"Sorry Pallenten," you say quietly, "water will have to wait."

The horse shakes her head and pulls against her tethers. She seems only interested in leaving and it is a good idea. There is nothing to be gained by staying.

As you make ready to leave the wind rises in a sudden squall, a hard buffeting gale that sends debris flying across the small market square. Pulling your travel cloak tighter to ward against the cold you turn your eyes from the direction of the winds and move towards Pallenten, dropping the bucket and rope as you go. Suddenly from within the bluster a moan rises from the mouth of the well. It is low and mournful but loud and clear nonetheless. Startled by the almost human cry in a place so desolate you step back and look carefully around you. Even Pallenten seems shaken by the intrusion and you move all the quicker to her side.

The storm is approaching. Will you move on? If this is your choice turn to section 455. If you cannot leave without first having a closer look at the well turn to section 488.

492

The evidence you have uncovered regarding the Morg gives you reason to consider carefully which way you should go. You have taken too much time finding your way through this forest, but the knowledge that the Hordim are so close is a truth better known than discovered too late. For a time you consider what you should do, but the choice is undeniable. The collar at your neck will kill you if you do not get to Stoneholme before Maenum falls, and a direct route to the Krodestaag is your only option. Pallenten may have eaten all your food, but you have gone longer than three days in your life without a meal. You have the distinct feeling that hunger will prove to be the least of your worries on this quest.

The Devkraager Tor and the smaller peaks of the Krodestaag Ranges sit on your horizon to the south-west, a silent unmoving signpost pointing directly to your objective. There can be no doubt that

this direction will prove harder, but the distance to travel is considerably less. You will trust in the remarkable speed of your horse to keep you safe on this new path.

With no further hesitation you turn Pallenten towards the mountains. Although there are a few abandoned farm buildings nestled close to the edges of the forest, you avoid these and strike out for the wilderness beyond. Ahead lay a wide, open terrain of grassland, some small patches of forest, and the stark remains of many attempts at settlement of these lands.

Nudging Pallenten forward she breaks into a trot and then to a gallop. Directly ahead lay a number of low stone fences, the remains of a farm long past. These are no barrier to the great horse, she jumps them easily and soon you are out in open country, the ruins left behind and the Devkraager Tor looming ahead. You know in your heart that this is a better way to go. Out in the open you will be more exposed, but there is little chance that you will meet anyone on these plains. They are seldom travelled by men of the Four Nations, and your hope must be that the Morg have continued into the west. If that is so you should find the way ahead lonely but uncomplicated. Only the mighty Laneslem River will provide you with any real difficulty as you make your way towards the Devkraager Tor.

Turn to section 378.

493

For a moment you consider the solid nature of the barrier that now confronts you, but then remember the large key you took from the Morg. If you remember correctly it is of a similar size to the keyhole that sits squarely in the centre of this door, and if you are lucky it may well be what you need. Quickly you pull the key from your pocket and have a closer look. It is definitely Dwarvendim-made and appears of a similar age to the door itself. You smile as you think on the odds of it being a fit for this lock.

You have nothing to lose however, and carefully place it into the keyhole. To your surprise the key turns, and as you do so you hear the sound of the lock barrels moving inside the door, and the sliding vibration of heavy metal bars disengaging from within the wall. The door is unlocked, all you have to do is push on it and it will open.

Quickly you stow your gear back into your pack and ready yourself. You have no idea what may lie on the other side, so you draw your

sword and then place your shoulder against the cool metal. A single push should do it. With almost no resistance the door springs backward, taking you completely by surprise. Before you have any opportunity to regain your balance you are pitched forward, straight out into...

Turn quickly to section 81.

494

"You surprise me Anawyn. Cannot such advice be given freely to a friend? Is there a need for money to change hands?"

You do not feel disposed to pay for the answer to your question but it is not an unexpected request. You wonder at the gall of the woman however, and lean over the horn of your saddle as you wait for her response.

"It's a poor pass that we have come to," bemoans Anawyn Patrice, "that a person of knowledge such as meself should have to give away her livelihood for nothin'. If there's no money to be 'ad perhaps a trade will interest you?"

"What do you want Anawyn, for I have little enough."

"It seems proper that I give what you need in payment for somethin' I want. Tell me what you saw on the road between Baellum and Maenum and you'll 'ave your answer."

There is little danger in telling her of what you have seen and as Pallenten nuzzles at the grasses at the roads edge you spend a few minutes describing the movement of troops towards Maenum. Anawyn is most interested however, with all you have seen of the disposition of soldiery around Baellum. She takes in all that she hears and then pauses. You can see her mind working, a frown of concentration creasing her sun-burned face.

"Well, if that ain't unexpected." she whispers to herself.

"What do you mean?" you ask. "Is there something you know about the battle?"

Anawyn scratches at her ear before answering. "From what I 'ad heard the idea was for the soldiers you saw to immediately reinforce the garrison at Maenum. Quick like too. No stoppin' until they were on the walls themselves. Two officers were talkin' about it as they passed me stall an' they weren't relishin' the idea of facing up to the Horde. But if they've been campin' around Baellum that's all changed. Makes you wonder what they're up to."

You nod your head. You have your own thoughts on the duplicity of the Kalboreans but now is not the time to discuss them. Instead you ask your question again. "So Anawyn, what will I find to the South and West?"

The old woman turns and points down the South Road. "It won't be any great surprise but the Army's everywhere. Thugs the lot of them an' most too busy harrassin' good honest folk. A lot of talk on the road of everybody bein' under suspicion. Not a great way to go if you're lookin' to travelin' unnoticed."

"The West Road is a whole different kettle. Word is the Horde's been out an' about, bands of the creatures attacking farmsteads an' the like. Dunno where they come from but causing all sorts of 'ell nonetheless. Not a great way to go either, but at least the Army's not about."

For a moment you think on what you should do, but in your own mind your course is clear. Quickly you thank Anawyn (You can give her 1 of your ration packs if you wish) and then mount Pallenten. It is time to move on.

If you still wish to journey south to Das Frontiere turn to section 255. If you would rather take the road west to Melem's Fork turn to section 225. These are not however, your only options. On either side of the road you can see a number of farmhouses and fenced paddocks. Beyond them lay open ground and possibly a more direct route to the DevKraager Tor. If you think it will be more practical to strike out across country and make for the mountain this way, turn to section 261.

495

It is evident that there is little shelter to be found within the confines of the town. Kal Murda is a desolation of collapsed buildings and debris littered streets, none of which could provide any protection from the storm to come. Looking to the north you see that you have only a small amount of time before the storm hits, and as you ponder the dark towers of cloud you consider for a moment the chance that Pallenten might be able to simply outrun the storm front. It is a possibility that you discount just as quickly. If you are to find shelter it will have to be found somewhere to the west.

Quickly you nudge Pallenten forward, guiding her around piles of

broken stone as you make for the western gate. Around you the winds build quickly, pushing loose debris around the ruined buildings as the storm tests the strength of what remains of the town. It is as you make for the gates that you begin to sense something different here, and it is not happy with your intrusion.

There have been many times that you have felt the unwanted attention of others watching you. Never have you felt it as keenly as now. The streets are deserted but a growing malice and resentment rises about you with every bluster of the wind and within the winds you can feel the cold touch of something grasping at you. And yet there is nothing there. You cannot tell if it is the reputation of the village that is playing with your mind, or a real expression of frustration and betrayal that manifests itself within the walls, but it is enough for you to urge Pallenten on all the faster.

Some fifty metres before the western gates you find a well. It sits within a small market square to the left of the road and appears in good order. If it has survived the years of neglect that have passed since Kal Murda was abandoned it may still provide water.

Do you wish to take this opportunity to water Pallenten? If you wish to do so turn to section 454. If you wish to leave the town as soon as possible turn to section 462.

496

Desperately you weave amongst the Morg, but the beast's reach is long and it clips you across the back of your right boot. It is only a glancing blow, but it is enough to throw you over the Hordim and into the underbrush some fifteen metres from the cliff's edge.

Staggering to your feet you can only watch as the beast wades into the diminutive Morg and begins a slaughter that leaves you sick at heart. In that moment of horror you realise what the beast is. It is a Dweo'gorga, a shape-shifter of the Ancient World, and a ruthless servant of whoever holds the talisman that controls it. It gives you no comfort when you realise also that someone has set this creature upon you.

From the shadows of the undergrowth you watch as the Hordim try to escape, but the Dweo'gorga hammers them down, and there is nothing they can do but turn and fight. Using their small size, the Morg dance about the huge creature, trying to confuse it, their intent

to send it backwards over the cliff's deadly drop. The shape-shifter is having none of it however, methodically and ruthlessly it picks a victim, crushes it, then moves onto the next. Its preoccupation with the Hordim is your invitation to get away. Quickly checking that you have not lost any of your equipment, you turn from the scene of the battle and then run with all the speed you can muster back into the depths of the forest.

The Dweo'gorga's blow has taken two points from your endurance. Record this on your character sheet and turn to section 348.

497

For a moment you back away from the rockfall and consider your predicament. You have no digging equipment that can help with this task, and all you can rely on is your bare hands. But you have no choice, without your equipment it will be impossible to finish your quest, and you need no reminder of the metal collar that grips firmly at your throat.

Quickly you tear a few strips of cloth from your shirt and bind your hands as a protection from the jagged debris. In the gloom you begin, dragging at the dirt as you pull away broken stone and mounds of loose earth. As you work you realise that the trap was far more cunning in its design than you might have anticipated. Not only did the roof collapse, but it did so along a good third of the length of the passageway. It was only luck that had you lunging forward to avoid the fall. If you had hesitated, or had fallen backwards, there would have been no escape. Luck was indeed on your side, however you have no time to dwell upon your good fortune. Your pack cannot be too far from the edge of the debris but the stone is sharp, the soil and powdered rock a heavy blanket that must be uncovered before you can retrieve it.

For some time you work at the rockfall, and are rewarded with the recovery of your bag and all its contents. Quickly you check your equipment and find no damage. At least in this regard Providence has given you some relief, but the reclaiming of your pack has come at a cost nonetheless. In the darkness you can feel your hand wet with traces of blood, and as the minutes pass it is evident that regardless of your precautions you have indeed sustained an injury. Although you did not feel it at the time you must have cut it against the sharp stone

that lay within the mounds of earth. Carefully you flex your sword arm, squeezing your hand to test its strength. As you do so blood runs from between two of your fingers. Quietly you curse into the darkness as you realise that you have lost some of your ability to grip hard. In combat this will cost you.

(The injury to your hand will take one point from your combat value for the remainder of this quest. Your strength attribute must be reduced by one point as well to take into account the effects of this wound.)

There is nothing that can be done to improve the condition of your hand at this time, but there are other matters to attend to. Dust from the trap lingers throughout the passage like a thin grimy fog. Breathing is difficult and your clothing is full of the remnants of the filth that previously covered you. As the dust settles you decide it is best to get as clean as possible before continuing, and if you have any left, eat some of your dwindling rations. There appears to be no chance of pursuit, but you realise you are in no state to defend yourself anyway. After getting rid of as much of the dirt from your clothing as you can you sit down for a short meal and rest.

(The food and rest will restore 6 points to your endurance rating. Remember that you cannot exceed your initial endurance value though. If you do not have any food or Nahla Bread in your possession restore only two points to your endurance. The rest may not be much, but it does allow you to recover somewhat from the effects of the trap. Record this on your character sheet before continuing).

After resting you prepare to move on. In your pack you still have a number of the torches you picked up from the passageway entrance. Taking one of these in hand you ignite it and, raising it above your head, continue on eastwards.

Turn to section 104.

498

The invitation is warmly given, but you hesitate and rather than follow the Maturi into his humble dwelling you call to him.

"Maturi, you must forgive me but there is much about my journey that I am unsure of. It seems more than a co-incidence that I should be on an errand for the Kalborean Union and find myself greeted by a man who I truly thought had died years ago. Tell me something that

only the Maturi Len would know and I will gladly share your hospitality." The Maturi turns in his doorway and smiles, the request seemingly expected.

"You have been in the world for some time Halokim, and I fear that it has not proven kind to you. It is a truth that it has been many years since we last spoke, and many people, even the Kalboreans, believe that all the LoreMasters are dead. I can tell you however, that we all live, though many good men have died protecting us."

"You wish a token of good faith? Let me say then, that we spent many hours in your time at the Temple talking on your life at Truvo Farm. I remember one conversation in particular and I believe so would you. Even as a small boy there was little that could bring fear to you, but as I recall it you recounted a time to me where you were caught in the grasp of a swollen river, and dragged for some distance away from the farm. But for the circumstance of a fallen branch that snagged your clothing and saved you from a certain death you would not be here today. I can guess that you are still fearless Halokim, but shy from approaching the water's edge unless you absolutely must. Am I not right?"

The Maturi's words uncover a deep memory of something long buried in your childhood. It had been many years since you had found need to remember the terror of that day, and you know you have never told the story to anyone else.

"Forgive me Maturi. In times such as these it is difficult to trust easily."

The old Dwarvendim waves away your apology and motions for you to enter his home. It is an invitation you now accept.

Turn to section 241.

499

The trail ahead beckons but you need your equipment if you are to continue. As you look around you can see pieces of clothing and other gear spread through the trees and undergrowth. Shaking your head you have no recollection of when you lost your pack, however its contents now lay strewn through the woodland. On the grass close to your position you find your sword buried almost to the hilt in the soft earth, a short distance into the undergrowth your pack hangs awkwardly from the jagged end of a broken branch. Thankfully it has

sustained only a broken strap and can be used, but some of your equipment cannot be found. Quickly you collect what you can and look to the trail.

(Regardless of the equipment you were carrying with you before the fall you may only take six items with you from this point forward. Choose the items you believe will serve you best for the quest ahead and leave everything else behind. Your sword must be one of these items. Most of your other gear has unfortunately been lost in the dense undergrowth and these six items will be the only pieces of your belongings that you can recover in the short time available to you. Please note that the rules that apply to money and Nahla Bread still apply here. No matter how much you might have of either they still count as only one item each.)

With your remaining equipment packed away you look to the trail ahead and consider what you should do. From the direction of the valley floor you are certain now that the entrance to Stoneholme will be found somewhere along its reach to the north. If you are lucky you should find the trail leading to the edges of the mountain itself, and then, with a measure of further luck, the entrance to the fortress. One last time you check yourself for injury and then begin to follow the trail.

In the full light of day you find your way along the old pathway. It is clearly marked against the encroaching vegetation of the forest floor but it is very old. For some time it meanders through the forest, keeping a northerly heading before turning to the west. About you the woodland closes in, but the trees are not close and as you travel you can see the remains of large standing stones littered across the valley floor. One in particular grabs your attention, and with a need to rest you leave the path and spend a few minutes looking over its worn surface.

Set upon a low platform of cut stone, the monolith stands some five metres high. It is not large by any measure but the stone itself is covered in carvings and devices, indistinct against its dark surface, weathered and cracked by millennia of exposure. Most of the symbols and glyphs are unknown to you, however you are sure that they are not the workings of either Men of Hordim. Only one of the glyphs is recognisable and it has been carved over the older symbols in more recent times. Carefully you rub dirt out of the grooves and look more closely. It is a sign left by your Dwarvendim brothers many years before and it says plainly "Dragon". For all its vague intention it

appears as an ominous sign of what might be found within the dark corridors of Stoneholme.

For a moment you stand before the stone, and then look out through a break in the forest canopy ahead. Against the absolute blue of the sky can be seen the summit of the Devkraager Tor, shining with a peak of snow, imponderable and massive, its dark granite rearing out of the surrounding trees. To the east of the Tor itself you can also see the lesser peaks of the Krodestaag marching away to the horizon. Within those great mountains can be found the ruins of the Dwarvendim Stone Kingdoms, and you cannot help but wonder if there will come a time when the Dwarvendim might reside there again. You smile when you think that you may have a small part to play in such a return.

With the sun well overhead you rest for a short time then return to the trail. (Restore two endurance points if needed.) Quickly the path veers towards the mountain and then is lost upon the hard ground of a rising series of foothills. With the mountain clearly in view you push on, climbing each of the undulating rises until you find yourself against a further sheer face of stone. Here you have found the edge of the Devkraager Tor itself and somewhere within the stone of this ancient mountain will be the ruins of Stoneholme.

Against the granite of the Tor you stop and rest again, before turning eastwards. To the west the cliffs disappear into an impassable tumble of fallen stone, but to the east you can see the remains of a roadway, broken and cracked but definitely Dwarvendim-made. There seems no other alternative but it is the most likely path to the entrance you seek.

The early afternoon is spent negotiating the rocky base of the mountain. Its weathered face is cracked and broken, strewn with rockfalls and enormous flows of gravel that trickle noisily down from the high cliffs above. The forest has grown thickly in places up to the base of the Devkraager Tor, and you find you have to make a number of wide detours to get around falls of rubble that have brought down large areas of the surrounding timber.

In the end your persistence pays off. Some two hours into your circumnavigation of the mountain, and just as you are making a difficult detour around a huge tangle of fallen trees, you are confronted by the impassable obstacle of a stone platform some ten metres high. It extends from the side of the mountain and out into the surrounding trees. Although the stones are worn, and vines and other

creeping plants have grown into its chiselled joins, you can see that it is Dwarvendim-made and exactly what you are looking for. Retreating back into the forest you make your way carefully about the platform's edge, then out into the trees to find a spot from which you can properly consider what you have discovered. Amongst a clump of small pines and low brush you find a hiding place from which you can survey the platform better.

Through the thick bushes you peer out at the massive entrance to the fortress of Stoneholme. Although showing the effects of long neglect the entrance remains awe-inspiring in its scale. Shaped as a huge archway carved directly into the face of the mountain, the images of two immense Dwarvendim Warrior-Kings have been sculpted; arms raised as if they are holding the weight of the Devkraager Tor on their huge shoulders. Under these images the open cavern that is the entranceway is black, the light of day swallowed completely in the darkness of its interior. From the entrance a wide polished stone platform extends outwards for more than fifty metres, at each corner the intricately carved statue of a Dwarvendim warrior stands in full battle armour. A long flight of white marble stairs rise from the green grass of a large clearing at its base and reach upwards to the stone platform. In times past this marble staircase would have met a road leading to the east, but this has long since disappeared. Gleaming white balustrades of carved stone border the platform and stairs on all sides.

Leaning back against the sturdy trunk of a young pine you relax for a moment and take in the rough grandeur of the Imperial Entrance and the encroaching greenery of the forest that surrounds it. Within this dark treasure-house, somewhere deep within its cold, silent halls lies the Tellandra. It seems a pity to squander the remains of such a fine day by attempting to enter this great fortress but you know you must.

After your efforts in finding this entrance you decide it is a good time to again take a meal. Only the Fates know when you may have another opportunity to feed yourself, so you take a ration from your pack and rest in the shade of the Pines as you eat.

(Withdraw one ration from your pack and record this on your character sheet. The rest you take will restore all endurance points you may have lost in the course of your journey so far. If you have no food or Nahla Bread available only restore a maximum of four points to your endurance regained for the rest.)

Upon finishing your meal and taking the time to rest, you pack away your meagre equipment and, by keeping to the edge of the clearing make your way to the stone platform and the base of the marble stairs.

You must move inside quickly. Turn to section 197.

500

Injured but alive you stagger to your feet and survey the devastated interior of the Deep Vault. With the Dragon Windhammer's demise the light in the cavern has dimmed, and only a dull red glow from flowing lava and molten metal illuminates the fractured stone. At your left shoulder the vast, lifeless body of the Dragon lies silent, its huge bulk torn and broken, a testament to the violence of the battle that brought it down. All about you the ground is pitted and scarred, great flows of molten rock and metal slipping noisily from vents in the walls; each torrent finding a path into huge breaks in the floor before dropping as fiery waterfalls into the depths far below.

Broken and winded yourself, you find a purchase against an upthrust of stone and search out the Tellandra. At the far right of the chamber you see it; a dimly glowing pillar of white stone, alone and diminished upon a stepped platform. This is the objective of your quest, and you drag yourself towards it, determined that all your efforts shall not be in vain.

As you move towards the pillar your injuries begin to take their toll upon you. The rigours of the quest, the many combats you have endured, and the confrontation with Windhammer have all left a mark that will take more than rest and food to heal. Above all it is your chest that causes you the greatest concern. Ribs have been broken, and you can feel the wet cling of blood in your throat from a puncture wound that will require attention quickly. You look about the great chamber and know that for the moment at least, you are on your own.

Stepping as carefully as you are able you work your way to the Tellandra. Clouds of pain are beginning to numb your senses, and it is not until you are no more than a stone's throw from the platform that you realise you cannot reach the pillar. Before you a fast flowing river of lava rushes along a huge fissure in the floor, cutting off any access to the platform itself. With every move you make towards the

shimmering barrier the heat intensifies. You can get no closer.

Standing there amongst the heat and noise it is difficult to accept that you are so close to success and yet so effectively barred from your goal. For some time you consider your plight, and as you wait you feel your injuries taking a firmer hold upon you. Falling to one knee you steady yourself and know that you cannot go back, nor can you go forward. All seems doomed to failure.

As your thoughts darken towards despair you look more carefully at the platform. Through the shimmering heat you see a series of words carved into the upper step. "naman tor varshem tolluth." As you read the words you realise that they are indeed familiar to you. Something hidden deep in your memory forces itself into your consciousness and you know then what you must do. Through the pain and heat you are sure you have your answer.

Quickly you gather what remains of your strength and struggle to your feet. Supported by a huge block of fallen stone you raise your arms and intone as loud as you can the words that will bring the Tellandra together once again.

":naman tor varshem tolluth:"

Instantly the Deep Vault is silent. As if time itself has been commanded to a halt the cavern freezes, all the melee of sound and heat captured and stopped in that instant. Within this frozen space you are paralysed, a great power holding you, and all about you, in its firm grasp. But something has been unleashed by the potency of the words, and you can feel it growing in the floor beneath you.

Held immovable within the silence you cannot see what is happening about you, your eyes are fixed upon the Tellandra itself, but you can sense a vast power building in the foundation of the world, rushing upwards towards you.

With your eyes focused on the stonewood pillar you become witness to something miraculous. In the grip of an unseen hand the broken shards of the Tellandra begin to lift from the platform and coalesce with the main column. With each shard's return to the whole an aura of rainbow light grows, pulsing with increasing intensity. From deep red to a shining incandescent blue the aura brightens, then explodes outwards as powerful as a new sun, blasting light throughout the cavern, illuminating every corner of the vast treasure vault.

Without warning the paralysing hold of the EarthMagic passes and

you fall, limp and fatigued, onto the hard stone floor. With a clatter the metal collar that has bound you to your mission so ruthlessly breaks and hits the ground, its pieces disappearing in a mist of hissing steam. Then around you the magic changes.

Upon its platform the Tellandra stands whole, a bright fountain of pulsing light from which a single swirling shaft of blue extends upwards. Within the space of a heartbeat the vortex of power hits the vaulted roof, spreading across its reach as a wave of magic that goes to work on the stone of the Deep Vault.

As you watch the chamber reforms and renews itself, the fissures in the walls of the cavern close, the many cracks and scars left by the great Dragon heal and disappear. In the vaulted ceiling above, a huge mosaic of stained glass rebuilds itself, turning the arching vaults into the moving representation of a jewelled forest canopy. At all sides pillars of yellow stone burst into life, shining a soft pastel light into every corner of the cavern. Against this light you see a series of immense carved images spread across the walls, depicting the great victories of the Stone Kings and the power of the LoreMasters of the Grand Circle. Within minutes the magnificence of the Deep Vault is restored.

In the quiet that follows the restoration of the Tellandra you try and raise yourself from the floor but it proves difficult. Using your weapon as a support you stagger to your feet and wonder at the transformation that has occurred about you. The Dragon's body has gone, the great lava flows have faded away, and the cavern has been swept clean of all debris and treasure. Somehow all is now new again, but outside the massive oak doors of the Vault a new sound arises. Faintly, at the edge of your hearing you can sense a great tumult being played out in the halls and passages of Stoneholme. All is quiet here, but you can feel magic scouring the fortress, removing the Hordim and returning the stone of the stronghold to its former glory.

With the tumult raging through the mountain you turn again to the Tellandra. Upon its shining platform the blue cloaked radiance of the pillar crackles with power, but there is something new, and as you watch it walks down the steps towards you, holding out its hand in greeting.

"Master Vesh," it says in a soft, aged voice. "It is good to see that you have survived."

Before you stands a man of untold age. He walks with the gait of one who has seen far too many years and seems as fragile as dried

twigs as he negotiates the stairs to the floor of the Vault. Dressed in immaculate blue robes lined with Azuril and sown with complex symbols and artifices, the man shuffles towards you, his face a vision of age and wisdom mingled with pain. There is something about him though that belies his apparent vulnerability. You sense quickly that he is as powerful as the Tellandra itself.

"Who are you?" you ask in a whisper. Your injuries are proving difficult to ignore and even as you ask the question you fall to your knees.

The old man hurries to your side and holds out his hand to help you up. Carefully you take his hand and feel a strange energy run through your hand as you rise. Immediately it is easier to breathe and in the magnificence of the Deep Vault you ask the question again.

"Who are you and what is your purpose here?"

The man smiles and shrugs his shoulders. "Who a man is can be a hard question to answer, Master Vesh. It has been my experience that we can spend our lives trying to determine who we really are, and then surprise ourselves at the last anyway; but I believe that a philosophical discussion was not the intent of your question..."

The old man bows slightly and continues. "In another time I was known as Shalengael, however that was another life, and another world away. In these times I am known only as Mentor and I have been sent by my Master to set you upon a new path. Whilst you have struggled here in the reaches of this fortress the world above has changed. I am afraid that the Powers of this world will give you no time for rest Master Vesh for they are once again in need of your services."

You frown and wince from the pain of your broken ribs. "Surely I have earned the right to an opportunity to heal. As I am there is little I can do for anyone."

The Mentor nods and looks around at the Deep Vault. "I am afraid that it is not in my power to help you with your injuries. I have spoken with the Maturi Len and he will provide the help you need once you have left the confines of Stoneholme. It is my task to give you what you need to know now. The world outside has turned sharply upon a dangerous path and I ask only that you listen to the message I must deliver."

You look at the old man and sense that there is nothing false in his words. You will listen.

"I am the Mentor, Master Vesh, an advisor of sorts to the Shan'duil

on all the affairs of Men. The River of Life knows all about the world we live in, for it created it all and sustains it even now, but Men are not native to these lands and the River finds this perplexing. Unlike all other things in this world the Shan'duil cannot keep a proper balance in the affairs of Men; we have proven ourselves somewhat erratic, and it is left to servants such as myself to do what is necessary to save ourselves from ourselves."

"I look at you Dwarvendim, and I see someone who harbours distrust and acrimony for the Kalboreans. Like most men you look at the Hordim as mindless beasts, a relentless enemy that haunts the affairs of Men as a predator might its prey. Such feelings are understandable but I will tell you Halokim, that there are dangers rising beyond these walls that hold far greater ambitions than the Kalborean Union, and a far deeper malevolence than the Horde."

"Trust what I say, for as you have been securing the restoration of the Tellandra a great scourge has been released upon us all. Out of the far west a creature that calls itself by a dark name has arisen, taking under its thrall a legion of deadly beasts, both living and spectral, which even now attack Men and Hordim alike. I am afraid Halokim, that it has been left to you to face this enemy and destroy it."

For a moment you wonder at the old man's words and then laugh. "You have got to be joking," you say loudly. "I can hardly stand, how am I going to attempt another quest? Is there no other?"

The Mentor shakes his head. "It is the will of the Powers of this world that it be you who stands against this peril. Somehow your fate has become the fate of all, but I must tell you that you will not fight this battle alone. There are others who will come to your aid, you need only take the first step on the journey."

As he finishes the old man pushes his hand into a deep pocket within his robes. When he withdraws it he is holding a talisman. Immediately you recognise it as a Sharyah, a talisman of the Ancient World.

"To aid you on your journey you are to be given this. It is a Sharyah, a Gathering-stone of the Trell'sara, but it has been altered to perform a new task. Within its presence all that is spectral will be drawn into the real world. Why this is important will become clear in time."

You take the talisman and look it over. It is a small circular device, wrought as an intricate pattern of intertwining knots held on a necklace of hard iron. Although you can sense a power within it there seems little about it that signifies its purpose.

"And what am I to do?" you ask, "How am I to find this creature and destroy it?"

The Mentor turns to the north and stares into the stone. It is as if he is looking straight through it.

"Your first task must be to find your way to Kal Arbor. There the Maturi Len holds all the knowledge you need to continue your journey. I can tell you that the shadowed creature holds its dominion in the mountains of the far west and it is there that you will find it. Why it has arisen, and how it is to be destroyed are questions that can be answered at a better time."

The old man turns towards you and places a withered hand upon your shoulder.

"But after having placed these responsibilities upon you do not think that your actions here have gone unnoticed. You were sent on this quest by the Kalboreans and yet in the completion of your task you have done a great service to your people. Whether it is your wish or not the pain and hardship of your ordeal will be rewarded. It is a necessity in these times though that the dangers rising before us are dealt with first, and I am afraid that much of that burden must fall to you."

In the quiet of the Vault you find yourself not fully believing what the Mentor has said, but your wounds leave you with little time to argue the point. Even as you stand you can feel the effects of his touch fading away.

"What must I do?" you ask quietly.

The Mentor points to the doors that now stand solid within the entranceway to the Deep Vault.

"Make your way back to the world above. The Hordim have been moved on and will not harass you as you go. Stoneholme is once again the domain of the Dwarvendim and they have you to thank for it. Find a path to sunlight and the LoreMasters will do the rest. Do not despair Halokim, it is not your time to die."

(If you have previously spoken with the Jotun General Aggamem and wish to release the wraiths of Kal Murda from their torment turn now to section 250. If you have not spoken with this warrior continue with this section.)

As those last words echo within the chamber the image of the Mentor fades and then is gone. Within the vast space you find yourself alone, once again left to your own devices. Carefully you turn towards the doors to the Vault and come to a halt, startled by what you see.

Across the entire surface of the huge doors is an intricately carved representation of the last desperate moments of your battle with Windhammer. In the restoration of the Deep Vault it would seem you have found a measure of immortality, a timeless reminder for all who might pass into this great chamber that it was you who brought EarthMagic back to the Dwarvendim. Not bad, you think, for a petty thief.

Carefully you head for the doors, the passage beyond lit brightly with a yellow glow. In the world above you will find the next task that awaits you and you see no reason to tarry any longer. Slowly you make for the corridor but turn to take one last look at the Deep Vault. At its end shines the Tellandra, a deep blue aura vibrating with power as it illuminates the chamber, the dark green of a forest canopy overhead, carved in arches of moving glass that sparkle in the pillar's reflected brilliance. All in all it has been a good day's work.

Ahead lay a slow return to the world and another quest to be completed. Whether you are up to the task is a question that you know can only be answered in the fullness of time. All you can be sure of is that whatever happens next will, of course, be another story.

THE END

501

So careful is your search of the passing wall of green that you do not see the expertly covered pitfall in the track ahead of you. Why it has been placed on the path before you is a question you will never answer. Without warning or hesitation you step out onto the deep pit's fragile cover and then fall headlong onto a series of strategically placed wooden spikes. In this pit you die and your quest ends. In another life it is possible that Providence may grant you better luck.

THE END

502

A shout erupts from the band of hunters and there can be no doubt that you have been discovered. Realising that there is no chance of remaining hidden on the open stairway you instinctively make a run for the safety of the nearby forest. Breaking from the stairs you run for

the clearing's edge, long grass and bushes grasping at your boots as you race for the safety of the trees. Immediately the Hresh drop the Sempaca calf and draw their scimitars, taking up the chase in an attempt to cut off your escape.

With the sounds of the pursuing warriors getting closer you veer desperately to the right, keeping the Hresh only a few metres from your left shoulder. Ahead the trees loom large and you give all the energy you have left and career into the undergrowth, crashing through bushes and vines before tumbling down a long embankment into a shallow gully.

Winded by the ungainly fall you stagger to your feet only to find the Hresh hard upon your heels, their eyes filled with a fierce determination that leaves no question as to their intent. Against such numbers you have no choice but to turn and run, however it is then that any chance of escape disappears as a further band of Hresh emerge from the trees ahead of you. They stand grimly in your way, scimitars raised against you. As you face off against these warriors the other Hresh circle your position their breathing heavy from the exertion of the chase. The clatter of drawn scimitars is answered only by the singular ring of your own sword.

The combat is swift, its end inevitable. Three of the Hresh fall before your sword but in the confines of the shadowed gully there are simply too many of the warriors. With the advantage of numbers they crowd in towards you and cut you down, a dozen blades piercing your body as you fall. In this quiet place your quest ends. Perhaps in another life you may find better luck.

THE END

503

The Morg attacks with astonishing speed and ferocity. In the dim light thrown by your lantern the Hordim is a shadowed blur edged by the dull reflection of its blade as it tries to strike at you. You have however, no intention of fighting with this wizened creature. Instead you judge the Morg's advance and carefully side-step its attempt to stab at you, turning quickly to its left shoulder. In the gloom of the King's Hall the Shimmera does its work relentlessly.

Before the Hordim can come to a sliding halt it drops its sword and grabs tightly at its temples. Falling upon one knee the Morg thrusts a

hand to the ground as it tries to steady itself. Caught within the grip of a terrible vertigo it is helpless, unable to regain its feet as the Hordim's world becomes a spinning wash of nausea. The Morg cannot know what is happening to it and you cannot hesitate in what you must do.



:bweshim; dwarven; mar u menon droya'felim;
maagon:

The Hordim is helpless and under other circumstances you might be content to leave it to recover, the effects of the Shimmera persistent enough to allow a quick escape into the dark passages ahead; but you cannot afford to leave this Hordim behind alive. Although it is not an honourable act you drive your sword through its chest and watch as it falls dead to the cold floor. Quickly silence returns to the King's Hall, and in the quiet you drag the Hordim's body over to the tapestries and hide the corpse away beneath them.

For a moment you listen, searching the corners of the vast hall for any sign that you may have been discovered. There is no alarm nor challenge and in the shadows you recover your lantern and press on northwards.

Before you the hall reaches into the gloom, its high arches and ornately carved pillars a forest of stone that you journey within. For some time you follow the hall northwards, the many corridors and passages that line the outer halls all blocked, their ceilings collapsed, any exit from the King's Hall sealed by tonnes of fallen stone and broken masonry. Carefully you find a path deeper into the mountain and it is with a small measure of surprise that you soon find yourself at another junction, and a series of doors that have escaped the attention of the Hordim.

Turn to section 93.

504

Desperately you struggle against the crumbling edge of the gap, your hands finding a firmer purchase upon a projection of stone, but not before you slip further into the abyss. Hanging in the darkness you have one hand upon solid stone, the other clinging to a mat of desiccated roots that will not support your weight for long. For a

moment you do nothing, then slowly you gather your strength and drag yourself up and out of the chasm. Around you the edge of the rockface is an unstable aggregate of large stones and dry, loose earth. Quickly it begins to come apart as you bear your weight against it, however you are able to haul yourself out of the rift just enough to save yourself before the edge disintegrates completely.

In a cloud of dust and collapsing earth the ground falls away beneath you but only as far as your waist. With your fingers clawing at the loose earth you gain a purchase and pull yourself quickly from the unstable edge, only to watch as most of the remaining lip of the passage falls away into the darkness. Sweating profusely you prop yourself up against the wall of the tunnel and search the floor for your equipment. The torch sputters quietly in the dust and in its light you quickly find your pack and weapon. Unfortunately you discover that the force of your backpack's impact against the tunnel wall has caused your remaining provisions to fall into the dirt, spoiling most of them. If you had any remaining rations only one remains edible. (Record this on your status sheet. This does not apply to Nahla Bread however. If you have any remaining they have not been affected by the spill.)

With no pursuit behind, and no noise coming from further down the tunnel you rest quietly and consider your immediate dilemma. You cannot go back, the way is blocked by both the rift (which you couldn't jump now even if you wanted to) and the remnants of the Impaler trap. It would seem that Fate has determined that the only way is forward.

With nothing more than an ache in your chest to show for your ungainly landing you collect your belongings and slowly make your way further down the sloping tunnel. As you move forward the passage narrows, the rough hewn walls closing in on all sides until you can go no further. Before you the way is blocked by a small round metal door, locked solid and immovable.

If you have the Brigandry skill, and have in your possession a set of lockpicks, turn to section 457. If you do not have these but do have a large key taken from a sleeping Morg, turn to section 493. If you have none of these skills or items turn to section 422.



505

For a moment you consider what you should do. The Mutan is one of the more numerous of its kind, an underling that performs the menial tasks given by the Clavern'sigh, but with weapon in hand is as dangerous as any of the Hordim. From behind the turn in the passage you take off your pack and pull out the small mirror you found earlier. With this you know you can take advantage of the one thing the Mutan have in common with Men, curiosity.

Carefully you position the edge of the mirror at the base of the wall so that a portion of its reflective surface juts out into the corridor beyond. In the gloom of the passage the reflected light from behind is a dim flash of light that appears in the darkness as a flicker of illumination, winking out as quickly as it appears. Immediately the posture of the Mutan changes, its senses alert for another of the strange glimmers. From your position behind the turn in the passage you listen intently, hearing the guard stir at his post before taking one furtive step forward, then another. For the Hordim the flicker is too obvious to ignore but with no further occurrence the Mutan moves forward, intent on discovering its source. Most importantly of all it makes no alert, and as the creature moves up the passage you ready yourself.

Test your luck attribute. If you are successful turn to section 159. If you fail this test turn to section 45.

506

The weight of your body on the rim of the fountain has released a lethal trap upon you. Before you can turn to jump for safety tonnes of rock from the roof above crash down, pinning you to the floor and completely blocking the passage. When the dust settles everything is quiet. Instantly crushed to death by the giant boulders that have fallen from above you have no chance of escape. Here your quest ends. May you find better luck in another life.

THE END



507

Each of the Warbeasts keeps at arms-length, raking the floor with their long claws and snarling like pit-dogs as they search out your defences. Alone in the Great Hall you have little chance of escape and these beasts will be difficult to defeat together. As you try and keep the monsters at bay you reach into a small bag at your belt and retrieve the flashcharge you found earlier in your quest. In one quick movement you depress the lever that arms the device and then throw it carefully towards the nearest Warbeast. The creature stops and watches as the small metal cylinder rolls noisily across the floor towards it, sniffing curiously at the charge as it comes to rest against its front paw. It is the last thing the Warbeast ever does.

In a coruscation of light and exploding metal the flashcharge detonates, but with a power far beyond your expectation. Caught by the explosion the body of the Warbeast is torn apart, pieces of its form shredding across the Hall as shards of shrapnel that slice through the air like missiles. Desperately you fall to the floor and cover your head as the shards dig into the ground about you. It is only luck that keeps you from harm but the same cannot be said for your opponents. Taken by surprise you hear the second Warbeast cry out in pain and from within a cloud of dust and debris you jump to your feet, ready to take on the remaining monster. You are not a second too soon.

From the edges of the dust cloud you see the second Warbeast charging towards you. The first of the creatures is no more, its body a pile of broken stone but the second has not fared well either. Caught by the full force of the blast and its resulting shrapnel, it runs with one leg cut from beneath it and a huge gaping hole in its side. Shaking with pain and fury it is still a danger however, and one that will take all the skill at your disposal to defeat.

This remaining Warbeast has a combat value of 17 and an endurance of 12. If you defeat this creature turn to section 559. If however, it is the Warbeast that is victorious then it must be here that your quest ends. If this is so then it will be to another life that you should look for better luck and a stronger arm.

508

Within the darkness you dig your feet into the loose earth and begin the climb to safety. Amongst the dry roots and unstable earth you struggle to find a way back to the lip of the hole but it proves to be a

task that is beyond your strength. Weakened by days of fatigue and the hardships of the road you cannot find the reserves needed to make it out of the pit. Unable to maintain a secure hold your right hand slips from its purchase, and it is only a matter of moments before your left must give way as well. Silently you fall away into the darkness.

In a crushing impact you hit the hard dirt floor of the pit, a shower of debris and loose stone collapsing into the hole after you. Here the pit has widened into a circular chamber, the only light coming from high above as your torch sputters in the dirt at the edge of the pit. Encompassed within a pale circle of light you attempt to stand but at first you cannot. Winded, and with your left shoulder broken by the fall you grab up your weapon and peer into the gloom. All about you there comes the scurrying of hundreds of tiny feet, and soon enough you see the pinpoints of a thousand red eyes peering out of the darkness towards you.

Painfully you attempt to stand, but as you struggle to your feet you find yourself confronted by hundreds of large, hungry rats. In the shadows they begin to move in upon your lonely figure. With the aid of your blade you keep the filthy creatures at bay, but hunger soon overcomes all fear and as you begin to weaken they attack. In this pit you die. Torn and blooded by the ferocity of a thousand needle-fanged mouths you collapse into the dirt, your screams unheard. Here your quest ends. In another life you may find better luck.

THE END

509

The dark shape lies to the left of your intended path and gently you turn Pallenten towards it. From a distance it appears as a large pile of torn rags, but as you approach you find reason to slow your mount and place your hand firmly upon the hilt of your sword. In the bright light of day the wind-blown pieces of cloth focus quickly into the remains of a Hordim, and as you gain a better view of the creature you can see that it did not die easily. Carefully you scan the surrounding plain, and when you are sure that you are indeed alone you dismount and move quickly towards the body.

As soon as you are standing over the Hordim it is easy to recognise it as a Hresh warrior, and what remains of the creature's broken body tells you everything of its fate. Some twenty metres to the south you can also see a cleared area and the smoking embers of a small fire-

pit. At first glance it would appear that the Hresh had camped in the clearing and at some time in the previous night had been taken by one of the many predators that stalk the plains. Although there is not much remaining of the warrior there are deep cuts across its back and shoulders that could only have been made by the long talons of a Kreel, and as you look at the body you do not envy the Hordim's fate.

A closer look however, uncovers a far more complex turn of events to the Hordim's end. Tentatively you roll the Hresh onto its back and find a broken arrow shaft protruding from the centre of its chest. On the ground beneath it is the torn feather of an arrow flet, black in colour and edged in a golden yellow. Looking about the campsite you find both the bootprints of the Hresh and a number of smaller prints made by Men. It is clear that the Hordim had first been killed by Rangers of the Watch, the body then left to be scavenged by a passing Kreel. For a moment you consider the torn remains of the warrior and think that this is a lonely enough end for anyone.



:dehr delve hendu thay'eth u nemes; surgis:

But there is more to this tableau than just a dead Hresh. Searching the body you find nothing of value except a long braided string composed of a sequence of spaced knots. Held within a leather pouch you know it to be a message of some type, coded in its knots to tell a story for anyone knowing the key that can unlock it. At some time this creature's masters had sent it on a mission into the south, taking this message to other Hordim that have no doubt already found a hiding place within the lands of Men. Looking about the plain you wonder as to the messenger's destination and hope that it too was not making for Stoneholme. All the evidence you can see certainly indicates it was going in the right direction.

And then there is the matter of the Rangers of the Watch. These Soldiers of Kalborea guard all the high mountain passes that cross the Rift Mountains to the north, keeping at bay any Hordim that might try to make their way south. You have no doubt that once this Hresh had been detected by the Rangers that they would not have stopped until the Hordim was dead. Such Rangers however, also have little regard for Dwarvendim and as you check the plain once again you know you cannot allow yourself to come under their notice. They have proven

themselves professional and relentless guardians of the frontier but to those they owe no allegiance they have also proven themselves vindictive and cruel.

With no sign of anyone else in sight you take the message pouch and place it in your pack. (This item has very little weight and does not count towards your overall carry load. Record it within the artifacts found section of your character sheet.) For a moment you consider if you should bury the Hresh but you have no time to do it. Instead you smother the remains of the campfire with some dirt and remount Pallenten.

With nothing more that can be done here you leave the Hresh and ride southwards. Turn to section 374.

510

Unmistakable in the bright light of day, the black and grey uniform of the Ranger can mean only one thing. The soldier is a Ranger of the Watch, and such men have no duty other than to hunt down the enemies of Kalborea. In his haste he can be neither a messenger nor a scout sent to find you for some unknown purpose. If you have come to his attention it is only because he means to kill you.

Turning Pallenten away from the Kalborean you consider what you should do. You could try and outrun him, but Pallenten has been at the gallop for some time and you do not know how fresh the Ranger's mount may be. It would be a mistake to try and outdistance this attacker without knowing you have the reserves needed to maintain the chase. There is however, another option.

Long experience has shown you that the Rangers of the Watch are effective and efficient warriors, trained for the open grasslands and high mountain passes of their frontier duties. They do not however, traverse the Faeron Marshes willingly, preferring to keep to the wider paths that cross the central marshlands. It is a truth well known to all on the frontier that the Marshes are the domain of many beasts, and all are predators that lay quietly in wait for those unsuspecting enough to pass within their reach. If you are lucky enough you should be able to lose the Ranger in the maze of meres and bogs that spread as a patchwork across the marshes. If you are luckier you will also find your own way out alive.

If you wish to lose the Ranger within the marshes turn to section 576. If you would rather stand your ground and fight, turn to section 517.

511

Locks such as these you have seen before, and more than one has given up its secrets with a small amount of the right attention. Carefully you take your pack from your shoulders and find the small eating knife that you brought with you. In the heat your hands are slick with sweat but you know exactly how to open this device, and it takes no more than a few minutes to do so. With the narrow tip of the blade you feel for the teeth within the lock that must be depressed, searching out the small ridges that will free the device's mechanism. Luck is with you for the lock has been well kept, and with a slight pressure turns easily on its oiled bearings. A sharp satisfying click is all you need to hear before you try the handle.

Turn to section 80.



512

The remains of the night pass without incident and the dawn brings with it clear skies and lighter winds. Well rested you make yourself a hot meal while Pallenten grazes on the plain beyond the entrance to the outcrop. (Record this on your character sheet.) After eating and putting away your equipment you walk out into the field and call her to you. At first you cannot see her but an answering neigh from behind a pile of boulders to the west marks where she is. After a moment the big horse canters out from behind the rocks and breaks into a gallop before coming to a halt at your side.

As the horse stands there you can sense that something is wrong. She is still, a look of unease in her eyes but then, as if by some distant call, she rears on her hind legs and turns and races for the distant forest road.

For a moment you do not understand what has happened, then you remember Tak Lovar's words. The horse was only to take you as far as the foothills. Now the horse must return to its master. Although you do not like it the rest of your quest will now have to be on foot. For some time you watch Pallenten disappear into the haze of the

morning and the dark forests beyond. You admit to yourself quietly that you have come to depend upon that horse a lot, and your task will be all the more difficult without her strength to aid you.

Collecting your belongings you strap your sword to your waist, shoulder your pack, and begin the last leg of your journey to Stoneholme.

The hot food and decent rest has given you new energy. Restore all lost endurance points to your character sheet and then turn to section 107.

513

Before you the tunnel angles up towards the mine entrance and you run with all the speed you can muster. Behind you the swarm swirls in a melee of blue light, one that illuminates the rough-hewn passage as they attempt to make up the distance between you. Sweating in the cool air you wonder at your folly and push on all the harder.

Quickly you make the large hall at the junction of the three passages and consider for a moment if you should take one of the other tunnels, but you know there can be no safety found underground. The only salvation from these blood-thirsty insects is the brighter light of day, and you run for the threshold, not stopping as you burst out of the mine entrance and fall headlong into the dirt at Pallenten's feet. For her part Pallenten looks at you, chewing on a mouthful of grass and seemingly unconcerned by your hurried exit, but you have no time to waste.

Fearing that the light of day may not be enough you turn back to the entrance and draw your sword. In the darkness you can hear the swarm milling at the edges of the light, buzzing and fluttering within the shadows, but they go no further. Breathing heavily you wait, expecting nothing more than a short pause before the swarm attacks again. With Pallenten munching grass in your ear you stand your ground but you are safe, the insects instead retreating to the quiet gloom of their own domain. At least this time you have survived.

Many of your fellow Dwarvendim have remarked that it is your curiosity that will one day lead you to an untimely end but it would seem that today will not be that day. The Needle Flies can have the mine as their own and you shall return to your journey. Whatever else may lurk within the mine will have to wait for another, less urgent time. You do not have the time to waste.

Remounting Pallenten you quickly check your horizons for any approaching danger and set off again on a south-westerly track. To the north-west you can see that the storm is building quickly and it is definitely moving your way. Already a stiff wind is beginning to rise from the north, and upon its bluster it brings with it a cold, moist chill that foreshadows a powerful tempest to come. At some time today this storm will overrun the plains and you will need to find shelter.

Turn to section 370.

514

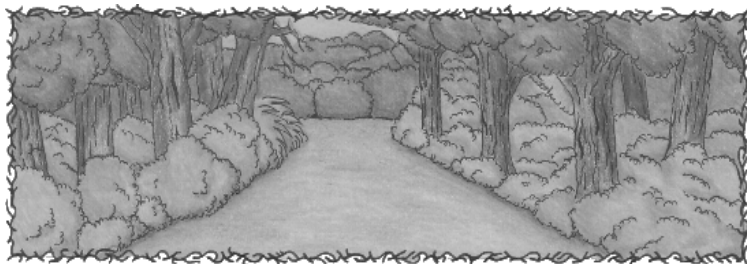
There is a chance that the Ranger may still be in pursuit, and to ensure that you have escaped the Kalborean you decide to make your way further into the marshes. The trail is no more than a path cut by wild pigs as they make their way from feeding ground to feeding ground but it proves a stable, if narrow, pathway deep into the wetlands.

About you the Faeron is a hive of activity. The marshes are a haven for bird life even at this late time of the year. Flocks of waterfowl and migratory birds infest the many bogs and pools, finding refuge within wide fields of reeds, and the deep undergrowth that lines every pond of standing water. At every turn you see sign of wild pigs and the scattered tracks of a species of large rodent known as Cumari. Within the bandits gangs of Kalborea both have a deserved reputation as good eating, and you keep an eye open for any chance to take one for the pot.

Carefully you follow the trail as it finds its way around and between the mires and lakes of the marsh. You are sure that somewhere ahead is the Western Trail, a ruined but usable section of raised roadway that will quickly take you first into the west before turning southwards. If you are right it should bring you out upon the open plains some distance closer to the mountains. The Ranger's fate is less certain, though you are sure it will take days for him to find a way out. If Providence is kind you shall not see him again.

In time you come upon a fork in the path. One leads to the north-west, the other to the north-east. Both should intersect the trail you are looking for, you need only choose which you will take.

If the north-west trail seems best turn to section 553. If the north-east trail is your choice turn to section 580.



515

No answer arises and in the ensuing silence you draw Than'durion and make your way inside. The interior of the cabin is as ramshackle and ill-used as its exterior. There proves to be little in the way of furniture within its four walls, and apart from a bed, small table and a solitary chair it is empty. There can be no doubt that the decrepit structure was once someone's home, though it has not been so for some time.

There is something you recognise here however, and quickly you move outside to check on your growing suspicion that this cabin is more than it seems. Although the interior of the shack is bare there is ample evidence surrounding it to show that many men have visited, the hoof and boot prints evident of at least a dozen in the past days. Your own experience tells you that there is a reason for this and it can be found outside.

The Faeron is one of the few places in northern Kalborea where a bandit can find safety for both himself and his stolen goods. The many farmsteads and other structures that litter the marshes are excellent places to stow plunder, and where necessary to find the shelter of a safe roof over your head. The trick though, in using such places for your ill-gotten gains, is to hide them away so that other bandits, who can sometimes stumble upon the dwellings, won't find the goods themselves.

Each bandit gang has their own particular codes that they use to direct members to caches of goods and money, but there are also a standard set of directions that remain in common usage amongst most. Your earlier life with these gangs tells you that this isolated place is being used as a drop point, and if you are lucky you may be able to find it.

Intrigued by what you might discover here you go outside and look about the porch area. Inscribed as small cuts in the wood above the

door are three parallel lines no longer than the length of a finger. This is a good indication that the cabin is indeed the marker for a cache, but where it might be requires further investigation.



**:dehr hoewck suud mar'shuil naer a'd aleth'on
pa a'du velle:**

Looking around the dwelling you come to the woodpile, neatly stacked against the side of the house. Although it is innocuous enough, the wood is newly cut and seems to have no purpose considering that the shack is deserted. Of all the things you have seen this woodpile is the one thing that is new, and it gives you pause to consider its true purpose. Quickly you realise that it is a pointer, one that draws a line directly to the edge of the clearing at you right.

Following the direction given you walk towards the thick vegetation and find near its border an area of ground that is far less stable than its surroundings. A quick test with your sword proves your suspicions, and it is then not hard to find a rope handle that you pull hard against. Immediately a long trap-door opens, hiding beneath it a narrow trench filled with an accumulation of stolen goods and provisions. After a quick look about the clearing you jump into the hole and search its contents.

A cursory survey of what you have found determines that most of the goods are of little value to your quest; most being clothing, personal jewellery and weapons of lesser quality than those you already possess. What you do find however, is more than a dozen ration packs, two flash-charges, and three small bottles of beer.

(You may take as much of the food as your carry load will allow. The provisions are bundled into packs equivalent to one ration each, but remember that you can only take what your character sheet allows you to carry. The two flash-charges are a valuable find. Each is a small tin-sized grenade capable of stunning the largest of creatures if used properly. The beer is something that may prove useful if you wish to take it. Each bottle will provide one point of endurance if drunk. All of these items are yours to acquire. Record their acquisition on your character sheet before you continue.)

Carefully you repack the remaining items and then replace the trapdoor as you found it. Calling Pallenten to your side you mount and turn her back to the trail. Although you have not found the

expected path to the main western track you have at least seen nothing more of the Ranger, and with this in mind you urge Pallenten forward.

With the afternoon now lost to your diversion into the marshes you follow the trail back to the fork and consider what you should do next.

If you wish to now take the north-west path turn to section 553. If you can see no benefit in doing this and would rather return the way you have come, retracing a southward path back to the open plains turn to section 578.

516

For a moment you wait, listening for any answer to your hail. All that you can hear in response is the bluster of the wind across the lake, but you know you heard something. Quickly you tether Pallenten at the landing and call out once again. In response there comes the crash of something falling within the house, not unlike plates or cutlery being dropped. Sure now that someone or something does reside within, you step out onto the narrow bridge and carefully make your way across to the farmhouse.

It is not an easy traverse, the bridge is a flimsy series of boards held above the water by equally unsound timbers, but it is stable enough for you to make it most of the way across before you find yourself coming to an abrupt halt. Ahead of you, and to the right of the farmhouse, there arises a slight disturbance in the water. It is nothing more than a ripple but it has not been caused by the wind. Something has moved beneath the lake's tranquil surface and you can see nothing of it through the dark waters.

Suddenly the lake erupts in a shower of water and grasping tentacles. Before you can react a huge limb, edged with suckers and sharp spines hits you squarely in the side and shoulder, sending you catapulting into the air. Thrown more than ten metres into the lake, you struggle for a footing and find that the water is not deep. Where you stand it is no more than waist high and as you grab for your sword your attacker looms out of the mere before you.

Like an opened bag of angry snakes the tentacles of a huge Watcher thrash the water, dragging the massive body of the squid-like predator out of its hiding place. In that moment of surprise you curse your own foolishness. There is always the chance that marshes such

as this might be infested with these monsters but there is little enough time to spare for self-recrimination. As you stand your ground the Watcher throws out its squirming limbs, cutting off any retreat you might have to the landing beyond. It means to have you for itself, though you have no intention of going quietly.

As a flock of water-fowl squawk into the air overhead the monster throws another limb towards you, its purpose to knock you backwards into the black water. With one arc of your sword you cut deep into its reaching limb and the entire Watcher shudders with the pain of it, but it will not be dissuaded from its meal so easily. From beneath the lake a flurry of tentacles lunge for your solitary form and there is nothing you can do except defend yourself.

The Watcher is an ambush predator. It prefers its meals easily taken, without too great a risk of harm to itself. Because of this the beast will only try so hard to have you. If you can put up enough of a fight it will retreat to its deep hiding place and simply wait for the next unsuspecting traveller to come its way. The Watcher has a combat value of 19 and an endurance of 21. If you survive four rounds of combat with this monster turn to section 557. If you cannot keep the beast at bay for this long then it is here that your quest ends, your fate to become its next meal. If this is the case then it must be to another life that you should look for better luck.

517

You look to the beckoning marshland and know that there are dangers residing within its dark borders greater than the Kalborean who rides so rapidly towards you. Drawing Pallenten to a halt you wait for the soldier, a small hope in your mind that he may have a peaceful purpose.

In a swift and determined movement the Ranger dismounts, drawing his sword as he runs at you. There can be no doubt now what the Rider's intention is. Before you can shout any question or explanation the Ranger grabs you firmly by your cloak and drags you off Pallenten, sending you toppling across her hind-quarters. Luckily you fall to the opposite side of the horse and this gives you the few precious seconds you need to regain your footing and draw Than'durion. With your sword flashing in the afternoon sun you gesture for the Kalborean to come and meet his fate.

You must fight this soldier of Kalborea. Powerful and well-trained, the Rangers of the Watch are formidable opponents and it will take all the skill you can muster to defeat this one. The Ranger has a combat value of 18 and an endurance of 16. If you win this battle turn to section 415. If it is the Ranger that prevails it will be here upon the open grasslands that your quest will end. Perhaps in another life you shall find better luck.



518

The Mutan is an agile and swift opponent but in the confines of the corridor the Hordim's knife is no match for your weapon. In the gloom its large eyes are nothing more than pits of shadow, however its countenance is grimly determined and its attack is relentless. Striking out with its short blade the Mutan probes your defences, lunging and slashing in an attempt to find a weakness it can exploit. There is no way though, that you can allow the Hordim to raise an alarm and in the confines of the corridor you press your advantage. The guard is both wounded and out-matched, and in the bloody conflict can maintain only a token resistance before you put it down with a lethal blow to the chest. Staggering backwards the emaciated creature falls and lays still, a wide pool of foaming liquid spreading quickly from the hapless sentry's gaping wound. As the Hordim's blood seeps between cracks in the stone floor it begins to react with the rock, eating away at its edges and sending fuming vapours boiling away as it works upon the floor-stones. In that moment you step back and cover your mouth with your hand, but quickly you realise that more than the stone floor is being worked upon.

The smell of the Mutan's blood is fetid beyond belief, its action as corrosive as any acid you have encountered. In the half-light you see your weapon smoking, its metal sheen disappearing beneath the

smouldering liquid's relentless attack. In fear of it doing damage you quickly attempt to remove the blood but it proves a stubborn adversary. It is a thick, clinging mess and in desperation you tear off a piece of the Mutan's tunic, trying to wipe it away but succeeding only in spreading it further along the blade. It is not until you sluice the metal with some of your drinking water that the corrosive fluid falls away. Luckily the damage has been minimal, the edge of your weapon still keen. After making sure none of the blood remains you stand at the turn in the passage and decide your next move.

Will you try the door of the first room. If so, turn to section 247. If you wish to continue down the passage to the second doorway you should turn to section 229.

519

Before the Hresh have a chance to raise the alarm you make a run for the entrance to Stoneholme. Quickly you ascend the stairway, urgent shouts from the clearing telling you that the Hresh have spotted your flight. Without turning to see if the Hordim are in pursuit you race for the huge arching entranceway, your boots pounding against the hard stone as you go. Behind you there comes the harsh clatter of the Hordim as they make the stairs, but for a few moments you are out of their sight and it is an opportunity that you cannot let pass.

Quickly you turn from the entrance and instead make for the stone balustrade that edges the platform at your left. With the sound of the Hresh about to make the top of the stairs you throw yourself over the side of the balustrade and drop back down onto the grassy clearing at its base. You land heavily against the spongy turf but you cannot wait to see what the Hresh might do. At the run you follow the edge of the platform and find a place to hide. Against the sheer stone wall a huge tree root has found a purchase in an exposed joint, forcing the stone blocks apart and opening a small triangular nook that will suit your purpose well. Without hesitation you bound onto the root and then push your way into the fracture's shadows. Crouched within the tight embrace of the stone you wait, your fate turning on whether any of the Hordim have seen you.

Above you the entrance erupts in a melee of activity and noise. From within your hiding place you can hear the Hordim searching the

platform, their deep guttural voices a mix of shouted command and disciplined reply, the clank of armour and sword a rhythmic and menacing backdrop to the search. Almost immediately shadows are drawn across the grass ahead of you as two of the Hresh lean over the balustrade above to search the wide clearing at the forest's edge. Carefully you push yourself deeper into the crevice and wait as they conduct an earnest survey of the open ground. As you hold your breath and consider what might happen if you are discovered, you have a chance to listen to the warriors and are struck immediately by the nature of their language.

It is true that there are few Men who understand the different dialects spoken by the Hordim, but as you hold to the thin hope that you will not be discovered you listen to the urgent conversation above and recognise that many of the words are familiar to you. One in particular gives you hope that you are about to be overlooked. As the long shadows of the Hordim point towards the forest you hear one say "arborim", which you know to mean trees in the Elder Tongue. Quickly the warriors leave the balustrade, their menacing shadows pulling back from the open ground ahead of you.

Almost immediately a group of Hresh move onto the clearing, making their way purposefully for the trees before disappearing into the understory. Your skin goes cold as you realise that at any moment one of the Hordim might turn and see you, but they are focused on the surrounding forest, and as you try and find a deeper shadow to withdraw into you watch as they beat the undergrowth, their desire to find you evident in the energy they expend in their attempt to discover some sign of your passing. For a good half hour the entrance to Stoneholme is a hive of activity, yet somehow you go unnoticed and soon the commotion fades, the coming and going of the Hordim lost to the quieter sounds of the forest.

When all is once again quiet you move carefully to extricate yourself from the cleft in the stone. Stiff and sore from the confines of your hiding place you tentatively peer out into the clearing and then search the edges of the forest for any sign of the Hresh. At all sides the way seems clear so with no more time to waste you pull yourself out of the fracture, over the huge tree root and onto the soft ground of the clearing. For a moment you wait, sure that a call will arise but none comes and carefully you make your way along the side of the platform.

Some twenty metres from your hiding place you find a series of

breaks in the stone wall that provide an easy climb back onto the platform above. You do not wish to try your luck on the stairs again, and it seems prudent to ensure that the way into Stoneholme is open before you make any further attempt at entering. Carefully you find the foot and handholds you need to climb, and soon you are peering over the lip of the platform at the dark entranceway. The platform is indeed clear, all sign of the Hordim gone. Still, you wait a few moments before pulling yourself onto the hard stone and finally stand. At your left shoulder an immense statue of a Dwarvendim Warrior searches the forest, its arm raised in greeting to the eastern horizon. If you are to save the descendants of all who built these great monuments, you think, it is best that you tarry no longer here. Without any further hesitation you make for the entrance.

The Imperial Entrance to Stoneholme awaits. Turn to section 83.

520

Desperately you claw at the edges of the chasm but there is nothing that will stop your inevitable plunge into the rift below. Using all the strength you have remaining you try and haul yourself out of the gap, however the rigours of your quest have left you with no reserves and your strength fails you. In this dark place, blanketed in shadow, you fall into the abyss. When you are gone nothing remains but the last dying flickers of your torch and the deep rumbling of the waters below. In this life your quest is over. In the next you may find better luck.

THE END

521

Quickly you move onto the bridge but pause as something long forgotten floods back into your memory. Quickly you take the small piece of stonewood from your pocket and hold it before you. With the proximity of the Shan'duil it burns like a blue fire, reacting to the vast power beneath you, but it is a power constrained as if it is waiting for you to command it into action. It is an invitation that you will not refuse.

With the shard in your hand you utter the only word that you think

may help. Across its smooth surface you whisper the one word that can help you - theoduris - and as it is lost to the thundering melee of the cavern you watch as the stonewood comes to life.

In a blinding flash of pure white light the stonewood shard erupts, pouring forth a growing sphere of clear energy that envelopes you, muffling the relentless thunder of the Shan'duil and shielding your life essence from the touch of the River. For a moment you pause, watching the enormous power of the River of Life wash against the sphere, only the vibration in the stone beneath your feet a reminder to the power that moves about you. With the shard in hand you take a deep breath and advance further onto the bridge.

Within the protection of the spherical shield you move quickly across the span of the bridge. It stands more than two hundred metres in length and rests on its foundations as a single arch of stone, impossibly thin for its reach but solid underfoot nonetheless. In the glaring illumination of the Shan'duil the entire cavern is brought into view as you run, and in that blazing light you begin to see things that were not at first apparent.

For a moment you stop at the mid-point of the span and look down into the River of Life. Through the curious filter provided by your sphere of protection the Shan'duil is clearer and within its surging flow you begin to see other lights and apparitions moving with its ebb and rush. You cannot say what these forms are but they exist in great multitudes, following the main wash of the River and all its tributaries as they run from the cavern. It is a spectacle that keeps you enthralled, but as you stand within the safety of the sphere other apparitions also come into focus and with these you cannot remain a spectator.

On the bridge before you a dark shape materialises, one of a vast flowing melee of spectral shapes that now fill the air. You are sure that it is the magic of the sphere that has brought them into view but the gangled form that now stands before you can see you as well, and as you turn to face it you know that it is not there for your benefit.

Standing roughly man-sized it is a grotesque apparition of a Hresh, somehow existing both within the real world and beyond it. Flowing and moving in a shimmering dance of vapours and shadows it advances upon you, taking what life energy it has from the closeness of the Shan'duil. In one hand it holds a very real scimitar and it means to do you harm.

This Dreyadim exists in the real world only because of the proximity of the River of Life. It is one of the many Hordim who have

failed the test that would have allowed them entry into Hallen'draal, and with their dishonour have been given over to the service of the Dreya Tree. This apparition has no mind of its own but it will follow all the instincts of its kind, and unlike its living counterpart has only a tenuous hold on its semi-corporeal form. Caught upon the bridge you cannot avoid conflict with this spectral being.

The Dreyadim Hresh has a combat value of 16 but no endurance. Combat with such a phantom will continue only until you win a combat round that strikes a full four point hit against the Hresh. At that time the combat is over, the Dreyadim dissolving back to its rightful place in the Underworld. If you are successful with this combat turn to section 530. If it is the Hresh who is victorious turn to section 5

522

For a short time you stand before the vast wall of shimmering light and consider what it is. Many years before, at a time when you were safely within the walls of the Temple at Das Frontiere you knew a Maturi of great knowledge and wisdom. The Maturi would talk often of the wonders of EarthMagic, and specifically the all-encompassing power of the Shan'duil, the River of Life. For the River, he said, nothing was impossible and such was the breadth of its power that it could display to those who sought it the very secrets of time and space.

You remember very clearly one such conversation where he described the wonders of the Time Stream, a device artficed by the ancient Trell as a tool to observe the past and gain clues to the many diverging paths of the future. In your naivety you had put aside the idea of such a thing as an impossibility but here it stands before you, and in its moonlit reflections you mouth an apology to the Maturi for your disbelief.

There are two things however that you remember with great clarity. The first is that the Time Stream is not harmful to Men, and because of this you should be able to walk through it without difficulty, gaining access to the exit on the other side of the hall. The second does not provide you with equal confidence. A Time Stream it has been said, is a device that requires the proximity of the Shan'duil itself to function. Somewhere very close is the River of Life, and it is a Power beyond the

reckoning of most Men. What its proximity may mean to you is unknown.

Carefully you move towards the Time Stream, placing your hand upon its rippling surface and finding that it is warm to the touch but not harmful. When you are sure that it is safe you take a deep breath and plunge into its flowing energy. To your surprise the Stream is thick, more than two metres in depth and it takes a few moments to force a path through it. Like a heavy fluid it clings to your skin and only releases its hold on you once you have passed cleanly through.

Once upon the other side the exit stands open and beckoning. Without looking back you make for the threshold and find that it is the entrance to another wide staircase, one that descends even further into the mountain. As you peer into the seemingly endless depths you can only wonder if there is an end to the delvings in this place. With only a small hesitation you take to the stairs and begin your descent.

Turn to section 588.

523

In this life you prefer to take those paths that are known to you, and this ring of mists is a mystery you do not wish to test with your life. Quickly you turn from the swirling vapours and retrace your steps back to the lake shore. In the quiet of the huge cavern you can hear little, but within the silence there comes every so often the sounds of shifting grit and falling stone, hitting the smooth dark waters and sending slow ripples outwards across the lake surface. It is a dark and eerie place, and one you must find a way out of.

With all your equipment gone, and with no food you cannot survive long in such a cavern. Determined to find another way out you search the length of the pebble beach, checking each nook and cranny, old fracture or stone fissure that might harbour another exit from the lake shore. In the cold air it is a desperate and fruitless exercise, one which leaves you sitting on the hard pebbles, staring out at the smooth surface of the water before you, and left with little hope and no place to go. Perhaps you think, the ring of mists may be your only chance after all.

As you wait upon the narrow shoreline there comes within the stillness a strange muffled vibration. It is not audible at first, nothing more than a tremor that runs through the stone about you, disturbing the lake's placid surface. But as you listen you begin to hear a

pounding, a strangely distant drumbeat that echoes within the stone chamber, getting louder and louder as you watch for some sign of its origin.

Suddenly out in the centre of the lake a large chunk of rock hits water, sending a plume of dark liquid erupting into the air. Surprised by the sudden movement in this quiet place you stand and watch as more stone falls out of the ceiling and into the lake below. With each falling shard the vibrations increase, and in a rising thunder you begin to recognise what the noise is that now echoes within the cavern. It is the sound of crushing stone, of rock being torn and smashed by something that needs it out of the way. You have heard this sound before.

In an explosion of scattering rock the ceiling of the cavern collapses downwards, a huge section of the roof falling as massive slabs of stone plummet into the dark waters. Within the tumult of collapsing stone and earth you see falling the spectral aura of the Druhl, and as it falls it lets out a hideous scream that resonates within the cavern like a detonation. All too quickly you realise that you have not escaped this beast wrought of stone and magic after all. It has come for you.

Like a wave panic sets upon you, but you are not to be undone yet. Salvation may still lie beyond the mists of the stone ring and with this one hope in mind you run for the stairs. Across the loose pebbles you make for the archway that will take you away from the lake shore but within the gloom there comes a greater threat looming in the darkness. Across the surface of the lake there rises a wall of black water, stirred by the impacts of falling stone and the immense bulk of the Dragon. Before you can make the stairs it hits, a solid blow that throws you against the stone walls of the cavern then drags you out into the cold depths.

For only a few moments you remain conscious, the chilling water sapping what strength you have from muscles that have endured too much already. It is only at the last that you see the spectral Dragon moving through the water towards you. Without strength or hope you wait for the end that must come, and it arrives quickly upon the edges of the Druhl's skeletal teeth. In this life your quest is over.

THE END



524

The passage directly ahead is large and stands closest to your entry into the cavern. With no other factors to guide you it seems the best choice. For a moment you pause and search out the space, looking for any sign that there is something more than just broken rock within this chamber. What you see is a wide field of smashed stone and shattered crystal, curiously piled in undulating heaps that remind you of the tailing mounds common to many mines in the east of Kalborea. In this subterranean chamber the mounds stand out only as a curiosity, but one that will certainly slow any quick traverse of the cavern floor. If however, this is your only difficulty you decide that it will be a small inconvenience at best.

Quickly you take to the open floor and begin climbing over and around the stone mounds. Most are made up of pulverised rock but others stand as huge accumulations of stone and crystal, haphazardly thrown into unstable heaps that you avoid deliberately in the gloom. It is hard and slow work, the terrain working against any chance of you quickly making for the western exit. When you are at the half way mark of your passage a noise to your left brings you to a halt. It is an insignificant fall of stone somewhere in the gloom, but within the silent space it resonates, echoing off the hard walls and causing you to pause and wait.

Searching the shadows you hear another sound of movement in the dark but this time it is a definite sign of something rousing itself, coming to life within the darkest corner of the chamber and it is big, very big. With no further hesitation you quicken your pace, leaving any pretence of stealth behind as you scramble over the stone mounds. Only fifty metres from the western exit the mounds end and you find yourself instead upon an open space, clear of the undulating stone piles. Standing upon the open floor you draw your weapon and peer into the darkness. Suddenly the chamber erupts as a monstrous screech shakes the quiet, bringing down stalactites from the ceiling and sending a sharp vibration crashing through the floor beneath you. Before you can move the shadows disgorge a nightmare and for a heartbeat you cannot believe what you have encountered.

Like an apparition the creature detaches from the surrounding shadows, its enormous bulk wrapped in a spectral aura of rushing vapours and dark energy. From your vantage you watch, unable to discern immediately what it is, but sure that it is a magical construct of some type. Before your eyes it moves closer, raising itself upon huge

legs before extended a pair of wide wings into each corner of the cavern. In the darkness your blood runs cold.

You do not know what it is but a more knowledgeable soul could tell you that it is a Druhl, a construct of magic, bone and rock, created in the form of a monstrous Dragon for only one purpose, to act as a Guardian for the very caverns you now journey through. For you however, it is simply a nightmare and in the confines of the cavern you cannot help but stare at it, transfixed by the raw hatred that seeps from it like blood from an open wound.

Standing upon its rear legs it is the petrified skeleton of an ancient Dragon, wrapped in a black writhing aura that holds it together, its body a moving morass of rock and fractured stone gathered from the cavern floor. In the gloom it moves purposefully forward then comes to a halt before the entrance to the south-western passageway.

Before you can move the Dragon raises its head and screeches into the roof of the cavern. It is a deafening cry that echoes like a high-pitched thunderclap through the open spaces, collapsing stone from the walls at all sides and bringing down huge pieces of crystal from the roof overhead. The sheer size of the spectral creature chills you to the bone; its ragged, grinding form moving ponderously as it charges directly for you. In this place you feel the malevolence and hatred that fuels its malice and you can have no doubt that if it can reach you it will kill you.

Turning on your heel you run for the western passage, the huge creature smashing at the ground behind you in its attempts to chase you down. Within this cacophony of grinding rock and clouds of dust you race for the western exit. About you the air chills, the cold despite of the beast's presence sapping your strength even as you make the threshold of the passage.

Sure that you are now safe you are not prepared for what happens next. In the gloom a shimmering wall suddenly appears before you, a solid field of energy that you cannot avoid. At the run you hit the barrier, your body thrown backwards in a jolting thrust, your arms flailing as you try and maintain some control over your trajectory. In a cloud of dust and grit you hit the floor and skid to a halt.

Stunned by the barrier's violent resistance you shake your head and search your memory for some clue of what it is that confronts you. With the Druhl only a few heartbeats from where you stand you search the passage beyond the shimmering wall and find what you are looking for embedded upon a small granite plinth only metres

ahead. It is a Shieldstone, a talisman of the ancient world and no doubt erected to keep the spectral beast behind you from straying beyond the confines of the cavern. For a moment you despair, for only someone with a piece of stonewood can pass beyond such barriers. If you do not move quickly this Shieldstone will serve its purpose and be the death of you as well.

If you have a piece of stonewood in your possession turn to section 595. If you do not hold a shard of the Silvan Tree turn to section 562.

525

Attempting to make as little noise as possible you place your back against the door and push with all the strength you can muster. The door does not budge. It seems to be locked solidly from the other side, and has been designed so that no obvious access can be gained from the Great Hall. Having failed at your first attempt you then try to lever the door open with your weapon, but it is immovable and you risk damaging its blade. For a moment you consider what might lie beyond this barrier, but the door is solidly locked and you can see no obvious way to open it. After a quick, but unsuccessful search of the wall surrounding the door you give up, and with no further time to waste decide to try another of the exits from the Great Hall.

If you have not already done so will you?

Investigate the alcove further along the northern wall? If so turn to section 239.

Try and open the first door in the southern wall? Turn to section 31.

Try and open the second door in the southern wall? If this is your choice turn to section 189.

Try and open the door in the eastern wall? If so turn to section 161.

526

Beyond a high stone archway the staircase opens into an immense natural cavern. Bathed in a deep blue light massive rock formations formed as huge pillars arch overhead, reaching out as vast branches across a chamber that overreaches a wide flowing river of incandescent light. Like starlight made fluid the river of energy pounds and surges along a deep chasm of fractured stone and then

through a series of clefts and chasms branches out as a river might feed its tributaries. In the bluish glow it takes a moment for your eyes to adjust but within the azure vista it does not take long for you to identify the only path that you can take.

Directly before you is a wide chasm, edged by steep cliffs that descend deep into the earth. Within this abyss the Shan'duil ebbs and surges, a brilliant blue river pulsing with energy, its undeniable power prickling at your skin as you look out over the huge gulf that separates you from the farthest side of the cavern. Upon the edges of the abyss stands a narrow platform of smooth stone, fashioned as a landing from which extends a long arching bridge. In a smooth curve of finely artificed masonry the bridge spans the River, finding its furthest purchase upon another landing at the chasm's far edge. In the rough interior of the cavern the bridge is a wondrous piece of architecture, a span that must have withstood the power of the Shan'duil for millennia.

For a time you stand at the entrance to the stairway and survey what you have found. At each end of the bridge stands two immense statues of polished black obsidian. Wrought as hooded priests of the ancient world they rise twenty metres above the highest arch of the bridge; and in their dark majesty look towards a shrine built into the far wall of the cavern.

Beyond the reach of the bridge, within an alcove carved from the natural rock, there has been raised a stepped platform, and upon its upper surface stands the statue of a leafless tree, as large and powerful as a mature Oak. From your position you can see the tree is artificed in white stone but radiates with the blue energy of the River, and as you watch you see its aura pulsing in time with the surging rush of the Shan'duil itself.

Apart from the landings and the bridge there is no other way forward. As the Shan'duil surges within the abyss you can feel the proximity of its power beginning to affect you. As a prickling touch the blue energy washes across your skin, and with each pulse you can sense a small piece of your own energy merging with the greater rush of the River. In this place it does not take long for you to realise that the warning posted against the Hordim also has meaning for Men as well. Stay too long in the presence of this Power and by degrees it will take your life.

You have no way back so the only way must be forward, across the bridge. Carefully you leave the stairway exit and move out onto the

landing. Before you extends the bridge. Upon its first steps you see that it is some ten metres wide and bordered by a high stonework balustrade, through which a blue aura swirls and twists as you watch. All about you is a deafening thunder, one that echoes about the great cavern, sending deep vibrations shuddering through the stone beneath you. What you notice most though, is the increasing sensation of your remaining energy being drained from you with each surge of the River. It is too potent a danger to allow hesitation. If you are to survive the crossing of the great stone bridge you must move ahead now.

If you have the skill of Lorecraft and you have a piece of stonewood in your possession turn to section 521. If you have the skill of Lorecraft but do not possess any stonewood turn to section 533. If you do not have the skill of Lorecraft turn to section 591.

527

The Druhl thunders across the cavern, its massive clawed feet pounding in echoing tremors that lift jagged pieces out of the stone floor as it runs. Ahead you see the exit but the ground is a morass of fallen stone and drifts of piled dust, and before you can make the passage the broken flooring trips you up, sending you sprawling into a mound of dust-covered debris. Even as you fall you know that the beast will not allow you to escape, and in this sunless place the end comes quickly enough.

In a gout of dust you fall hard against the unforgiving stone but as you try and recover your footing the Dragon's dark bulk rears upon you. In a bone-crushing impact a clawed fist slams down, crushing the life from your body, leaving nothing but a stain upon the cold stone. In this life your quest is over. Do not despair however, for in another life you may well find better luck.

THE END

528

Upon the high stairway you make your way, leaving behind the rough natural caverns below and rising slowly into the familiar structures of Dwarvendim-made stonework. Quickly the stairway changes, turning from a tight spiralling well into a long slanting incline that works its way directly northwards. Within the stairway

you struggle against the endless stairs, resting when you can, taking food if you have it. It is a long ascent; a gruelling climb upon steps worn and aged by the passage of countless Men and Hordim through the years, but one that ultimately ends within the confines of a small torch-lit room.

Throwing your pack to one side you place your weapon beside you and slump against the nearest wall. For a time you rest against its smooth stone, recovering your breath and wondering what must confront you next. The stairway is a gloom-filled pit from which you can barely discern the distant sounds of the beast, working its fury against the mountain far below. If you are lucky, you think, your quest will be over well before the creature can find its way into the world of Men. As you listen for any further signs of danger you look around the room and consider what must be your next move.

The chamber is square and smooth-walled, and completely bare except for a small archway that provides an exit in its eastern wall. The exit however, is covered by what seems to be a heavy piece of fabric and as you push tentatively against it you realise that it is more than mere cloth. Slowly you place your hand against the moving fabric and discover that if you push hard enough your fingers pass right through it. It is a curious and disconcerting sensation but one that you will have to endure further if you are to find your way out of this room.

Grabbing up your pack and equipment you move towards the archway and try to force a path through. In a constricting embrace the fabric resists, fighting your attempts to leave the room, but as you struggle harder you find yourself able to push a way through, somehow passing beyond its fibrous barrier into what proves to be a wide chamber beyond. When you are through the archway you come to a halt and wait as your eyes adjust to the gloom. With some relief you recognise that you have indeed returned to the halls of Stoneholme.

As your vision adjusts you look about the hall and quickly discover that it is a large natural cavern, one that has been cunningly sculpted as a huge rectangular space supported at each corner by an immense Dwarvendim warrior. High overhead the roof arches into an ornate vault upon which a rich tracery of leaf and vine has been carved, intertwined within the natural roughness of the stone. For a short time you admire the artifice of your ancestors but movement from one of the passages brings you quickly back to the dangers of your quest.

From your knowledge of Stoneholme you know that you have found the Great Hall, once the meeting place of Kings and the true heart of the Fortress. It was here that Morgen the Younger held the business of his court and ultimately where the treachery of his allies was uncovered. If you are right the Deep Vault should lie very close indeed.

In the shadows you see that you have entered the Hall upon its western edge, close to the colossal feet of one of the Dwarvendim warriors. The hall extends before you for more than two hundred metres and is at least half as wide, illuminated by a dim yellowed glow that permeates the natural rock overhead. Within this half-light you identify a number of other exits standing silent in the darkness.

At your left shoulder is a wide archway, the threshold to a set of stairs that lead upwards into the stone of the mountain. From this dark opening you can hear the distant sounds of movement and the unmistakable voices of Hordim approaching. They are still some distance away but there is no good reason to take these stairs. If you are right about where you are the Deep Vault should lie somewhere below this hall, not above it.

In the low light you see another door in the northern wall at your left and next to it a deep alcove set into the stone. In the southern wall there is also two other doors and in the distance one further exit cut into the eastern wall ahead. Carefully you adjust your pack upon your shoulders and place your hand against the fabric covered opening to the archway behind you. To your bewilderment the archway is gone, nothing but the rough stone of the wall greeting your fingertips as you run them along the hard rock. Curious as to what has happened you push against the stone, then search the wall for any evidence that an opening existed. You can find nothing, but as you ponder this mystery sounds come from the near stairway that tell you the Hordim are getting closer. It is time to move on.

If you wish to try the nearest door in the northern wall turn to section 48. If you think it better to try the near door in the southern wall turn to section 31. If the second door in the southern wall is more promising turn to section 189. If however, you would like to investigate the alcove carved into the northern wall first turn to section 239. If none of these options seem best and you would rather take the door in the far eastern wall turn to section 161.

529

There is no benefit to remaining so exposed and as the creature moves in the gloom you sheathe your blade and find a place to hide within a ramshackle mound of fallen crystal and smashed rock. In the darkness you remain still, searching the shadows for any sign of the beast. It is only a matter of a few minutes before the creature emerges into view.

Like an apparition a monstrous beast detaches from the surrounding shadows, its enormous bulk wrapped in a spectral aura of rushing vapours and dark energy. From your vantage you watch, unable to discern immediately what it is, but sure that it is a magical construct of some type. Before your eyes it moves closer, raising itself upon huge legs before extending a pair of skeletal wings into the far corners of the cavern. In the darkness your blood runs cold.

You do not know what it is but a more knowledgeable soul could tell you that it is a Druhl, a construct of magic, bone and rock, created in the form of a spectral Dragon for only one purpose, to act as a Guardian for the very caverns you now journey through. For you however, it is simply a nightmare and in the confines of the cavern you cannot help but stare at it in disbelief.

Standing upon its rear legs it is the petrified skeleton of an ancient Dragon, wrapped in a black, writhing aura that binds it together, its body a moving morass of rock and fractured stone gathered from the cavern floor. In the gloom it moves purposefully forward then comes to a halt before the entrance to the south-western passageway. For a moment it pauses, looking into the darkness before turning in your direction, sniffing the air as it searches you out. It knows you are here, however it cannot yet find you.

Before you can move the Dragon raises its head and screeches into the roof of the cavern. It is a deafening cry that echoes like a high-pitched thunderclap through the open spaces, collapsing stone from the walls at all sides and bringing down huge pieces of crystal from the roof overhead. The sheer size of the spectral creature chills you to the bone, its ragged, grinding form moving ponderously as it searches the ground, looking for you. Within the pile of stone you remain unnoticed but this cannot remain so for long.

In a building rage the beast begins to throw large chunks of rock, skidding them across the floor, smashing and pulverising the mounds in a systematic attempt at flushing out the trespasser it senses within the cavern. As one of the pieces slams into the ground only a few

metres from where you hide you know it is time to get away from this ghostly apparition. If you remain here it will find you, and there can be no doubt that if it does you will die.

The Druhl has cut off any exit through the south-western passage. Only the larger western exit ahead and the smaller passage at its right remain open. If you are to escape this beast you will have to make for one of them and hope the Dragon will not be fast enough. If it is the western passage you wish to take turn to section 554. If you believe the smaller passage in the north-west will be more prudent turn to section 582.

530

For only a moment you wonder whether the protective sphere that keeps you safe from the power of the Shan'duil will also be an effective defence against the Dreyadim. It is a hope that proves short-lived. At a howling rush the Hresh charges, swinging its scimitar in a wild frenzy, pushing through the energy of the sphere and shouldering you hard in the chest. Caught by surprise you fall backwards, the Hresh upon you in an instant, its scimitar raised high, ready to deal a lethal blow.

Without thinking you kick out with your legs, smashing into the creature's knees and toppling him backwards onto the smooth stone of the bridge. In the passing of a heartbeat you regain your feet and stand your ground, the Hresh already on its own feet, the scimitar waving in wide arcs as it runs for you once again.

In its mindless rage the spectral Hordim acts instinctively, using all the strength of its semi-corporeal form in a series of blows that crash against your blade, forcing you backwards as it strikes. Placed on the back foot by the ferocity of the attack you know that it is only a matter of time before the Dreyadim will find an opportunity to strike a deadly blow, and you cannot allow that to happen. As the ghostly Hordim raises its scimitar to strike at you once more you thrust outwards with your weapon, passing its keen edge directly through the Hresh's chest. In a spasm of pain mixed with surprise its form begins to collapse and then dissolves away, the Dreyadim screaming its anguish and frustration as it dissipates into nothingness.

For a moment you catch your breath and wonder at what else might lay before you, but there is precious little time left to you to

ponder it. Before you have a chance to regain your energy you sheathe your weapon and make a run for the end of the bridge. About you the dark forms of the Dreyadim spiral around the span, swirling in great clouds of malevolence but unwilling to confront you again. Without waiting to see what they might do you make for the far side of the chasm and soon find yourself standing before the shrine, and the enormous white tree.

Your knowledge of Lore tells you that this is a Taal, a shrine built in supplication to the Silvan Tree but for a purpose that is unknown to Men. Standing upon its intricately decorated platform the Tree rises at least forty metres over your head and apart from its pure white form seems to be a perfect reproduction of a living tree, down to the texture of its bark and the fragile form of the twigs that rest at the end of its enormous branches. In the blue glow of the cavern it radiates an aura just as intense, drawing power from the vast flowing river of light at your back.

Looking up you wonder at who must have carved the Tree, but as you watch you begin to see it moving as if caught in an unfelt breeze. Slowly, almost imperceptibly, the tree sways to and fro, its branches stressing and bending to a wind that you cannot feel. In the immensity of the cavern it glistens like a jewel and you cannot help but stare at its perfection, watching it sway to the power of the Shan'duil and pulse with a blue fire that entwines itself through its branches. Truly, you think, you have found here one of the wonders of this world.

As you stand transfixed by the Tree the sphere of protection dissolves around you and suddenly the power of the River bursts back into your consciousness. In a tremendous crash of noise and prickling energy you realise the danger that can still take you if you remain within the cavern too long. To escape the pounding thunder you move quickly around to the other side of the Tree and find behind its platform an area of rock wall that has collapsed outwards, covering the ground at the rear of the Taal with debris and smashed stone.

It takes only a quick survey of the area to see that at some time in the past somebody has dug a tunnel into the cavern, a rough hole of cut stone that leads out of the domain of the Shan'duil. For all the wonder of this place you know you cannot stay, and without looking back you take to the tunnel and disappear into its darkness.

Turn to section 551.

531

The climb is not beyond you but you cannot tell how sound the stone may be along its full reach. It is not your first choice but you decide that it will be better to try and force a way through the flowing barrier.

Carefully you move towards the shimmering light, placing your hand upon its rippling surface and finding that it is warm to the touch but not harmful. When you are sure that it is safe you take a deep breath and plunge into its flowing energy. To your surprise the rushing stream is thick, more than two metres in depth and it takes a few moments to force a path through it. Like a heavy fluid it clings to your skin and only releases its hold on you once you have passed cleanly through.

Once upon the other side the exit stands open and beckoning. Without looking back you make for the threshold and find that it is the entrance to another wide staircase, one that descends even further into the mountain. As you peer into its shadowed depths you wonder if there is an end to the delvings in this place. With only a small hesitation you take to the stairs and begin your descent.

Again you find yourself on a long decline, the stairway a straight arrow inclined directly to the root of the mountain. In construction it is the same as that which you have passed through before but unlike the previous stairs there is no silvered reflections to give you light. Instead the stairway is bathed in a blue glow unlike anything you have seen before, and it ebbs and flows up the steps like a heartbeat pounding in the earth itself.

Upon the seemingly endless stairs you make your way, watching always for any sign that danger is near. Beyond all thoughts of your quest however, lay the resonating energy of what resides below. Each minute upon the stairs comes with a growing sensation of power, of an unfettered energy that crackles in the air and sends pulsing vibrations racing through the stone around you. Upon every footfall you feel its insistent force, and with every step the blue light increases.

Another hour passes as you descend the stairs and like the first great staircase they find an end as well. What you discover upon the staircase exit leaves you speechless.

Turn to section 526.

532

With only seconds to spare you utter the Word - "nethel". In that instant the barrier collapses away, its shimmering field evaporating into nothingness before your eyes. With no time to waste you run for the passage, the air behind you filled with the thunder of the beast's approach. In these few moments you think there is a chance that you may escape, but it is a hope that fades as quickly as the barrier itself. In your haste you did not command the barrier to simply let you pass. Instead you have removed it completely, the Druhl now free to pursue you into the large passage ahead.

Without looking back you run, the ground resonating to the pounding footfalls of the beast, but it is a race you cannot win. In an eruption of smashed stone and roiling dust the Dragon brings a solid clawed fist down upon you. In a bone crushing impact you die, nothing remaining of your time in the world but a bloody stain upon the floor of the passage. Your quest is over. Providence has not been kind but perhaps in a latter life you shall find better luck.

THE END



533

You know enough of the nature of the River of Life to understand the danger you are in. The Shan'duil is the concentrated life-force of the world, sentient and concerned only with the balance of the seasons and the good order of all Existence. But this giver of life can be a deadly companion when encountered face to face. If you are to survive the encounter you must find a way out of this cavern quickly.

At the run you take to the bridge, keeping low against its balustrades as a measure of protection from the insistent gaze of the Shan'duil. All about you the thundering echo of the River's flow tremors the air, sending pulsing vibrations through the stone beneath your feet, but within this melee of overwhelming noise you do not stop. Quickly you cover the distance across the bridge, the vast flow of

the Shan'duil a glaring blue illumination that bathes the cavern with its azure touch. Ahead the Tree stands washed in the River's power however you do not stop to wonder at the immensity of its form. Instead you rush in behind the statue's platform and find a sanctuary within the shadows of the Tree.

Breathing heavily you try and recover from the exertion of the run but it is difficult, the power of the Shan'duil has had its effect and it has left you fatigued, your limbs leaden, your shoulders strangely numb. At least in the shadows of the Tree you seem to have found the one place where the River's proximity provides no danger, and as you rest you cannot help but notice the immensity of the shrine you have sought shelter behind.

Your knowledge of Lore tells you that this is a Taal, a shrine built in supplication to the Silvan Tree but for a purpose that is unknown to Men. Standing upon its intricately decorated platform the Tree rises at least forty metres over your head and apart from its pure white form seems to be a perfect reproduction of a living tree, down to the texture of its bark and the fragile form of the twigs that rest at the end of its enormous branches. In the blue glow of the cavern it radiates an aura just as intense, drawing power from the vast flowing river of light at your back.

Looking up you wonder at who must have carved the Tree, but as you watch you begin to see it moving as if caught in an unfelt breeze. Slowly, almost imperceptibly, the tree sways to and fro, its branches stressing and bending to a wind that you cannot feel. In the immensity of the cavern it glistens like a jewel and you cannot help but stare at its perfection, watching it sway to the power of the Shan'duil and pulse with a blue fire that entwines itself through its branches. Truly, you think, you have found here one of the wonders of this world.

For a time you stand in awe of the Tree but you know you must find another way out of the cavern. Even as you ponder the marvel reaching up over your head you can feel a subtle but noticeable dissipation of your energy. Your sanctuary behind the Taal is not as safe as you might have hoped. With nowhere else to go you look to the stone walls behind you and find a small outcrop of rock, behind which hides a gaping hole where its surface has collapsed outwards. Camouflaged by mounds of smashed rock the hole is the entrance to a rough passageway.

It takes only a quick survey of the debris to see that at some time in the past somebody has dug a tunnel into the cavern, a rough hole of

cut stone that leads out of the domain of the Shan'duil. For all the wonder of this place you know you cannot stay, and without looking back you take to the tunnel and disappear into its darkness.

Your unprotected run across the bridge has left a lasting impression upon your endurance level. Take 3 points from your maximum endurance and record this on your character sheet. For the remainder of this quest the touch of the Shan'duil will restrict your maximum endurance to this lower level. When you have done this turn to section 551.

534

Stunned by the barrier's violent resistance you shake your head and search your memory for some clue of what it is that confronts you. With the Dragon only a few heartbeats from where you stand you search the passage beyond the shimmering wall and find what you are looking for embedded in the ground only metres ahead. It is a Shieldstone, a talisman of the ancient world and no doubt activated to keep the spectral beast behind you from straying beyond the confines of the cavern. For a moment you despair, for only someone with a piece of stonewood can pass beyond such barriers. If you do not move quickly this Shieldstone will serve its purpose and be the death of you as well.

If you have a piece of stonewood in your possession turn to section 595. If you do not hold a shard of the Silvan Tree turn to section 562.

535

In a thundering melee of falling rock the ceiling collapses, each part that surrenders to the flashcharge's detonation bringing down the next. Before this danger you stand hesitant for only a heartbeat. On the turn of a heel you begin to run, clouds of dust and scattering rock threatening to bring you down as you try and escape a certain death. Choking on a mist of smashed stone you almost succumb but Providence is with you and from the clouds of debris you emerge, half-suffocated, struggling for breath but alive. It is not all good though.

To escape the collapsing stone you have had to return down the

passageway, clouds of suffocating dust forcing you back down towards the cavern, and the imponderable malice of the Druhl. With a thin film of grime covering your whole body you emerge from the passage and come to a halt. In the distance you can see the Dragon and it can see you. It is not a happy Guardian.

Before you the barrier of shimmering energy holds firm but the constant attack of the beast is weakening its capacity to keep the Druhl in check. When it lays its dull red eyes upon you once again its fury intensifies and you know it will not stop until it finds a way through the Shieldstone's defences.

Quickly you turn your back on the beast and decide that the left passage can be your only way forward. Somehow you must get away from the Druhl.

Turn to section 542.

536

The nature of the flowing light is unknown to you but there are no other options. If you are to find a way through it must be on the other side of this vast apparition.

Carefully you move towards the shimmering light, placing your hand upon its rippling surface and finding that it is warm to the touch but not harmful. When you are sure that it is safe you take a deep breath and plunge into its flowing energy. To your surprise the rushing stream is thick, more than two metres in depth and it takes a few moments to force a path through it. Like a heavy fluid it clings to your skin and only releases its hold on you once you have passed cleanly through.

Once upon the other side the exit stands open and beckoning. Without looking back you make for the threshold and find that it is the entrance to another wide staircase, one that descends even further into the mountain. With only a small hesitation you take to the stairs and begin your descent.

Again you find yourself on a long decline, the stairway a straight arrow aimed directly at the root of the mountain. In construction it is the same as that which you have passed through before, but unlike the previous stairs there is no silvered reflections to give you light. Instead the stairway is bathed in a blue glow unlike anything you have seen before, and it ebbs and flows up the steps like a heartbeat

pounding in the earth itself.

Upon the seemingly endless stairs you make your way, watching always for any sign that danger is near. Beyond all thoughts of your quest however, lay the resonating energy of what resides below. Each minute upon the stairs comes with a growing sensation of power, of an unfettered energy that crackles in the air and sends pulsing vibrations racing through the stone around you. Upon every footfall you feel its insistent force, and with every step the blue light increases.

Another hour passes as you take the stairs and like the first great staircase they find an end as well. What you discover upon a further threshold leaves you speechless.

Turn to section 526.

537

The Druhl thunders across the cavern, its massive clawed feet pounding in echoing tremors that lift jagged pieces out of the stone floor as it runs. Ahead you see the exit but the ground is a morass of fallen stone and drifts of piled dust, and before you can make the passage the broken flooring trips you up, sending you sprawling into a mound of dust-covered debris. Even as you fall you know that the beast will not allow you to escape and in this sunless place the end comes quickly enough.

In a gout of dust you fall hard against the unforgiving stone but as you try and recover your footing the Dragon's dark bulk rears upon you. In a bone-crushing impact a clawed fist slams down, crushing the life from your body, leaving nothing but a stain upon the cold stone. In this life your quest is over. Do not despair however, for in another life you may well find better luck.

THE END

538

The Sand Lurker is a beast that enjoys an easy meal and you are determined to disappoint it. Struggling against the grasp its tentacles have upon you, you pull your weapon free and slash out, cutting cleanly through two of its limbs. Pieces of the monster hit the wall of the passage, spraying a thick liquid across the rough stone.

Immediately the rock begins to dissolve, hissing and steaming as it runs like half melted tallow down onto the debris covered floor. In a spasm of unexpected pain the Lurker draws back its free tentacles and hauls itself out of its desiccated lair. In the narrow confines of the passage its bulk fills the space before you, and in those few moments of hesitation you get a good look at what it is that confronts you.

In the half-light the beast shimmers, its skin a pulsating bag covered with a fetid ooze that reeks of rotting flesh. Before it writhes a multitude of sinuous tentacles, searching the area within its reach, feeling for whatever caused it such pain. Immediately you realise the creature is blind but in the narrow passage its limbs thrash and search, reaching out for you.

It is then that the Lurker attacks again. From within the tangle of limbs another pair of tentacles lunge towards you. One passes your left shoulder but the other is aimed directly at your chest. With another cut the tentacle collapses onto the floor and the Lurker shudders, spraying acid-like fluids about the passageway. Writhing in pain the beast's anger grows, and for a moment you are sure it is about to attack again but instead it falters, now unsure in its resolve.

There is a truth in Arborell that no predator chases a meal to its own destruction. All those creatures that inhabit the world and who feed off others measure the benefit of a meal against the losses sustained in acquiring it. The Lurker is no different and with the loss of its third tentacle it hesitates once again. It is an advantage that you decide to press.

Stepping in amongst the remaining limbs you hack wildly, trying to cause as much damage as possible. The Sand Lurker shudders with each cut, unwillingly to press the fight but you know you cannot kill it for its vital organs reside out of reach. Instead you decide to force it back into its hole.

Steadily you advance, swinging your blade in wide arcs, sending small pieces of the beast spinning off against the passage walls. In this melee of arcing steel and thrashing limbs you stand too close for the beast to grab at you and in the end you prevail. Caught by the confines of its own domain the Lurker withdraws back into its hole, content to lick its wounds and wait for a less combative meal. At least for this battle it is you who wins the day.

In a shuddering slump of sand and clouding dust the Sand Lurker disappears back beneath the ground. For a moment you stand against the wall of the passage and try and recover your breath but you know

you cannot spend time resting here. Before the monster decides once again to try its luck you run past the Lurker's lair and hurry up the passageway. Quickly you leave the beast far behind and find yourself at an intersection with another passage that curves upwards and westwards. From the noises of shattering stone emanating from its dark shadows you can tell that this is the left passage you chose not to follow before. Both passages must come together here and there seems little point in returning back along either of them. In the half-light you take a deep breath and follow the new passage into the west.

Turn to section 569.

539

For a time you consider how you might gain entry beyond this door but it stands securely locked and you have little time to spare trying to open it. You cannot however, deny that your curiosity has been aroused, and with the feeling that you can spare a few minutes you decide to try and pick the lock. Quickly you take your pack from your shoulders and retrieve the small eating knife brought with you from Maenum. Its blade is thin and tapered, and although you are not the most skilled lock-pick you set about trying to open the door. With the narrow tip of the knife you feel for the teeth within the lock that must be depressed, searching out the small ridges that will free the device's mechanism. It is not a task you find easy.

In the heat of the passage your hands are slick with sweat, the constant pound and rush of the furnace somewhere ahead diminishing your ability to concentrate. In the end though, it is your knife that fails you. Caught within the workings of the lock's mechanism it snaps, breaking off at the handle and lodging firmly in the keyhole. Frustrated by your lack of progress you hammer at the door but such remonstrations do nothing to open it.

Stymied by the door's stubbornness you look up and down the passage. In the gloom there is little to see, and the heat only builds in intensity the longer you remain here. In the end you decide that your quest is not being served by this delay, and that it will be better to move on.

There is nothing to be gained here. Turn to section 42 and continue with your quest.

540

The vast wall of moving light is something unknown to you and there seems no good reason to risk forcing a way through it. For a moment you consider if you should try and find a way around it but there is no clear way of doing so. The stream flows from one end of the chamber to the other and it is immensely high. It is a barrier that you will have to retreat from. Perhaps a more straightforward path can be found within the halls and passages of Stoneholme above.

Quickly you turn and come to an abrupt halt. The entry behind you has changed and in the light of the rippling stream you shake your head in disbelief. Before you stands the high arch, but whereas before a long corridor reached out into the mountain there is nothing more than a perfectly smooth and blank wall of stone. In desperation you place your hand upon its surface and press hard, but it is as solid as the mountain itself and effectively blocks any way out.

For a moment you consider the possibility that you have inadvertently moved further along the hall and that your exit opens somewhere else along the wall, but there is no sign of any other opening and in the end you have to accept that your way back is blocked. The only way forward will be either through, or perhaps around this huge stream of energy.

If you would like to inspect the chamber further before committing yourself to any attempt at finding a way through the stream turn to section 577. If you see little option but to walk into it turn to section 536.

541

For a moment you stand transfixed by the sight of the lumbering monsters, but only for a moment. With no sure way to defeat both of these brutes you are prepared to try anything and you make your decision in a heartbeat. As the Warbeasts circle your position you grab a piece of Nahla Bread from your pack and the bottle of beer you acquired previously on your quest. You have no time for careful preparation, and with only seconds before the monsters attack you stuff the bread forcefully into the open neck of the bottle. Beer spews over the floor-stones of the Great Hall but with the beasts only ten metres from where you stand you throw the bottle at the nearest and hope that what you have heard about Nahla Bread has not been

exaggerated. Even as the bottle sails through the air you can see a powerful chemical reaction building in the glass container, and in one blinding flash you come to appreciate that everything you have ever heard is true.

In a detonation that sends a shockwave running through the stone beneath you the bottle hits the flank of the Warbeast and explodes. Instantly engulfed in a cloud of shattering stone and dislodged dust the Warbeast disintegrates, showering rock as deadly missiles over the floor of the Great Hall. Caught by surprise you are not prepared for the blast-wave that knocks you off your feet and sends you skittering across the stone flooring. Only luck keeps you safe but the same cannot be said for the other Warbeast.

Also caught in the blast the second Warbeast has not fared as well. Hit by a number of flying pieces of stone it has lost one of its forelegs and sports a deep gash that runs jaggedly along its side. In a tremoring fit of pain and fury it regains its footing and looks you directly in the eyes. It may be injured but it has only one purpose and that is to kill you.

This remaining Warbeast has a combat value of 17 and an endurance of 12. If you defeat this creature turn to section 559. If however, it is the Warbeast that is victorious then it must be here that your quest ends. If this is so then it will be to another life that you should look for better luck and a stronger arm.

542

With no time to delay you take the left passage and run into the darkness. Behind you the Druhl hammers away at the edges of the entranceway but the spectral creature can no longer be your concern. Although tired from the rigours of your quest you find the energy to keep a brisk pace and in the half-light of the passageway move further into the stone of the mountain.

The passage proves to be a roughly cut tunnel, following the course of a layer of stone that rises by degrees along a winding path strewn with fallen stone and deep drifts of dust. Only the gleam of a few veins of luminous crystal lights your way but it is enough to illuminate the passage and in its dull glow you keep up a steady run, though struggling against the dust and unstable footing.

After a good hour of travel the need to rest and take food brings

you to a halt. Within a small niche in the stone you find a position against one of the walls and relax. The Druhl has been left far behind and in the quiet you consider your position, searching your pack for food before settling down to rest.

(If you have food you may take some at this time. The usual increase in endurance should be recorded if you eat. If you have no food or Nahla bread in your possession at this time deduct one point from your endurance to account for the additional fatigue you must now endure.)

In the silence of the passageway you rest, no sound or sign evident that there is any living thing close. Your diversion through this underworld beneath Stoneholme has left you bruised and beaten but you can sense that the object of your quest is close. You cannot tell if it is the call of the Tellandra itself or just a gut feeling, but as you let your body recover the certainty grows within you that the Deep Vault is somewhere ahead, and that you are indeed going the right way.

When you feel more able to return to your task you stand and check the passage behind you. In the distance you can hear the Druhl, but the sounds are muffled and indistinct, and knowing that the spectral beast is still a threat return to following the passageway.

Before long you find a worn set of stairs and then upon their upper threshold a small square chamber. This chamber is definitely Dwarvendim made and at its end stands a further exit, the remains of an iron portcullis barring any way forward. Quickly you approach the bars and find them rusted to the point of ruin. With one hand you grasp the lower edge of the grill and pull it upwards, the decrepit bars snapping and bending as you force the portcullis out and then back upon itself. In a spray of metal particles and dust you force your way beyond the bars, brushing centuries of grit and rust from your clothing as you look into a long hallway that stretches some distance ahead. In the shadows you feel all the stronger that you are close to your goal, but as you look down the corridor you wonder how much farther you must travel. The collar at your neck is an insistent reminder that time is running short.

Turn to section 579.



543

Providence is not with you on this day. Instinctively you lunge forward, attempting to clear the huge slab of crystal that falls from the roof above. If not for the choking clouds of dust or perhaps the weariness of a long quest you might have succeeded, but on this day you do not have the resources to clear the lethal fall of stone. In a shuddering impact the crystal hits, tonnes of solid stone laying you out beneath its overwhelming weight. In this life your quest is over, your existence snuffed out in the lonely passages of a place long forgotten by Men. It must now be to a latter life that you should look for better luck.

THE END

544

If the object is of value it will be worth a few minutes spent retrieving it. Carefully you lower yourself over the edge of the well and begin to climb down into the shadows below. The descent is easy but as you lower yourself further into the depths you encounter a thick slime covering most of the well that reaches a few metres above the waterline. It is too slick to allow any further descent but you find a foothold against a broken piece of stone that may just allow you to reach down and pull the medallion from its resting place. It will require a measure of agility to reach it however.

Test your agility attribute. If you are successful turn to section 490. If you fail this test turn to section 486.

545

You do not cover more than twenty metres before you begin to feel the full effects of the Shan'duil. As the River rushes below, you begin to see writhing tendrils of energy spreading over the balusters of the bridge, deep blue and alive with power. Within the thunderous echoes of the River's flow you feel your legs beginning to weaken, your breath laboured as you try and cover the distance to the other side of the chasm. It is an exhausting race but it is one that you win, just.

Upon the bridge you are exposed to the full power of the River. Struggling against the debilitating touch of its swirling energy you

forge on, dropping to one knee, staggering as you fight for the sanctuary you hope can be found upon the other side. By the time you reach the bridge's end you are on your hands and knees, crawling painfully for the shrine. With barely enough energy to drag yourself out of harm's way you make it in behind the shrine's stepped platform and collapse onto the ground. For a moment you cannot move.

With leaden limbs and shallow breath you lie still, unable to do anything but recover from the grasp of the Shan'duil. It was your strength that saved you but Providence has smiled on you as well. In the shadows of the shrine the Shan'duil's power proves to have no effect, its ability to draw down your energy lost behind the massive stone platform. As you lay upon the broken floor you stare up at the Tree that spreads its bare limbs above you and attempt to regain your strength.

Although detailed knowledge of such things has long passed from your memory you do remember that this is a Taal, a shrine built in supplication to the Silvan Tree but for a purpose that is unknown to Men. Standing upon its intricately decorated platform the Tree rises at least forty metres over your head and apart from its pure white form appears as a perfect reproduction of a living tree, accurate in detail to the texture of its bark and the fragile form of the twigs that rest at the end of its enormous branches. In the blue glow of the cavern it radiates an aura just as intense, drawing power from the vast flowing river of light.

Looking up you wonder at who must have carved the Tree, but as you watch you begin to see it moving as if caught in an unfelt breeze. Slowly, almost imperceptibly, the tree sways to and fro, its branches stressing and bending to a wind that you cannot feel. In the immensity of the cavern it glistens like a jewel and you cannot help but stare at its perfection, watching it sway to the power of the Shan'duil and pulse with a blue fire that entwines itself through its branches. Truly, you think, you have found here one of the wonders of this world.

Mesmerised by its ancient beauty you lay still until you have the strength to rise. Stiff from the effects of the River you look about the rear of the platform and find an area of rock wall that has collapsed outwards, covering the ground at the rear of the Taal with debris and smashed stone.

It takes only a quick survey of the area to see that at some time in the past somebody has dug a tunnel into the cavern, a rough hole of hewn stone that leads out of the domain of the Shan'duil. For all the

wonder of this place you know you cannot stay, and without looking back you take to the tunnel and disappear into its darkness.

Turn to section 551.

546

There is nowhere to turn and in the darkness you face your attacker. Weapon in hand you are a lonely figure, standing before the great spectral Dragon as it smashes its way into the chamber. In a tumult of falling stone and growling malevolence the beast rises before you, then lets out a hideous scream. In the confined space it is a deafening blast that echoes off the walls and sends stalactites falling from the ceiling.

Staggering backwards you steady yourself and stand your ground, yelling at the giant beast to come and meet its fate. Unfortunately the Dragon has no intention of striking you down itself. It is a spectral servant of a far greater power that cares only that it guards these halls from all trespassers, whether they be Man or Hordim. Battle is not its goal, only the quick disposal of those that tread here. With one mighty punch into the ceiling the Druhl fractures the roof of the chamber. Before you can move to protect yourself the ceiling collapses, thousands of tonnes of stone and crystal falling in a blanket of debris that you cannot avoid.

Realising the danger you try and run for the hole in the floor but you have no chance of reaching it. As the ceiling falls the Druhl collapses into a tangle of rock and bones, its task complete. For you there is nowhere to run. In a pounding crash of stone against stone the rock fall does its job, your life crushed beneath its enormous weight. In this life your quest is over. It will be to another that you must now look for better luck.

THE END

547

The climb is a gruelling test but it is one that your strength and natural agility does overcome. Upon the stone you make use of the deep carved images as hand and footholds, negotiating a path first to the uppermost reach of the slab and then down its other side. It is a

climb though, that brings with it mysteries of its own.

At first you find the slab to be warm to the touch, a not unsurprising warmth that could only be generated by the vast volumes of energy the monolith is somehow absorbing. As you ascend this changes subtly. The higher you climb the cooler the stone becomes. At its upper edges it proves cold enough that you have to cover your hands with loose cloth, but in doing so a new sound grows about you, one that proves both very personal, and insistent.

As an undertone to the rushing flow of the energy stream you begin to hear voices, a strange whispering of tangled conversations, rising and falling within the pounding flow of the stream. At first you cannot separate the differing languages or themes but as you ascend higher one voice stands out, and as you focus upon it you identify that it is speaking in Dwarvendim, although of an older dialect.

Quickly you realise that the voice is that of Morgen Orncryst the Younger, the very StoneKing who presided over the demise of the Dwarvendim, and who brought ruin and slavery to them all. As you climb you find yourself captivated but it is a sorry tale, and one that becomes all the clearer as you find your way to the top of the stone.

In a fractured set of speeches, conversations and anecdotes the spiral into despair of the last StoneKing is all too evident. You listen as he is told of the encroaching armies of Kalborea and of the need to pay the Faeyen for the weapons and provisions they have provided. In his despair you overhear the last speech he gave to the Army of Stone before the great Battle of Menion'Barac, and the reports of their bloody defeat at the hands of the Kalborean Army. Above all there comes the undertones and rumouring of betrayal, of the duplicity of the Faeyen and their ultimate surrender to save themselves and hand the Dwarvendim into servitude.

It is a story that finds its way to you in rumouring whispers but it is at its end that you hear of the Dragon Windhammer. Amongst the shouts and cries of a great tumult you sense the rising dread of a population as the news is spread that their King has found a violent end within the halls of Stoneholme. And from their cries there can be no doubt as to the assassin. Above it all is carried one word – gael'qirion – Dragon.

For a time you rest upon the upper surface of the stone monolith before making your descent upon the other side. The voices recede quickly and soon are lost to the pounding rush of the stream, but the gravity and desperation of the voices leaves you sick to your stomach.

One thing you cannot doubt any more however, is the existence of the Dragon Windhammer. Somewhere ahead of you the monster waits in its dark demesne and you can only wonder if it knows your coming.

Once upon the other side the exit stands open and beckoning. Without looking back you make for the threshold and find that it is the entrance to another wide staircase, one that descends even further into the mountain. With only a small hesitation you take to the stairs and begin your descent.

Again you find yourself on a long decline, the stairway a straight arrow aimed directly at the root of the mountain. In construction it is the same as that which you have passed through before but unlike the previous stairs there is no silvered reflections to give you light. Instead the stairway is bathed in a blue glow unlike anything you have seen before, and it ebbs and flows up the steps like a heartbeat pounding in the earth itself.

Upon the seemingly endless stairs you make your way, watching always for any sign that danger is near. Beyond all thoughts of your quest however, lay the resonating energy of what resides below. Each minute upon the stairs comes with a growing sensation of power, of an unfettered energy that crackles in the air and sends pulsing vibrations racing through the stone around you. Upon every footfall you feel its insistent force, and with every step the blue light increases.

Another hour passes as you take the stairs but like the first great staircase they find an end as well. What you discover upon a further threshold leaves you speechless.

Turn to section 526.

548

You cannot say how long you lay unconscious. The fall was brutal in its impact and sprawled upon the cold floor you awaken to the metallic sensation of blood in your mouth. Carefully you raise yourself, testing your limbs and finding that all have survived your ungainly drop onto the hard stone. Your head however, has fared worst of all. Upon your forehead flows the result of a wide gash, blood finding its way into your mouth and ears as you lay still upon the floor. As you try and steady yourself you realise that your life has been spared only by good luck. If your head had hit the ground only slightly more to the side the impact would have killed you and indeed

your quest would now be over.

For a short time you recover your senses and do what you can to stem the blood that wells freely from your forehead. Climbing the stone is no longer an option, the blow to your head has left you disoriented and you cannot know how long you have lain unconscious. For all you know your time may well be running out.

With your head clearing you check your equipment and consider what you should do. The metal collar at your throat is a constant reminder of your need to finish your task, and you have no time to spare finding another way around the shimmering wall of light. You will have to trust that Providence is on your side and walk through the stream. It is now your only hope.

Turn to section 536.



549

Caught within the writhing embrace of the monster's tentacles you watch as the Sand Lurker hauls itself out of its desiccated lair. It is a hideous creation, a large slug-like beast that fills the passage with its bulk; its quivering form covered in a gelatinous ooze that stinks of rotting flesh. As you fight against its grasping tendrils it moves forward, most of its body a morass of limbs and one huge gaping mouth, equipped with endless rows of razor-sharp teeth.

Held firm but not yet subdued, you struggle enough to free your arm and swing your blade twice. In a frenzy of unexpected pain the Lurker flails two severed limbs, its blood splattering along the walls, sending goutts of steam and dissolving stone into the air. For a moment the beast hesitates, blind in its dark nest and unsure as to what it must have snared, but it is a hesitation that is fleeting. Out of the steaming air more of the tentacles grab at your body, latching on with powerful barbed tips that dig into your flesh, cutting deep as they find a purchase upon your bones.

Screaming with pain you cut again with your blade but it is to no good effect. The Sand Lurker has you and it is not about to let you go. In one trembling slump of sand the creature descends back into its hole, dragging you with it to a certain doom, and sure of the feast to come. In this life your quest is over, your last thoughts the earnest hope that the beast will choke on you.

THE END

550

The western track appears a better option. It is wider than the trail you have been following and shows sign of having recently been used. If you are lucky it will lead you out of this wetland and back onto the open plains.

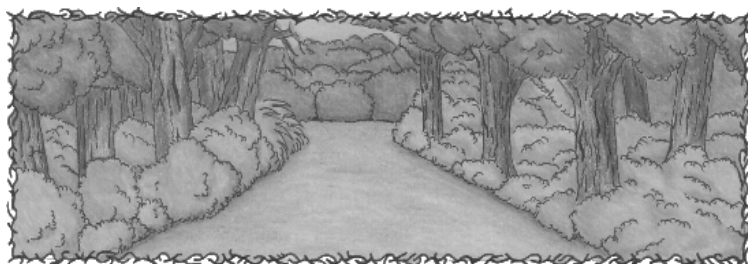
Turning Pallenten onto the new trail you find quickly that it heads into the west for some distance. Around you the vegetation thickens, the bush giving way only to wide ponds of still water, edged by the dome-bushes that seem so common here. Enclosed completely by the marshes, you follow the track as it negotiates the bogs and meres until you reach a small landing. It is no more than a wooden platform, suspended above the water's edge upon a series of thin pylons, but it is what you find standing at the centre of the lake beyond that piques your curiosity.

The lake is a wide circular body of water, still and dark in the afternoon sun. Upon this expanse of quiet water there stands a farmhouse, raised above the surrounding lake upon a multitude of thick timbers, and connected to the water's edge and the landing before you by a long, narrow bridge of equally unstable supports.

The farmhouse is a ruin but the sight of it suspended out of the water is something you have not seen before, although you know the reason why it was done. It is a well known fact of the frontier that the Faeron Marshes have been expanding, reaching further into the plains that surround them with each passing year. At some time in the past the farmer who had claim to this land must have realised that his livelihood would inevitably be swallowed up by the encroaching waters, and faced with ruin decided to elevate his farmstead above the rising marsh. Nothing could forestall the inundation of his lands but he had time to build up his home, and here it now stands, a strange memorial to his efforts, and his ultimate failure.

As you look about the lake it becomes apparent that you have met a dead-end here yourself. The track stops at the landing and there is no other exit to be found at any other point along the lake's border. Unfortunately the time spent upon this trail will not return you to the plains as you had hoped. Frustrated by this you carefully turn Pallenten back towards the path, your intention to retrace your steps, when there comes from the interior of the farmstead a definite sound of something moving within. You call out but get no response.

If you would like to go and investigate the farmstead turn to section 516. If you would rather return to the trail and go back to the northern path turn to section 570.



551

After the azure grandeur of the Shan'duil the confined roughness of the tunnel comes as a welcome relief, and the further you find your way along its narrow delving the more the power and clamour of the River recedes. Carefully you feel your way, finding the rough-hewn passage an easy negotiation as you follow its ramshackle ascent back into the stone of the mountain.

Very quickly you lose all sense of direction but in the gloom you are sure that the tunnel is finding its way upwards, veering in all directions as it follows a path along a vein of quartz. Curiously the quartz itself has a subtle luminosity and by its dull gleam you see that the builder of this hole in the earth was after gold, and he had gone to some lengths to find it.

Every few hundred metres you discover the tunnel opens into a small chamber, a hastily cut room in which the owner must have kept his quarters as he delved deeper into the mountain. Within each of these spaces you find the meagre remnants of his occupation, and a

curious journal scrawled upon the walls, scratched into the rock in no apparent order it is an ongoing memoir of his descent into the roots of the Devkraager Tor. Only a few minutes reading tells you everything you need to know.

The miner was a man, a Dwarvendim by the name of Madimus. Without occupation or purpose after the fall of the Stone Kingdoms he had set to the task of finding a way into the Deep Vault himself with the goal of taking the Tellandra by stealth from the clutches of Windhammer. Driven by grief he had begun a dangerous descent through the halls of Stoneholme and had ultimately found his way deep in the mountain, but in doing so had happened upon an old tunnel system within which he had become hopelessly lost.

It was within a large cavern below Stoneholme that he had stumbled upon the quartz vein and the gold that came as its glittering companion. Lost to the metal's allure he sought instead to find its source and, a supply of the rare metal in hand, bargain with the Dragon for the return of the Pillar of Stonewood. It was a plan that could never have succeeded but as you read his journal you see the signs of someone lost to desperation and delusion. Quickly his writings begin to ramble and soon there is nothing in his words that can tell you any more. Wrapped in a delusion the Dwarvendim had delved far beyond the reaches of the gold and had ultimately found his way to the Shan'duil itself. His last comprehensible words report him finding a "River of Light" and then nothing more. For a short time you ponder the futility of his story but in this place you know that his efforts have not altogether been in vain.

By a quirk of Fate your fellow Dwarvendim has become the instrument of your salvation, giving you the only way out of the cavern of the Shan'duil. In some measure if you are successful in restoring the Tellandra it will be to the efforts of Madimus that it will have been made possible, and ultimately that was his intent from the beginning. As you work your way further up the tunnel you are not unaware of how Providence may have had a hand in your good fortune.

As you make your way along the tunnel the rough passage begins to level out and soon you find yourself negotiating a natural fracture in the stone across which slabs of rock have been placed to form a solid but uneven flooring. On this footing you are forced to move much slower, and it takes time to find the end of Madimus' delving. It is within a wide cavern that the tunnel finds its end and even in the gloom you can see that you have a number of ways forward open to

you.

From the tunnel the quartz vein opens out into a large natural cavern. Ahead, across a flat area of open ground more than one hundred metres in breadth you can see three exits. One at your left hand reaches into darkness, another smaller passage at your right hand is lost to its own depths and directly before you is a larger gaping exit. All are cold and dark and none more inviting than the others.

In the shadows you consider what lies before you, and find as your eyes adjust to the gloom that there is more to ponder here than just the exits. At the left side of the chamber there opens a deep hole from which issues a rank and billowing fume. At all sides the ground is strewn with boulders and smashed stone and above all else you can sense a deep brooding malevolence that hangs like a mist in the air. If you weren't so far underground you might think that you had just stumbled into the lair of some primordial beast. Suddenly chilled by a gust of cold air you move forward and then come to a halt. Before you can go any further you must choose which of these exits you should take.

If you wish to take the left exit turn to section 598. If your choice will be the large exit directly ahead turn to section 524. If it is the smaller passage to the right that you wish to take turn to section 571.

552

Any hope is better than none, and as you consider your options you are sure that no salvation can be found in the cavern behind you. In the time it takes to inhale one deep breathe your decision is made. Without looking back you walk into the swirling mists. Whatever may lie beyond them can be no worse a fate than dying here in the dark alone.

In a heartbeat the world around you dissolves away as the magic of the portal takes hold. In that instant you feel yourself disincorporated, somehow changing into nothing more than another vapour moving swiftly within the larger disc of roiling mists. It is a sensation short-lived, for as you begin to sense that you have changed the world reforms back around you, hard stone and cool air striking your face as you tumble from the other side of the ring.

Caught by surprise you make an attempt at steadying yourself but

the transformation in the portal lingers as a numbing weakness that does not pass quickly. Without control of your limbs you tumble from the stone platform's upper level, collapsing onto a shelf of rock. Confused and disoriented you recognise only that you are face up on the stone, staring at a field of blue sky.

For a moment you can do little more than wait as the strange numbness recedes, but by the time it allows you to rise you already recognise where the portal has sent you. In a wide arc there is nothing before you but a vista of mountains, jagged peaks in shades of grey lined around a horizon of deep blue sky. It is the late afternoon and the suns of Arborell are reaching for their nightly rest, but the air is crisp and chilled and in the bright light of day you know that Providence has not been kind.

For whatever purpose the ring has sent you deep into the mountains of the far west. This place is known within the nations of Men as Araheal and for many reasons is well-known to the Dwarvendim, but there can be no salvation for you here. As you stand you can see the stone platform about you rests upon a shoulder of hard granite, the peak of Mount Araheal wind-swept and edged with snow reaching up at your right hand. It is a point in the western mountains from which any traveller must endure weeks of hardship to return to the civilised world. Turning you see the portal standing quiet, its hard black form finely outlined against the deep blue, its mists gone. You have no knowledge of how to reactivate it and you know that there is no easy way to return to the realms of Men. In this moment you realise that it is here that you are going to die.

Carefully you feel at the metal collar around you neck and accept that your quest is over. You are now weeks from Stoneholme and Maenum will surely fall before you can return. If the Tak Lovar is to be believed the metal collar will do its gruesome work within the next few days, and for that reason you sit back upon the steps and decide to enjoy the setting suns. In this lifetime your quest is over. Perhaps in another Providence will prove kinder.

THE END



There is every chance that the Western Trail you seek can be found by following this north-western path. Turning Pallenten onto its rough track you take her on a winding negotiation of low-lying swamps and wide fields of dammed water. In this part of the Faeron you see much evidence of the farms and fields once worked by the hapless Kalboreans who chose this region as their home. Long dykes and inundated water channels all attest to the lengths most went to try and keep the rising waters at bay, but it was all to prove futile, and as you follow the path into the north the marshland that they fought against spreads out before you.

The Faeron is a vast wetland, and in its expansion it took not only farmsteads and buildings but small towns, roadways, inns and taverns and all the infrastructure of modern life that once supported them. As you take Pallenten along the edges of the ruins that rise out of the waters as stark monuments of what had once been, you can see also that other travellers are still making use of the marshes, but for different reasons. All along the trail you can see sign of the passing of men both on foot and on horseback. Every so often there is also evidence of discarded items, torn cloth and broken equipment, thrown to the shoulders of the trail and left as litter to be swallowed up by the ever changing marshes.

You have no doubt that most of what you see is the refuse of bandits and others who use the wetlands as sanctuary from pursuit; but you can also be sure that the Kalborea Army has been here as well, and it is a possibility that keeps you alert as you make your way northwards.

It is with some relief you find what you are looking for no more than a league further along the trail. Beyond a series of weathered dykes and enclosed ponds you find the Western Trail. Although not as large as the Bandit's Row that cuts a path from north to south through the centre of the Faeron, the Western Trail is a clear and relatively direct route from the lower fringes of the marshes out towards its western edge. After struggling out onto the raised roadway you check first for any sign of danger, and then turn Pallenten westwards.

After the claustrophobic confines of the narrow paths you have been following the Western Trail is an open road, although ruined by the action of weather and neglect. Upon its rough surface Pallenten gallops forward, winding her way about the many bushes and trees that have found a purchase upon its hard surface. Within the space of

an hour you find the Trail veering into the south, and by the early shadows of evening you can see the open plains ahead, peering through hedgerows of dome-bushes that line the edges of the old roadway.

Glad to be finally seeing an end to this unwanted detour you urge Pallenten on, sending her racing again for the open grasslands. Sure that you are now safe from any pursuit you begin to think about finding the best path to the foothills of the Devkraager Tor, but your thoughts are cut short by a sudden movement at the corner of your eye.

From the left side of the old road a dark shape charges out of the shadows. Holding a long piece of timber the figure throws it into the path of Pallenten, forcing her to a halt before grabbing at your cloak and hauling you back over the horse's hind-quarters. Your assailant is prodigiously strong and in a tumble of flailing limbs and scattering equipment you fall heavily to the ground.

Immediately the man is upon you, locking a firm hold around your neck as he reaches for a long dagger at his belt. In that moment you recognise the Ranger, and cannot help but smile as you realise the futility of your detour. The Ranger knew that he could not follow you, so instead chose the most likely place that you would exit the marshes and then simply waited. You respect the man's determination but if you do not act quickly this soldier of Kalborea will kill you, and you have no intention of allowing that to happen.

The Ranger is strong, however you are no weakling. In the struggle that follows you place a foot against the Ranger's chest and heave him off, toppling him into the dome-bushes. It takes a moment for the man to regain his footing and in that pause you find your own feet and draw your sword, urging the Kalborean to come and meet his fate.

The Ranger is a formidable opponent but not one that is beyond your strength or skill. The Ranger has a Combat Value of 18 and an endurance of 16. His duty is clear and he will not stop until either he, or yourself, are dead. If you win this combat then the way is open to return to the plains beyond. If this is your fate turn to section 341. If however, it is the Ranger that prevails it will be here that your quest ends.



554

Even as you scramble from your hiding place a huge boulder slams into the mound, sending broken stone and crystal showering in all directions. You have no cover, but in the clouds of dust and grit that erupts with the impact you remain hidden just long enough to pick up a sizeable piece of stone and throw it with all your strength into the shadows behind the raging beast. With a loud crash it hits the wall and bounces onto the stone floor, clattering upon the cold granite as it comes to rest. The noise sends the Dragon after its source and in that moment of opportunity you turn for the western exit and run with all the strength you have left to you.

Ahead the exit is a wide opening into the stone and as you run you can hear the creature turning, its huge bulk smashing into pillars of rock and crystal as it senses your presence and realises your deception. From the shadows another scream pounds through the cavern however this time you have no intention of hiding. Running at full speed you make the threshold to the passage, the Dragon narrowing the distance between you with every step you take. It is just as you think you have made the safety of the corridor beyond that you come to a painful halt.

From out of the passageway ahead a barrier of gleaming energy rises before you. Unable to stop in time you slam into its edges, a tangible wall of energy grabbing at your rushing form and throwing you back into the cavern. In a cloud of dust you fall onto the floor, but the Druhl is at your heels and you have no time to recover. Rolling back onto your feet you shake your head and turn to see the beast bearing down upon you. In a matter of seconds you are going to die.

If you have the skill of Lorecraft turn to section 534. If you do not turn to section 575.

555

There is something familiar about the resonating power that fills the air. It is like the lingering echo of something long forgotten, and in your gut you know that this stairway will take you closer to your quest's end. Quickly you arrange your equipment more securely about you and take to the stairs.

As you descend even further into the mountain you come to appreciate that the age of this delving is truly old. Carved from the

cold stone of the mountain the stairway is impossibly steep, its steps narrow and weathered, its walls a morass of fractured rock and crumbling facing stones. Within this long descent however there is a subtle light that illuminates the way, infiltrating the stone and growing brighter as you move further down the incline. It is like moonlight reflected off a pond of disturbed water, and as you travel deeper its intensity grows.

In the semi-darkness you move quickly. Confined within these stone walls the stairway is a silent witness to your passing but you no longer feel as if you are alone. The solitude of Stoneholme has been left far behind, replaced by an unusual feeling of being watched, one that grows as surely as the wavering light grows with each step you take closer to the root of the mountain. There is surely something ahead that is now aware of your approach.

For some hours the stairway reaches out before you, an exhausting series of stone steps that seem to have no end but which ultimately come a conclusion. In a wash of flickering light you stumble onto a wide flat landing of perfectly smooth stone and find yourself standing within a square chamber some twenty metres in width. There is only one exit from the featureless room and it extends to the west along a narrow corridor. A quick survey of the chamber shows nothing of interest, but the end of the corridor ahead opens into a further chamber, and it is from there that the source of the light bursts forth.

With nowhere else to go you move forward and as you approach the western corridor you begin to hear voices, nothing distinct just a babble of sounds like a crowd talking all at once. Carefully you edge against the nearest wall and slide closer to the chamber. As you do so the sounds increase, but now you can also hear thunderstorms and rushing rivers and other sounds unfamiliar to you. In a rising chorus the cacophony increases until you are forced to place your hands over your ears. Whatever is ahead has become the source of both the light and the rising waves of noise.

When you reach the chamber you cannot at first believe what you have found. Before you is a long narrow hall, spreading across your view as a road might at the junction of a crossroads. On the other side of this room is a further exit, but it is what moves between you and the further way out that holds your attention.

Before you extends a room more than two hundred metres in width, yet no more that fifteen metres in depth. Rising above you for more than sixty metres the chamber is surfaced in white stone, its walls

perfectly smooth and artficed at their zenith into a curving barrel vault that reaches across the narrow space. At either end of the chamber rises walls of shimmering moonlight, reflecting endlessly about the chamber as if someone is moving their hand through water, sending ripples and droplets of light scattering in all directions.

Within the chamber however moves a stream of energy as high as the hall itself, emerging from the shimmering light at your left hand and crashing into its opposite wall after passing quickly down the length of the hall. At first the great stream appears as nothing more than a rushing river of light and sound, but as you look more carefully into its mesmerising shimmer you begin to see things, and in this alien place they both transfix and terrify you.

As you watch the river of light changes. From out of the reflective stream you begin to see images, and quickly those images grow into clarity. Before you a great story unfolds but it is the story of Arborell from the earliest of its days and it plays itself out as a rushing melee of sound and image.

Within the stream you see a land untouched, quiet and at peace, a domain of trees and flowing rivers unspoiled by the hands or artifice of others. But as you watch the serene quiet is disturbed then swept away in a succession of horrifying tableaux. At all sides great empires rise within the forests, monoliths and monuments growing amongst the trees then crashing down as war and destruction overtake them. In the shimmering light you see vast battles spreading across blood-soaked plains, of great nations falling in ruin, and recoil at the terrifying revenge brought by the Hordim in the relentless slaughter of their once all-powerful masters. It is a brutal rush of history, one that floods the mind and numbs you with its overwhelming reality, but then it changes and just as quickly you find yourself alone, once again a solitary figure reflected in its shimmering energy.

In the space of a heartbeat the images disappear, only to be replaced by the mirrored image of yourself, isolated and fatigued. For a moment you wait, wondering what is still to come but the stream of rushing light will give up nothing more. Once again you are left to the solitude of your thoughts and the necessity of your quest.

There is a way out of this chamber but it lies on the other side of the vast flowing wall of light. If you have the skill of Lorecraft turn to section 522. If you do not possess this skill turn to section 599.

556

No answer arises and in the ensuing silence you draw Than'durion and make your way inside. The interior of the cabin is as ramshackle and ill-used as its exterior. There proves to be little in the way of furniture within its four walls, and apart from a bed, small table and a solitary chair it is empty. There can be no doubt that the decrepit structure was once someone's home though it has not been so for some time.

Not wishing to waste any more of the afternoon you make your way outside and free Pallenten from her tether. As you do so you look at the boggy ground surrounding the cabin and realise that most of the prints you see are indeed fresh. Although nobody has lived here for some years it would seem that the shack has had frequent and recent visitors.

With no time to ponder who might be using the cabin you mount Pallenten and make your way back to the fork in the paths. It is an unwanted delay but at least you have seen nothing more of the Ranger.

If you wish to now take the north-west path turn to section 553. If you can see no benefit in doing this and would rather return the way you have come, retracing your path back to the open plains turn to section 578.

557

Trapped within the confines of the lake you have no choice but to fight for your life. The Watcher lunges at you, its huge quivering body shaking with the anticipation of its next meal. You have no intention of giving it the pleasure though. Than'durion cuts deep into the limbs of the monster, its tentacles recoiling from the sharp agonies of its wounds, but it persists, forcing you slowly into deeper water.

When it believes that it finally has you it charges, its limbs thrusting forward, a wide slavering mouth ready to bite hard upon you. In that moment you lunge forward yourself, stabbing your sword deep into the monster's barbed mouth. In a spasm of pain the Watcher recoils, thrashing from side to side before sinking back beneath the water. It is the opportunity you need to escape and you take it without hesitation.

Struggling for the broken bridge you haul yourself out of the lake and run for Pallenten, taking no time to mount and turn her back

along the trail. You do not stop as you make for the intersection with the northern trail, and it is with some relief that you find it in the late afternoon. For a moment you pause at the junction and consider how lucky you were to escape the embrace of the Watcher. Still wet from the encounter you look to the trail and ponder what you should now do.

If you wish to now take the northern path turn to section 514. If you can see no benefit in doing this and would rather return the way you have come, retracing your steps back to the open plains, turn to section 578.

558

With the Druhl lumbering down upon you the word "emru" is spoken. In that instant the stonewood brightens slightly and a small opening appears in the barrier, large enough only for you to pass. It is an opportunity that you do not waste.

Behind you the ground tremors to the beast's approach and you do not find your way through the barrier a moment too soon. In a coruscation of light and energy the Dragon hits the shield, its vast bulk slamming into the wall of energy before being thrown back into the cavern beyond. In a melee of scattering rock and dust the beast skitters across the rough surface, its spectral body a twisting ruin of stone and dark vapours. You watch for a short time as the Dragon's form slumps into an inanimate pile of stone, but the Druhl is not yet finished.

Before your eyes the Dragon reforms, the dark vapours that hold it together taking a new mound of stone and crystal and building a new beast, one that howls in the darkness like madness unchained. You step back from the barrier as the Druhl approaches but this time it does not try and force a way through. Instead the dark construct attacks the stone at the edge of the passage entrance, tearing and crushing its rough outline, trying to force a way around the shimmering wall. Given enough time it will do it.

With the Dragon tearing at the rock you turn on your heel and run into the western passageway. A long corridor of roughly hewn stone lies ahead.

Turn to section 590.

559

In a cloud of breaking rock the last of the Warbeasts falls, its body reaved of life, crashing to ground with an impact that sends shards of its being scattering across the smooth floor. It is a battle that has left you breathless and fatigued, the last stroke of your weapon felling the beast and returning its living form back to solid stone. Whatever may have animated these monstrosities left in those fleeting moments, and with the sounds of the battle ebbing away as faint echoes against the hard rock of the chamber you stand quietly, alone once again and surrounded by the dissolving remains of the fractured statues. Before you have time to sheathe your weapon the Warbeasts dissipate into the heavy air, disappearing as mists that leave no trace of the creatures they were, only a few deep gouges in the floor evidence of the battle fought between you. Sweating from the fight you look quickly to the exits and know that this melee could not have gone unnoticed. It is time to move on.

If you have not already done so will you;

Try the first door in the northern wall? If so turn to section 48.

Try the door in the eastern wall of the Great Hall? If so turn to section 161.

Try the first door in the southern wall? If so turn to section 31.

Try the second door in the southern wall. If so turn to section 189.

560

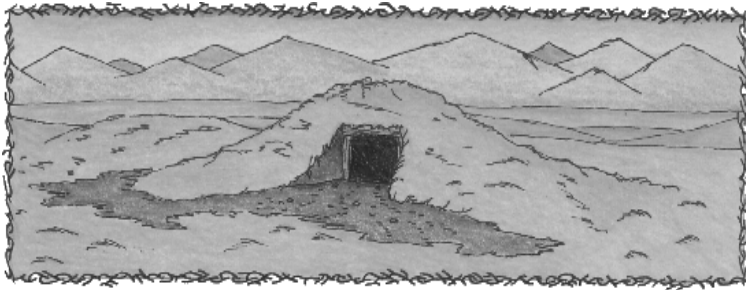
Behind you the swarm gathers speed, its number a swirling mist of light that illuminates the edges of the passage as it pursues you. From what you have been told of these insects there is only one escape, and that is to find the light of day quickly. Without looking back you run for the mine entrance, your only hope to find safety beyond its threshold. Sweating profusely you make the large hall, the bright glow of the outside world close, but it is as far as you get. Without apparent cause your left leg collapses beneath you, and with the swarm only metres behind you fall headlong into the dirt. Desperately you regain your feet, but in this moment of unforeseen delay a strange dizziness overtakes you, and it takes all you have just to keep your feet.

Staggering against the wall of the chamber you draw your sword and await the end that must surely come. A searing pain in your left calve collapses your leg once again and in the gloom you see your

attacker. A Needle Fly has latched onto your leg and jabbed its sharp proboscis deep into the muscle. For a second you remain in shock, the insect draining blood straight out of your leg. Striking at it with your sword you knock it to the ground and stamp it to mush. Around you the rest of the swarm waits, then from the swirling cloud more of the insects dive, hitting you in the shoulder and arms, trying to find a way inside your clothing. These insects you also crush but this only sends the remainder into a frenzy. There is no way you can fend off the attack that follows. Unable to stand beneath the assault you receive from the diving insects you fall to one knee and try to lash out at the swarm with your sword. Dozens of the insects fall, cleaved into pieces by its blade's sharp edge, but the numbers inevitably overwhelm you. Writhing under a blanket of drinking insects you die, the secret of this mine safe for the arrival of the next unsuspecting victim.

Here your quest ends, your life taken on the points of a thousand razor-sharp needles. Perhaps in a latter life Providence will afford you better luck.

THE END



561

The nature of the flowing light is unknown to you but the stairs that will return you to the halls of Stoneholme are steep, and their reach overwhelmingly long. If you are to find a way through it must be on the other side of this vast apparition.

Carefully you move towards the shimmering light, placing your hand upon its rippling surface and finding that it is warm to the touch but not harmful. When you are sure that it is safe you take a deep breath and plunge into its flowing energy. To your surprise the rushing stream is thick, more than two metres in depth and it takes a few

moments to force a path through it. Like a heavy fluid it clings to your skin and only releases its hold on you once you have passed cleanly through.

Once upon the other side the exit stands open and beckoning. Without looking back you make for the threshold and find that it is the entrance to another wide staircase, one that descends even further into the mountain. With only a small hesitation you take to the stairs and begin your descent.

Again you find yourself on a long decline, the stairway a straight arrow aimed directly at the root of the mountain. In construction it is the same as that which you have passed through before but unlike the previous stairs there is no silvered reflections to give you light. Instead the stairway is bathed in a blue glow unlike anything you have seen before, and it ebbs and flows up the steps like a heartbeat pounding in the earth itself.

Upon the seemingly endless stairs you make your way, watching always for any sign that danger is near. Beyond all thoughts of your quest however, lay the resonating energy of what resides below. Each minute upon the stairs comes with a growing sensation of power, of an unfettered energy that crackles in the air and sends pulsing vibrations racing through the stone around you. Upon every footfall you feel its insistent force, and with every step the blue light increases.

Another hour passes as you take the stairs and like the first great staircase they find an end as well. What you discover upon this further threshold leaves you speechless.

Turn to section 526.

562

Your knowledge of these artifacts tells you that only someone in possession of stonewood can pass beyond its impenetrable shield. You have no choice and no time to ponder any other course of action. Upon the north-western wall opens the small passageway; its dark, shadowed exit lying beyond a floor of broken stone and shattered ground. It is now your only hope.

Turn to section 593.

563

Upon the stone you force your way upwards, using the deeply carved images as a purchase as you climb. Very quickly however, you find that the labours of your long quest have taken their toll upon muscles already tested to their limits. With the stone vibrating with power you can feel the energy flowing along the streaming wall of light but this monolithic slab reaches high, and the climb proves too much.

When you have risen some thirty metres from the base of the trembling monolith a misplaced boot slips from its hold and leaves you dangling by one arm. Without the strength left to regain your footing it is inevitable that you fall, and the distance is great. With a sickening crunch you hit the cold floorstones and lay still.

Roll two dice and double the number thrown. If you have thrown a number larger than your current endurance points this fall has killed you and your quest is over. It will indeed be in a latter life that you must now look to for better luck. If the number you have thrown is less than your current endurance level you have survived the fall but at a great cost. Take the number thrown and deduct this from your endurance. When you have done this turn to section 548.

564

Without all the talismans required to destroy Windhammer you will need instead to rely upon your skill and a good measure of luck. This does not mean however, that you should discount any help that might be obtained from the many items you have collected in the course of your quest. It is now that you must prepare.

In the safety of the entranceway you make ready for a battle that you do not know how to win, but as the Tellandra fades before your eyes you know that you must kill this serpent if you are to save yourself, and your people. Quickly you lay before you all the artifacts that you have found on this quest and decide which will give you an advantage in the battle to come.

If you have the Dragonseye, Dragonclaw or Morgen's Spear mentioned in the previous section in your possession add five points to your combat value for each one held. If you have any Nahla potions or Words of Healing before you now will be a good time to use them. If you have a book titled "Words of Protection" there is one word within

that can help you now. Utter the Word noted previously on your character sheet and any damage caused by Windhammer in each battle round will be limited to two endurance points.

If you have previously obtained a suit of Dwarvendim Dragon-armor and a bone-tipped lance you may add an additional eight points to your combat value. These items have been specifically crafted for combat with Dragons and will add greatly to your ability to defeat Windhammer.

If you have in your possession another book known as the Teth Ellandra it unfortunately cannot help you here. Its great power can only be released in the presence of the Tellandra but the Pillar now falters, unable to draw the EarthMagic needed to give it potency. Like all artifacts of magic tied to the Tellandra it diminishes as the Pillar does and soon will fade completely.

Any other items you may have collected on your journey cannot help you in this battle except for Than'durion. If you have come through this quest with the great sword undamaged it will give you a small benefit of two additional points to your combat rating. The sword was given to you by the Tak Lovar for a reason and if it has not been broken should be used in the battle to come. If it has been damaged in any way it cannot help you now.

In the withering heat you ready yourself, bringing together everything you need and discarding the rest within the entranceway. For just a moment you gather your courage then move towards the threshold of the Deep Vault. Now is the time that you must stand against this Dragon. Within the next few minutes it will be either Windhammer or yourself that will die.

Turn to section 586.

565

Quickly you take your pack from your shoulders and search its contents for the set of lockpicks. Held together on a small ring of silver the picks are thin rods of hard metal, flattened at their ends and tapered to a short hook point. Although you have had the use of these tools explained to you, the forcing of locks such as these has been something that you have been happiest leaving to others with more skill. On this day however, it must be upon yourself that you must rely.

Carefully you begin to feel out the internal mechanism of the lock. It

is of a barrel construction, operated by the depression of a series of small interlinked levers. Under other circumstances it would be a key that would do the job but today it is the careful movement of your lockpicks that must suffice. Wrapped in the heat of the passageway your hands are slick with sweat, the concentration of your task made all the more difficult by the intolerable pounding of the furnace ahead, but by degrees you fathom the lock's secrets and finally turn its mechanism. A sharp satisfying click is all you need to hear before you try the handle.

Turn to section 80.

566

You can see no point in remaining here so you move forward quickly, the sounds of movement growing louder and more definite. With no reason to remain quiet you break into a run, scrabbling across the mounds and sending stone and crystal showering onto the rough stone floor. In the gloom the sounds of your passage echo off the walls and within this cacophony of clattering stone you begin to hear a growl, low and menacing.

For a heartbeat you turn and trace the sound of the guttural noise back to its owner. At the edge of your vision stands a beast, half as tall as the cavern itself, and as black and unknown as the shadows themselves.

In a howling rage the creature begins to run, four huge legs propelling it across the floor of the cavern, its bulk sending shudders through the stone. Quickly it makes up the distance between you but before it can bring you down you run into the passageway, its monstrous body crashing against the exit, sending plumes of dust and scattering stone across your path.

In a panic you turn to face the beast but the creature is not finished with you. With a series of pummelling blows it rips and smashes at the exit, bringing down stone and tearing away at the exit itself. In this melee of smashing rock you begin to see what it really is. The beast is a Druhl, a magical construct formed as a Dragon, but unlike anything you have ever heard of. In your mind you are sure that it is not alive, the thing is an agglomeration of stone and ancient skeleton somehow held together by a dark aura that binds its parts, keeping it whole.

As you watch the Druhl tears at the passageway, relentlessly forcing its way towards you. In the face of such a beast even the bravest can falter. Without further thought you turn on your heel and run but the passage provides no sure escape. Some twenty metres further along you come to another chamber, a wide circular cavern from which there are no other ways out except for a small hole in the floor at its centre. Apart from the hole you have found your way to a dead end.

Turning back to the passage you can see the creature forcing a path through the stone, its spectral arms smashing through the rock in its frantic efforts to reach you. Within a matter of a few minutes it will be upon you.

If you can see no alternative but to stand and fight turn to section 546. If you would rather take your chances and jump into the central hole turn to section 573.

567

You take to the right passage without hesitation, running with all the strength you can muster. Quickly the passage narrows, turning northwards and then veering once again into the west. As you run you notice that the walls have been scoured by some type of acid, long streaks of dissolved rock flowing from large impact fractures that line the walls. It is as if something has hit the stone hard and left behind a residue, one that has eaten into the rock, leaving it a seeping mess that flows like partially heated tallow. It is a curiosity that remains on your mind as you follow the passage into the west.

Without stopping you make your way further into the mountain. Around you the passage is a mess of dissolved stone and broken walls but it is the floor that begins to give you the most trouble. Hard under foot when you first entered, the ground is now mostly sand and pulverised stone, an unstable mixture that slows your progress and makes each step far harder than it might otherwise have been. Against this resistance you try and keep up a brisk pace but it is a task that leaves you sweating profusely in the dark, cold corridor. After a time the exertion takes its toll, and eventually you come to a halt, your legs crying out for rest. Leaning against the passage wall you try and recover your breath but you are not given the chance. Something else lurks here and you are within its reach.

Suddenly the ground ahead of you erupts in a cloud of moving sand and pluming dust. Before you can properly defend yourself a long tentacle reaches out of the clouding sands and grabs at your leg, pulling you inexorably towards a gaping hole in the floor ahead. As you struggle to draw your weapon a multitude of sinuous limbs thrust out of the hole and flail about the narrow confines of the tunnel. One hits you across the back before grasping at your arm but you drag it free only as another comes snaking towards you. You are in deep trouble.

If you have a flashcharge in your possession and believe now might be a good time to use it turn to section 597. If you do not have such a device or alternatively are foolish enough to wish to save it for another time then you will have to fight this beast if you are to survive. Unwittingly you have stumbled into the lair of a Sand Lurker and the beast is hungry. Unless you give it a good reason to let you go it will have you for its next meal. The Sand Lurker has a combat value of 19 and an endurance of 70. If you are able to survive three rounds with the monster turn to section 538. If you succumb to the creature within these three rounds turn to section 549.

568

With all the strength you have at your command you run, the vast power of the Shan'duil raging in the chasm beneath you. All about you the thundering echo of the River's flow tremors the air, sending pulsing vibrations through the stone beneath your feet, but within this melee of overwhelming noise you dare not stop. At a sprint you should cover the distance in less than thirty seconds, however as you reach the highest arc of the bridge's span you begin to feel the full relentless effects of the River.

Like tendrils reaching out of the abyss the blue radiance of the Shan'duil swirls around the bridge, twisting and surging as the River pounds below. In the grip of this raw energy you feel the strength draining from your legs, your breath labouring as you realise that the strength you have will not be enough. Like spectral hands grasping at your skin you come to a halt, unable to move as your energy is quickly dissipated into the roiling surge of the River of Life. If you cannot make the other side before your strength gives out this exposure to the River will kill you.

Exhausted, you drop to one knee then the other, your body's endurance draining away as you struggle to make the end of the bridge. Collapsing forward onto your hands, desperation takes hold as you crawl painfully onwards but it is to no avail. Still some sixty metres from the far landing you fall onto the hard stone and lay still.

In those last few moments of life there is a strange calm about you. Although the Shan'duil surges beneath you, it is your own heartbeat that you notice most. Pounding in your chest you feel its last few beats and realise that it too is now beating to the rhythm of the River. In this place you are now one with the Shan'duil. Your quest is over. It will be to a future life that you must now look for better luck.

THE END

569

The passage proves to be a roughly cut tunnel, following the course of a layer of stone that rises by degrees along a winding path strewn with fallen granite and deep drifts of dust. Only the gleam of a few veins of phosphorescent crystal lights your way but it is enough to illuminate the passage and you keep up a steady run, though struggling against the dust and unstable footing.

After a good hour of travel the need to rest and take food brings you to a halt. In a small alcove you find a position against one of the walls and relax. The Druhl has been left far behind and in the quiet you consider your position, searching your pack for food before settling down to relax.

(If you have food you may take some at this time. The usual increase in endurance should be recorded if you eat. If you have no food or Nahla bread in your possession at this time deduct two points from your endurance to account for the additional fatigue you must now endure. Do not reduce your endurance to zero however. If such a reduction would kill you leave yourself one point of endurance at this time. You are not that tired that it should lead to your demise.)

In the silence of the passageway you rest, no sound or sign evident that there is any living thing close. Your diversion through this underworld beneath Stoneholme has left you bruised and beaten but you can sense that the object of your quest is somewhere ahead. You cannot tell if it is the call of the Tellandra itself or just a gut feeling, but as you let your body recover the certainty grows within you that

the Deep Vault is somewhere ahead, and that you are indeed going the right way.

When you feel more able to return to your task you stand and check the passage behind you. In the distance you can hear the Druhl, but the sounds are muffled and indistinct, and knowing that the spectral beast is still a threat return to following the passageway.

Before long you find a worn set of stairs and then upon their upper threshold a small square chamber. This chamber is definitely Dwarvendim made, familiar inscriptions cover the walls and ceiling, and at its end stands a further exit, the remains of an iron portcullis barring any way forward.

Quickly you approach the bars and find them rusted to the point of ruin. With one hand you grasp the lower edge of the grill and pull it upwards, the decrepit bars snapping and bending as you force the portcullis out and then back upon itself. In a spray of metal particles and dust you force your way beyond the bars, brushing centuries of grit and rust from your clothing as you look into a long hallway that stretches some distance ahead. In the shadows you feel all the stronger that you are close to your goal, but as you look down the corridor you wonder how much farther you must travel. Time is running short.

Turn to section 579.

570

Somewhat disappointed that you have not yet found an easy way out of the marshes you turn Pallenten onto the trail and find your way back to the path you left previously. Here you have only two options open to you. One is to continue northwards deeper into the marshes, the other to retrace your path back into the south and find your way onto the open grasslands.

If you wish to continue north, turn to section 514. If you would rather go south turn to section 578.

571

The passages that open ahead and to your left can only be reached across a debris field of fractured rock. It is too open and unstable a

terrain and although the cavern seems empty there is a feeling here that raises the hair at the base of your neck. Carefully you search the gloom ahead, looking for the source of such palpable malice. You cannot see it, but as you wait in the shadows you can sense that there is something else in the chamber with you.

The right passage, which you are fairly sure exits from the north-western edge of the cavern, seems your best option. By skirting the edges of the cave you should be able to reach the passage threshold without leaving yourself open to notice. If you are lucky you may be able to remain hidden, using the high mounds of stone and earth as a cover that should keep you safe from any unwanted attention.

The cavern itself is an ancient formation of hard stone and flowing crystalline pillars. At all sides the walls stand as a multicoloured wash of solid but seemingly fluid limestone cascades, all reaching from a domed ceiling crowded with stalactites and dark recesses. Within this strange wonderland of liquid stone the floor stands in direct contrast, large mounds of pulverised stone and fallen crystal forming an undulating sea of fractured rock. To take the edges of such an unwelcoming sea seems the best choice and you take it carefully.

Hidden within deep shadows you keep close to the wall, following the edges of the cavern and using the mounds as cover from something as yet unknown to you. More so than at any other time whilst within Stoneholme you feel a malevolent presence here, something filled with a brooding hatred that waits patiently in the darkness. It is the chill though that grows most unsettling. You have delved many subterranean caverns in your time and all have been cold, but never have you felt the chilling edge in this chamber. It is a cold that soaks its way through your clothing, numbing your skin and gloved fingers, and one that increases as you work your way about the cavern's perimeter. Your breath streams as vapours in the icy air, and frost cracks underfoot but the distance is not too great and quickly you make a distance mid way to the north-western passage.

It is as you take a moment to pull your clothing tighter about you that you hear the first sound of something moving in the shadows. It is nothing more innocuous than a fall of stone far across the breadth of the cavern but in the quiet it echoes off the stone walls, forcing you to crouch behind a pile of broken crystal and stare out into the gloom. Quickly another movement of rock in the distance heralds more proof that you are not alone, and before you can move a creature emerges out of the darkness. Alone in the cavern you wait, transfixed by the

horror that looms out of the cavern's shadows.

Like an apparition the creature detaches from the surrounding shadows, its enormous bulk wrapped in a spectral aura of rushing vapours and dark energy. From your vantage you watch, unable to discern immediately what it is, but sure that it is a magical construct of some type. Before your eyes it moves closer, raising itself upon huge legs before extending a pair of skeletal wings into the far corners of the cavern. In the darkness your blood runs cold.

You do not know what it is but a more knowledgeable soul could tell you that it is a Druhl, a construct of magic, bone and debris, formed in the shape of a Dragon and created as a Guardian for the very caverns you now journey through. For you however, it is simply a nightmare and in the confines of the cavern you cannot help but stare at it.

Standing upon its rear legs it is the petrified skeleton of an ancient Dragon, wrapped in a black writhing aura that binds it together, its body a moving morass of rock and fractured stone gathered from the cavern floor. In the gloom it moves purposefully forward, then comes to a halt before the entrance to the south-western passageway. For a moment it pauses, looking into the darkness before turning in your direction, sniffing the air as it searches you out. It knows you are here, however it cannot yet find you.

Before you can move the Dragon raises its head and screeches into the roof of the cavern. It is a deafening cry that echoes like a high-pitched thunderclap through the open spaces, collapsing stone from the walls at all sides and bringing down huge pieces of crystal from the roof overhead. The sheer size of the spectral creature chills you to the bone, its ragged, grinding form moving ponderously as it searches the ground, looking for you. Behind the small mound of stone you remain unnoticed but it cannot remain so forever.

In a growing rage the beast begins to throw large chunks of rock, skidding them across the floor, smashing and pulverising the mounds in a systematic attempt at flushing out the trespasser it knows is moving furtively within the cavern. As one of the pieces slams into the ground only a few metres from where you hide you know it is time to get away from this ghostly apparition. If you remain here it will find you, and there can be no doubt that if it does you will die.

As missiles of jagged rock hit the walls at your back you run for it, your hope that the passageway will be too small for the Druhl to follow. Without thinking you run, rushing for the only sanctuary you

can see from the raging beast. Across the cavern the Dragon sees you and throws down the boulders held in its clawed hands. In a spasm of unrestrained anger the beast jumps forward, its spectral eyes burning red as it focuses all of its energy on your insignificant form. Before this horror you flee, the ground beneath you a ruin of fractured ground that will take all your skill to negotiate swiftly. This Guardian takes its job seriously, and if it catches you it will kill you.

Test your agility attribute. If you are successful turn to section 593. If you fail this test turn to section 537.

572

Desperately you leap forward, a huge slab of crystal falling out of the roof overhead. Within a cloud of roiling dust you hit the ground, rolling to your feet as tonnes of stone smashes into the ground at your back. Thanking Providence once again you keep on running and eventually find yourself emerging out of the haze of suffocating dust. Somehow you have survived, but your deliverance has come at no small cost.

To escape the collapsing stone you have had to return down the passageway, clouds of choking dust forcing you back towards the cavern and the imponderable malice of the Druhl. With a thin film of grime covering your body you emerge from the passage and come to a halt. In the distance you can see the Dragon and it can see you. It is not a happy Guardian.

Before you the barrier of shimmering energy holds firm, however the constant attack of the beast is weakening its capacity to keep the Druhl in check. When it lays its dull red eyes upon you once again its fury intensifies, and you cannot doubt that it will keep up its assault until it finds a way through the Shieldstone's defences.

Quickly you turn back to the passages and decide that the left passage can be your only way forward. Somehow you must put distance between yourself and the Druhl.

Turn to section 542.



573

In the face of such a danger there is only one way you can go. Quickly you run for the hole and find it to be a vent of some type, circular in shape and no more than a metre wide. From the passageway the frantic struggle of the Druhl is all the motivation you need. In one smooth movement you shrug your pack from your back and throw it into the vent, then jump feet first into the hole yourself. Whatever happens now must be for Providence to dictate.

Turn to section 592.

574

Within the darkness of the pit you dig both boots into the unstable wall and begin the slow climb back to safety. Above you the hole is a morass of old roots and rotting vines, loosely held against the crumbling earth that must somehow support your full weight as you climb. One handhold at a time you find each new purchase and steadily make your way out of the pit. It is only with a measure of good luck that you find the upper edges of the trap and slowly haul yourself out of its lethal embrace. Exhausted from the climb, you lay upon the ground and try and recover your breath. You cannot tell whether it is the weight of your equipment, or just the fatigue of the past days, but those fifteen metres have left you unable to stand, and for a time you remain still.

(The climb has been exhausting and one that will take time to recover from fully. Reduce your endurance level by two points before continuing.)

When you can move, you raise yourself and move over to the lip of the pit. At its edge you peer into the abyss below and hear clearly the movement of a large number of creatures in the shadows. Once again you thank Providence for your deliverance from yet another nasty end, but as with many other close calls on this expedition you have little time to ponder your good fortune. Upon regaining your torch you spend a short time organising your equipment, then look carefully to the long passage ahead.

Moving steadily forward it takes only a few minutes to reach the passage's end. A quick but careful search confirms your growing suspicion that it is a dead end. Where the tunnel should have continued there has been set an enormous slab of dull grey metal. You

can find no mechanism that will move the barrier and no other way around it. Discouraged you turn back down the passage and make your way back to the Lesser Hall.

Standing behind the tapestry that covers the opening you listen for any sounds that might betray the presence of a patrol or lone guard in the chamber beyond. For some time you stand silent in the darkness. At first you can make out the muffled movement of something quietly crossing the floor of the hall before all is again still. The minutes pass, but hearing nothing else you edge your way from behind the heavy cloth hanging and decide your next move.

If you have not already done so you can try and open the double doors in the east wall. If this is your choice turn to section 153. If you believe that a better course will be to investigate the open passage in the south wall turn to section 70.

575

The barrier is a shimmering wall of energy that covers the entire passage entrance. Without knowledge of how to pass beyond it you look immediately to the smaller passage in the north-west and run for its dark sanctuary. Behind you the Dragon is a fury of pounding claws and grinding stone, its only intent to chase you down and kill you. If you are not fleet of foot it will catch you.

The entrance to the north-west exit stands only a short distance ahead but the Druhl is hard upon you. Test your Agility attribute. If you are successful turn to section 593. If you fail this test turn to section 527.

576

Quickly you search the edge of the marsh and find the overgrown remains of a track leading into the Faeron. As the Ranger closes the distance between you, you turn Pallenten for the opening, a narrow path that lies beckoning between a bed of reeds and a hedgerow of large domed-shaped bushes. With a flick of her reins Pallenten charges onto the trail and immediately you are embraced within the overwhelming verdancy of the marshes.

About you the Faeron spreads, a huge wetland that, for a reason

unknown to Men, has been growing, swallowing up the plain surrounding it, and most of the farmlands and farmsteads within its reach. Even upon Pallenten's back you cannot see very far; the dome-shaped bushes and ruined earthworks of farmers who had tried to hold back the marsh's advance, all conspiring to turn the Faeron into a maze of water and weed, overgrown bush and shallow spreading meres.

Within this patchwork it is easy to take a winding path along old animal trails and the remnants of man-made roads and track-ways. After a few minutes you find yourself alone, a solitary figure upon a narrow track heading roughly north into the heart of the Faeron. To make sure of your escape you take cover behind a stand of rotting Beech and watch for any sign of pursuit. It does not come, and with only the company of water-fowl upon a wide pool of water at your back you return to the trail and continue northwards.

After a time you come to a junction with another pathway leading to the west. It is the remains of a wagon trail, although barely recognisable. The trail you have been following reaches northwards, before disappearing behind a high hedgerow of overgrown bush.

Will you take the trail northwards? If this is your choice turn to section 514. If you would take the wagon trail into the west turn to section 550. If you would rather take the chance and return the way you have come, turn to section 578.

577

The stairs have disappeared but there is no way that you are going to step into the flowing stream of energy that stands before you. Quickly you make for the end of the hall, following the moving wall of energy as it passes down the length of the chamber. Perhaps there is a chance that where the flow meets the wall at its end you may find a way around the shimmering barrier.

It takes only a few minutes to reach the end of the chamber and come to a halt, a hint of desperation crossing your face as you find yourself at what appears to be a dead end. The huge moving stream of flowing energy terminates against an upright slab of pure black stone, which stands only a hand's width from the walls of the chamber itself. Any wider and you may have been able to squeeze between them but it is too narrow a space. You will have to find another way.

Not deterred you consider more closely the slab of black stone. It is metres thick and extends upwards almost to the reach of the roof itself, but even from your vantage you can see that it does not go all the way. There is a space of no more than a metre between its summit and the roof itself, however it is a possible way over. In the shimmering light you look more closely at the monolith and find it to be intricately carved, a convoluted relief of vine and ancient script writhing its way across its smooth surfaces. With an idea forming you check the nature of the stone and find it sound, its carvings deep, and despite the chamber's great age, still sharp and clean.

For a moment you stand back and ponder the great reach of the slab. It stands as high as the chamber itself but it is something that you could climb, given a small measure of luck. If you are to find a way to the other exit it seems the only way to go.

If you think that climbing the edges of the slab a little too dangerous then you have no option but to take your chances and try and make your way through the stream. If this is your choice turn to section 531. If you believe that the best way will be to climb over the dark slab then section 594 is the path you must take.

578

You have lost the Ranger and there seems little point in making your way any further into the wetland. Turning Pallenten around you retrace your steps back towards the grasslands in the south. This is not an easy task however, the marshes are truly a maze and it takes more than one attempt to find your way out. It is a place of hidden dangers and shifting ground, where the waters move, rippling and disturbed as if something large is lurking within them. On more than one occasion you are sure you see shadows in the depths, or the ridged back of a large animal sliding beneath the black waters as you pass. You cannot say what it might be, however it gives you good reason to urge Pallenten on all the faster.

It takes more than a few hours to find your way back onto open ground. At each turn of the trail, or each intersecting path you must watch for the Ranger, but it is soon evident that he has been lost to the Faeron, and it may be days before he can find his way out. When you do emerge from the grasp of the marshlands it is at a point only a short distance further to the west than your entry. At least, you

console yourself, you have not lost any ground in evading the Kalborean. After brushing the last clinging remnants of the Faeron from yourself and Pallenten you turn her towards the looming presence of the Devkraager Tor.

Turn to section 341.



579

The corridor is long and narrow but as you make your way forward the feeling grows stronger that you are indeed on the right path. Ahead there is a dull red glow framing an exit shaped as a high arch, and as you get closer it sharpens in outline, the sound of something like the rushing murmur of a great river in the distance. With your heart racing you make the end of the passage and find the threshold to another room, this one small and cleanly carved. In its quiet interior you come to a halt, all the fatigue and pain of your quest forgotten as you try and make sense of what you have found.

Before you is a perfectly clear crystal wall, and beyond the wall a further huge chamber spreads out as a vision of all your worst nightmares. You stand in disbelief and watch as lava flows gout from deep splits in the wall, only to speed along wide fractures in the floor and then fall out of sight into unknown depths below. At all sides run pools of liquid metal; Azuril, gold and silver in vast quantity made molten by the proximity of the steaming, molten rock. Within these pools float fused lumps of precious stones and all about is the fumes and vapours of an environment ruled by lava. It is a hellish terrain, obscured by plumes of ash and toxic gases, but as you look more closely you realise with a rising hope that you have found the object of your quest and the salvation of your people. You have found the Deep Vault.

Carefully you rest against one of the smooth corners and stare out into the steaming inferno. The floor of the cavern is some twenty metres below the level of the crystal wall and from this vantage there is a clear view of the entire chamber. Against a far corner of the huge open space stands a stepped platform and upon its upper level you see the Tellandra, broken and vibrating with a diminishing power, the aura surrounding it weakening even as you watch. At the other side of the Deep Vault is a large arched doorway, its timbers long consumed, all that remains of its substance a few torn and melted iron bands hanging twisted from long disused hinges.

Within all this turmoil of flowing rock and fuming vents you cannot see the Dragon Windhammer, but as you take a closer look at the interior of the Vault there opens a huge gaping rift in the floor at its far end, only a short distance from the platform upon which the Tellandra stands alone. The rift is certainly large enough to allow a Dragon to pass, though as you watch you cannot help but wonder if the serpent is indeed dead. It is an intriguing question but whether the beast is still alive cannot remain your concern if it is not in the chamber itself. Finding a way to the Tellandra, and fulfilling your mission, looms as a challenge just as great. As you look at the state of the Deep Vault you know that this will be a task filled with perils of its own.

Time however, is not on your side. The Tellandra stands diminished, pieces of its form scattered upon the platform. Even as you watch it dims, struggling against the great damage done to it by the Dragon. If you are to save your people, and yourself, you must act quickly.

The room is only small, its smooth walls without door or exit. It is bare except for a single metal rack, upon which rests the pieces of a set of armour and a solitary long-hafted lance. For a moment you turn from the devastation of the Deep Vault and look more closely at what you have found. The armour is definitely Dwarvendim-made and as you run your fingers along its smooth outlines you realise that it has been fashioned from Dragon scales, carefully shaped and fitted into a suit of remarkable strength and lightness. The lance is equally impressive, its long metal shaft tipped with a carefully shaped blade of Dragon bone. You test the edge of the lance's ivory-coloured tip and find it razor-sharp.

(This is armour and weaponry purpose-made in the last days of the Stone Kingdoms to battle the threat of Windhammer. For a reason

unknown it was never used, but now it stands ready for you if you wish to take it. If this is your choice you cannot wear any other armour items and must drop them here. How this armour and lance will adjust your combat value will be given later in this adventure. If you choose to take these items record them on your character sheet before continuing.)

Once you have made your decision you search the edges of each wall looking for any sign of secret latch or lock. You find nothing but as you place your hand upon the crystal wall you feel it give way, bending outwards with the pressure of your fingers, before separating and allowing your whole hand to slide through. For a moment your surprise gets the better of you and you withdraw your hand. It seems unaffected and quickly you push again, this time letting your entire arm slide through. What happens next takes you completely by surprise.

Before you can withdraw your arm again, the crystal takes hold, forcing you forward, dragging you bodily through the wall and thrusting you out into the heat and thundering commotion of the Deep Vault. Balancing upon a narrow ledge of stone you recoil from the shock of your displacement and try and gain a firm purchase against the wall of the Vault. To your amazement your hands grab solid stone, the crystal wall gone, the small room unseen and now lost to you. Carefully you try and force your hand back through the stone but you encounter only the hard rock of the mountain. If you had any hope that you might be able to return to the safety of the room it is now gone.

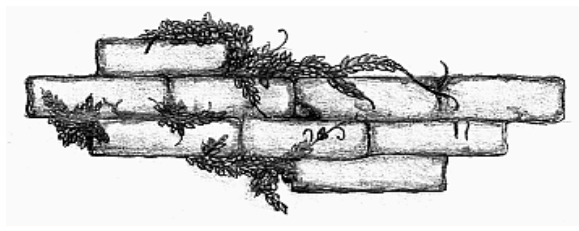
Looking around you find a series of roughly carved holes in the wall beneath you and using these you climb down onto the floor of the chamber. The Vault is a steaming fog of sulphurous vapours and swirling ash, and within this melee you can see the Tellandra shining weakly upon its platform. If ever you are to complete your quest it must be now.

Suddenly a great tremor shakes the ground beneath you. Staggering against the swaying floor-stones you grab at a jagged piece of stone and try and regain your footing. Again the tremor rocks the Vault and then from the rift in the far end a hideous groan erupts, followed by the sounds of something truly gigantic moving in its depths. Quickly you search for a place to take refuge and find it within the shadows of the high arched entryway. Beyond it extends a

long dark hall, but at its edges you watch and wait as something rouses at the far end of the Vault.

Against the hot stone you press your body and peer around the threshold as a monstrous claw emerges from the pit. In a shuddering impact it grabs at the edge of the hole and then pauses as another clawed fist rises into the air. To the sound of a bellowing screech you stand silent and watch as a monster claws its way into the Deep Vault.

Turn to section 191.



580

Your decision made, you turn Pallenten to the right-hand trail and urge her forward. Quickly the path descends into a wide depression, its interior a tangle of thick vegetation punctuated by large stands of sickly trees and bogs edged by the dome-bushes that prove an impenetrable barrier to movement anywhere other than the narrow pathway. Sure that this path will lead you to the larger Western Trail, and an easier way back to the open plains, you follow it carefully. At all sides the vegetation crowds the trail, a solid wall of grasping branch and hanging vine; and in this wet, crowded place the wind cuts through everything, sending loose leaves and rotting twigs scattering across your path.

Within this dank and unwelcoming basin you follow the trail until it opens out into a wide, cleared area of ground. Here you bring Pallenten to a halt and dismount onto the sodden earth. Your hope that this trail might lead to an easier path ends when you survey the ground about you. Here you have found a dead-end instead, a wide clearing from which there are no exits, only thick walls of green and thickets of tangled thorn bushes. If you are to find your way out it will have to be along another path.

You have not wasted your time completely though. At the lower edge of the clearing stands a dilapidated cabin, ruined by long years

of neglect, but showing some signs of having been recently inhabited. Piles of cut wood line one wall, and the ground surrounding the ill-kept front door is churned by many horse and boot prints. If nothing else there is the chance that if someone resides here you may be able to gain valuable information on what lies between the marshes and the Krodestaag mountains in the west. Cautiously you approach the front of the cabin and call out to anyone inside.

If you have the skill of Brigandry turn to section 515. If you do not possess this skill turn to section 556.

581

As the Reaver charges towards you the ground beneath your feet shudders with its advance. In the shimmering air the creature screams loudly, its shrill call echoing across the cavern as it runs, and even within the shadows you can see all its eyes locked upon you. Grimly you stand your ground, but in truth you see no way that you can defeat such a monster. Then you hit upon an idea. In your travels you have heard many stories of the Reavers that infest the far northern wastes. Amongst most knowledgeable travellers it is agreed that the only weakness these deadly monsters possess is the soft area between their main forearms, directly beneath their carapace. It is there that these huge animals have their multiple eyes, and in the few moments that are left you pull off your pack and find the small bag of flour you brought from Maenum.

In the shadows of the Lesser Hall you steel yourself for what you are about to do. The Reaver thunders down upon you and when it is no more than a dozen metres from where you stand you throw the opened bag of flour at its eyes. In a gout of powder the bag hits its target, spraying the finely ground grain beneath the monster's protective carapace. Caught by the unexpected assault the Reaver skids to a halt, its huge forearms flailing ineffectively as it tries to wipe away the white powder. Staggering to the side the beast drops, shaking its body in a desperate attempt to regain its sight, but the flour has done its job. For a short time at least the Reaver cannot see you, and it is an opportunity you will turn to your advantage.

With the Reaver blinded by the gritty powder you now have a slim chance of putting the monster down, but it is a dangerous foe and one

that can still kill you with a lucky strike of its clawed arms. It has a combat value of 17 and an endurance of 21. If you defeat this creature turn to section 123. If you are devoured by the Reaver your quest ends here in the stifling atmosphere of the Lesser Hall. If this is the case you can take consolation in the knowledge that you were very close to finding the object of your quest. In another life you may have better luck.

582

The smaller passage in the north-west is your only real hope. It is a narrow exit, far too small for the beast to follow you but it opens at the other end of the chamber. To make its shadows without being caught by the Dragon will require all the speed that you can muster.

Quickly you extricate yourself from the pile of broken crystal and it is not a moment too soon. Out of the shadows a huge piece of rock arcs towards you, slamming into the mound and sending a spray of smashed stone and dust scattering across the cavern floor. Engulfed for a moment in the plume of detritus you stagger backwards and then begin to run, using the dust to cover your retreat as you make for the exit.

The Druhl takes up the pursuit almost immediately. Covered for only a few moments within the dust cloud you extend the distance between yourself and the beast by just a short distance but it is enough to give you a fighting chance of escaping the cavern. With the Dragon smashing at the ground in its attempts to run you down, you race for the exit.

Turn to section 593.

583

With only a heartbeat left to live you throw yourself backwards, then roll and jump for the floor behind you. In a crashing thunder of falling stone and earth you scramble for safety as the roof collapses in a gout of clouding dust. Caught within the roiling mist you place your sleeve over your mouth and run back down the passage. Only when you a good distance from the trap do you find clean air, and at the borders of the suffocating dust you cough violently, trying to clear the choking grit from your lungs. Desperately you take some of the filthy

water from a drainage ditch and wash away the clinging dust from your face, before quickly wiping the stinging liquid itself from your skin. Thanking Providence for your deliverance you massage an aching shoulder and shake your head in disbelief. You have survived the trap, but only just.

When you have recovered your breath you stand and take stock of what has happened. As the air settles you find to your dismay that the hall is now blocked by a tangle of broken stone and flows of loose earth. There is no way forward, and no time to try and dig a way through. For a few moments you consider how close you came to death but there is little that you can do except move on and find another way. After cleaning what you can of the grit from your clothing you turn back towards the Great Hall.

It takes some time to retrace your steps but eventually you find your way back to the immense chamber. After making sure there is no danger you leave the passage and return to the open floor of the Hall.

If you have not already done so, will you;

Try the nearest door in the south wall? If so turn to section 31.

Try the second door in the south wall? If so turn to section 189.

Investigate the alcove in the north wall? If so turn to section 239.

Try the door in the far eastern wall? If so turn to section 161.

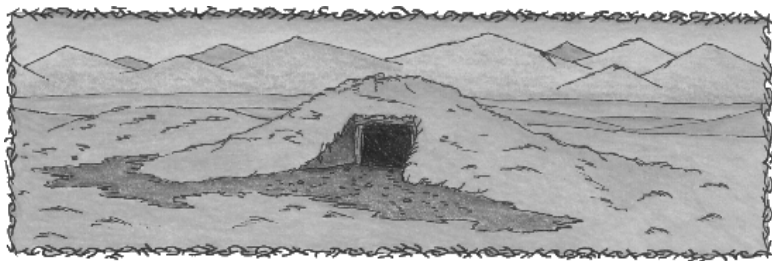
584

For a moment you watch the blue lights flickering upon the high ceiling, and then a long forgotten memory returns like a nightmare rearing out of the darkness. You have spent many years on the frontier and more than one of your fellow travellers has spoken of the things that lurk in the deep earth. Here you have found one of them. All about the floor, strewn between boulders and fallen stone you can see the remains of Men and Hordim who have previously wandered into this deadly chamber. Most are long dead, the agonies of their passing clearly expressed in the tortured remains, the oldest nothing more than skeletons covered in multitudes of tiny puncture marks.

In the time it takes to turn on your heel and run for the passage at your back, the lights above detach from their resting places and swarm towards you. These innocent looking lights are Needle Flies, insects bigger than a large man's fist and equipped with a long razor-sharp proboscis that can pierce the thickest clothing. Out of the ceiling

they descend upon you in their thousands, the swarm a surging wave of death.

To outrun this danger will require all the speed you can muster. Test your Agility attribute. If you are successful turn to section 513. If you fail this test turn to section 560.



585

Asleep within the outcrop the night passes slowly. Beyond your shelter's walls the wind grows in energy, pushing the remains of the overcast into the south. Before its chilled breath the sky clears, and in the light of the moons of Arborell all is awash in a silvered gleam that outlines yourself and Pallenten at rest.

In the hour before dawn your dreams are interrupted by a sense of disquiet, one that invades your consciousness and brings you quickly back to wakefulness. From beneath your blanket you peer out into the darkness, searching the shadows and gloom for some clue to what has awoken you. Carefully you take a hold upon your sword, throw your blanket aside, and move quietly into the deeper shadows of the stone pile, grabbing at Pallenten's tethers as you continue to search the wider area of the grassland before you.

As you wait a feeling grows within you that there is indeed something out in the darkness, and that it is coming closer. Not for a long time have you felt such a burden upon your senses. It is an overwhelming sensation of power, concentrated and energetic, and for whatever purpose it approaches, even though you cannot yet see it.

Then from out of the shadows ahead you begin to see the first signs of a glimmer, not unlike a reflection of moonlight upon water, but one that grows quickly, twisting and forming into an almost human shape. Human perhaps, but the apparition that forms before you is a coalescence of light, barely defined yet recognisable. For a moment

you stand bewildered by what it might be. The apparition however, does not radiate any malice or belligerence. Instead you feel both curiosity and a powerful sense of discovery, as if the Being has been looking for you.

"Who are you?" you whisper into the night. Within the rush of the winds your call is barely audible but the apparition makes no response. Instead you watch as it finds a place to sit upon the edges of the outcrop, and folds the edges of a spectral robe across its lower half. The Being seems to have all the time in the world and is in no hurry to make its purpose known. When it does it speaks quietly, its words cutting through the winds as if they were not there.

"Halokim, it is good to see you."

For a moment you stand quiet, surprised that the Being knows your name, but it is a hesitation that cannot last.

"Who are you, and what is your purpose here?" you ask again. This time your voice is loud and clear, and you cannot tell if it is fear that propels it.

The Being smiles and extends its arm in friendship. "Greetings Dwarvendim. You cannot know who I am but I can tell you that you are well known to me. Since the beginning of your quest I have been searching for you, and now that I have found you I would ask that you give me a few minutes of your time."

Carefully you take the apparition's hand and feel a warm sensation run along your own at its touch. Quickly you withdraw and motion the Being to continue. "It would seem," you say quietly as you lay your hand upon the metal at your neck, "that I am an unwilling servant of many, but I do have the time for anyone who asks politely. How may I be of service?"

The Being rises and moves further into the outcrop. "It is not service that I require, only your ear for a short time. But first things first. You have asked my name and it would be remiss of me if I did not answer."

The apparition looks to the west as if in earnest conversation and then turns to you. It appears all the brighter and crackles with power.

"Halokim, I am Ulaal'serai, a Caer'dahl, a servant of the Silvan Tree and in this circumstance a messenger, sent to give you a small guidance on your travels. I am here because the Silvan Tree requires that your mission be a success, and there is one thing that you must know if you are to succeed."

Still holding Pallenten's tethers tightly you look at the Being and

can sense no deception in its words. There are questions to be answered though.

"I am glad for your concern Ulaal'serai, but why should my task be of any interest to any one of the Powers of the world?"

The Caer'dahl looks to the south and points towards the Devkraager Tor. "The Tellandra is a piece of stonewood, once part of the Silvan Tree before the treachery of the Trell'sara brought it to ruin. It lies broken within Stoneholme and it is a damage the Silvan Tree cannot endure lightly. All stonewood is connected Halokim, the destruction of any piece a physical assault upon the Tree itself. Windhammer has done more than just take EarthMagic from the Dwarvendim. He has wounded the Silvan Tree with his malice and it is something the Powers of the World cannot allow."

You wonder at what the Being is saying, unsure as to what your part must be in its designs, but there is more to this story and you ask for it quickly.

"I am but a man Caer'dahl, what can I do that might ease such damage?"

Ulaal'serai smiles and crosses his vaporous robes about himself. "You need only complete your mission Halokim. Upon the platform where stands the Tellandra is inscribed a phrase, one as old as the Silvan Tree itself. Say the words as written and your task will be done. Uttered by a Man who understands Lorecraft the Tellandra will be made whole, your people will be saved, and the Silvan Tree will have its pain eased. Do this Halokim, and the world will change before your eyes..."

As the Being's words fade into the winds so does Ulaal'serai. As light might break up upon disturbed water the Caer'dahl flickers and then is gone. In the solitude that follows you look at Pallenten and consider that your mission holds many secrets and that much weighs upon it. Not for the first time you think it is far too much for a solitary Dwarvendim to have to shoulder alone.

In the east the horizon glows with the approaching dawn, and as there is little to be gained by returning to sleep you busy yourself with the tasks of the morning. As you work the sunrise brings clear skies and lighter winds, and with the time to spare you make yourself a hot meal while Pallenten grazes on the plain beyond the entrance to the outcrop. (This meal will recover six points of endurance to your endurance level. Record this on your character sheet before continuing.) After eating and putting away your equipment you walk

out into the field and call her to you. At first you cannot see Pallenten but an answering neigh from behind a pile of boulders to the west marks where she is. For a moment you still cannot see her then the big horse canters out from behind the outcrop and breaks into a gallop before coming to a halt at your side.

As Pallenten stands there you can sense that something is wrong. She is still but there is a look of unease in her eyes, her body shifting as if she is being compelled to do something she would rather not. You place your hand upon her tethers and stroke her forehead, but there is nothing that can forestall what she must now do. As if by some distant call she rears upon her hind legs, and then turns and races for the distant forest road. Before you can run after her she is gone, a black shape disappearing into the wide expanse of the grasslands.

For a moment you do not understand what has happened, then you remember the Tak Lovar's words. The horse was only to take you as far as the foothills. Now the horse must return to its master. Although you do not like it the rest of your quest will now have to be on foot. For some time you watch Pallenten fade into the haze of the morning and the dark forests that lay beyond. You admit to yourself quietly that you have come to depend upon that horse a lot, and your task will be all the more difficult without her strength to aid you.

Collecting your belongings you strap Than'durion to your waist, shoulder your pack, and begin the last leg of your journey to Stoneholme.

The hot food and decent rest has given you new energy. Restore all lost endurance points to your character sheet and then turn to section 107.



Ready for the fight to come you move into the open and call out to Windhammer. If you are to restore the Tellandra the serpent must perish, and with the help of Providence you will be the instrument of its destruction. Standing unprotected upon the hard stone floor you call out again and this time the Dragon hears you.

In a sudden rage the predator that lies at the heart of all Dragons erupts, its claws raking the hard stone, its tail slashing from side to side, huge horned extensions cutting into the rock as it shakes with a fury that knows no constraint. Insignificant before such a powerful foe you stand your ground and wait as the beast prepares to charge. You are not prepared for what happens next.

From out of the solid stone at your right shoulder the wall of the Deep Vault shatters and plumes outwards. Also caught by surprise Windhammer recoils, edging away from the collapsing wall as something else punches its way into the Vault. Surrounded by smashing stone and roiling dust clouds a hole opens in the wall and through it struggles the Druhl. Fuelled by its unending malice the spectral Dragon has escaped its dark prison and has found you.

Staggered by the persistence of the Guardian you do not know what to do, but as you slowly back away from the spectral beast a remarkable transformation occurs. With its proximity to the Tellandra the magic that holds the Druhl together changes, the dark vapours dissolving away, replaced by a swirling aura of blue light. Unsure as to what is happening you look to the Tellandra and see it shining brightly, but you can also sense that this is the pillar's last power. Once it has finished whatever it is about to do it will fade and then all that you have ever known will die.

Infused with the blue energy the Druhl shifts on its clawed feet. Always a mindless construct it is now under the control of others and its attention shifts immediately. No longer are you its focus. Now it turns to Windhammer. In a screaming rage the Druhl launches itself through the air at the living Dragon. Caught in a corner of the Deep Vault the serpent braces and stands its ground, head low, waiting for the impact. In a hammering blow the Druhl strikes the Dragon across its shoulders, throwing Windhammer to the ground in a flurry of smashed stone and splattering lava.

The Dragon is not finished however. Recovering from the blow the serpent regains its feet and charges the Druhl. In the spaces of the wide Vault Windhammer races for the spectral beast, its clawed feet

slamming into the ground as it runs. In another bone shattering impact it hits the Druhl, crushing it against the far wall and scattering its petrified skeleton across the floor of the Vault. Standing over the mounds of stone and earth that remain of the Druhl the Dragon screams into the roof of the chamber, its echoing thunder deafening as it triumphs over the interloper. But the battle is not yet done.

Victorious over the Druhl Windhammer searches you out, and you are not hard to find. Enthralled by the power of the contest you have not moved from your position near the entranceway, and as the Dragon's eyes focus once again in your direction, you realise how exposed you are.

As Windhammer moves slowly forward you notice the Tellandra once again brightening. Behind the Dragon the piles of bone and rock quietly reform, the blue aura asserting its power over the remains of the Druhl. Before the serpent can take one step towards you the Druhl leaps upon its back and drives its long claws into Windhammer's sides. In a howl of pain and surprise the Dragon rolls sideways throwing the Druhl to the ground once again, but the magical beast does not let up its assault.

In a flurry of razor-sharp claws and thrashing tails the two giant creatures attack each other. Forgotten in the melee you run for the safety once again of the dark entranceway and watch as the beasts engage in a terrible battle. On one side the Dragon Windhammer is a force of nature, living power at its most terrible and brutal. Against it stands the Druhl, mindless and unrelenting, energised by the limitless magic of the Shan'duil. Between them stands only malice and a relentless need to kill. With all the strength that remains to them they attack each other, tearing at each other's bodies, crushing and smashing their way across the breadth of the Deep Vault. It is a battle that cannot last long and it is the living that prevails.

In one final crushing blow the Dragon smashes the petrified skull of the Druhl. Staggering backwards into the wall of the Vault the Druhl collapses once again, its bones scattering about the vault, its rock and earth form disappearing in a shower of debris. At the other end of the chamber the Tellandra ebbs, its ability to draw more magic into the Druhl exhausted. Surrounded now only by a shimmering glow it stands silent, but it has done its job.

Limping back towards the far end of the Deep Vault Windhammer has only barely survived the battle with the Druhl. Wounded and torn by the magical construct it is not the beast it had been, and caught

now within a web of its own pain and injury it has forgotten you, content to hobble back to its home. Unfortunately for you it cannot be allowed to live.

Upon its platform the Tellandra is dying. Broken and fading fast you have only moments left to you before it will cease to function as a conduit of magic. If this happens the walls of Maenum will fall and the collar at your throat will tighten. Everything that is Dwarvendim in the world will die and the Realms of Men will disappear beneath the violence of the Horde. It cannot be allowed to happen. Once again you walk into the open and call the Dragon to battle. Again it turns and in the smoking destruction of the Deep Vault attacks.

Within the Deep Vault you must fight and it will be the greatest battle of your life. Wounded and weakened by the Druhl, the Dragon Windhammer is still a formidable opponent, one that can kill you with a single strike of its clawed fist.

In this encounter the Dragon has a combat value of 30 and an endurance of 33. Follow the rules given previously in this story for combating a serpent of this type but add two additional points to your combat value if you have a piece of stonewood in your possession. If you defeat Windhammer turn to section 500. If it is you who dies then your quest is over, your task unfinished. If this is to be your fate consider that you have achieved much and come farther than most. It will now be to another life that you must look for greater success.

587

For a moment you stand transfixed by the sight of the lumbering monsters, but only for a moment. With no sure way of defeating both of these brutes you are prepared to try anything, and you make your decision in a heartbeat. As the Warbeasts circle your position you reach into your pack and retrieve the small flask of Nahla Extract. The label hangs loosely bound at its neck but you are only interested in its claim that the liquid is explosive, and with nothing to lose you throw it at the nearest creature. What happens next takes even you by surprise.

In a detonation of blinding light and deafening sound the Nahla Extract explodes against the flank of the Warbeast. Caught within its shockwave the monster disappears in a cloud of shattering stone, its body reduced to a shower of jagged shrapnel that scatters across the

length of the Great Hall. Unprepared for the force of the blast you are knocked backwards, helpless before the power of the explosion, engulfed within a growing cloud of dust and falling stone that throws you across the polished floor of the chamber. In a rolling tangle of limbs and equipment you come to rest, only to find the other Warbeast writhing upon the cold stone next to you, struggling to regain its footing. Quickly you check yourself for injury and find that you have survived the explosion unscathed. Truly it is only luck that has saved you from the devastating effects of the explosion but the same cannot be said for the second Warbeast.

Caught also by the shockwave the second creature could not avoid two large pieces of its brother statue that smashed into it, fracturing one of its forearms and taking away its left eye and a large section of its forehead. It has been badly damaged but you are not yet safe. Before you can turn to run the monster struggles to its feet and then settles its remaining eye upon you. Damaged as it may be it has been animated for only one purpose, and that is to protect the Dragonseye. Shaking with a mindless rage it attacks.

This remaining Warbeast has a combat value of 17 and an endurance of 12. If you defeat this creature turn to section 559. If however, it is the Warbeast that is victorious then it must be here that your quest ends. If this is so then it will be to another life that you should look for better luck.

588

Again you find yourself on a long descent, the stairway a straight arrow aimed directly at the root of the mountain. In construction it is the same as that which you have passed through before but unlike the previous stairs there is no silvered reflections to give you light. Instead the stairway is bathed in a blue glow unlike anything you have seen, and its ebbs and flows up the steps like a heartbeat pounding in the earth itself.

Upon the wearying stairs you make your way, watching always for any sign that danger is approaching. Beyond all thoughts of your quest however, lay the resonating energy of what must reside below. Each minute upon the stairs comes with a growing sensation of power; of an unfettered energy that crackles in the air and sends pulsing vibrations racing through the stone around you. Upon every

footfall you feel its insistent force, and with every step the blue light increases.

Another hour passes as you take the stairs and like the first great staircase they find an end as well. What you discover leaves you speechless.

Turn to section 526.

589

For only a moment you hesitate, watching as the roof collapses in a long line of massive stone slabs. With huge pieces of rock slamming into the ground you turn on your heels and run, the air quickly turning to a choking miasma of dust and smashing stone. With all the skill you possess you race down the corridor, jumping large stones and forging your way through drifts of debris. It is a desperate attempt, but just as you see an opening in the passage ahead the roof above your head slumps and then falls. Only the hand of Fate can save you now.

Test your Luck attribute. If you are successful turn to section 572. If you fail this test turn to section 543.

590

Behind you the beast hammers at the walls, the air thick with dislodged dust and the echoing impacts of the Dragon's claws as it tears at the stone. You have no wish to wait and see if it will succeed so at the run you pass into the darkness and follow the passage as it finds its way even further into the mountain.

The passage is no more than a roughly hewn tunnel but you can see that it follows a vein of lighter rock that winds its way directly into the west. At a point a few hundred metres from its entrance you come to a fork where one tunnel leads to the left following the lighter stone, the other diverging to the right and a more open hall. With the sounds of the Druhl at your back a potent reminder of why you should move quickly you consider which way you should go.

If you wish to take the left passage turn to section 542. If the larger right passage seems a better option turn to section 567.

591

You have learned enough about your world to know that this is the Shan'duil, the River of Life, and that within its power resides the energies of all that lives in Arborell. You know also that exposure to its raw power must always be overwhelming to mortal kind. In the presence of the pounding rush of the River you can feel its touch, caressing away at your life essence, drawing imperceptibly upon your mortality. If you stay too long here, the Shan'duil will kill you.

Quickly you consider your predicament. You cannot go back, but across the great bridge lies the shrine and the possibility of another way out. Without any further hesitation you make for the span and begin to run.

To make it across the bridge, and in doing so bring yourself close to the power of the River, will require all the remaining strength you have. Each step you take will bring with it a small reduction in the energy you have left and there is every chance that the attempt will kill you. Test your Strength attribute. If you are successful turn to section 545. If you fail this test turn to section 568.

592

In a flurry of loose rocks and dust you fall into the darkness of the vent. Caught within the relentless grip of gravity you slide down the hole, no hand or footholds available to slow your descent. Without knowing what you can expect you feel yourself accelerating, sliding and bumping against the sides of the vent as you descend deeper into the mountain. What you find takes you by surprise.

Through a cloud of dislodged dirt and dust you exit the vent into nothingness. In the darkness about you it takes a moment to realise that you have fallen out of the hole, exiting its narrow confines through the roof of a large domed cavern. Flailing in mid-air you drop all the faster, your equipment and yourself now nothing more than missiles in the dark, falling to what must be a certain end.

Perhaps though, it is not your time to die. Out of the shadows below you see the first signs of water and as the floor of the cavern rushes inexorably upwards you realise that it is a lake beneath you. In a crushing impact of spraying water you hit its surface and sink into its black depths.

You cannot be sure how long you remain unconscious but you

awaken to find yourself floating on your back, your shoulders tight with pain. In a choking fit you rid the water from your mouth and lungs, struggling in the dark water as you try and regain your breath. Overhead you can see the small vent from which you have fallen and as you look about the cavern you wonder at your survival. It is not unknown for Dwarvendim to survive long falls into water, but how you were able to find your way to the surface is the only question on your mind as you swim stiffly for a small beach area that lies along one edge of the lake.

In the darkness you make the beach and pull yourself up onto a narrow landing of loose stone and pebbles. Gasping for breath you lay on your back and stare up at the ceiling overhead, thankful that you are alive but with no idea as to where you are. When you have recovered enough you stand and look around the beach. It is only narrow but at one end it joins with a stone staircase, which in turn winds upwards before disappearing into a narrow archway. Here is the possibility of a way out.

As you move towards the stairs you feel for your weapon and find that it is gone. Through the pain and fog of your survival you realise quickly that you have lost all your equipment, and in this place you have nothing more than the clothes on your back and the metal collar at your throat. A bad situation has indeed become much worse.

Painfully you struggle for the stairs and find them worn and ancient in design. Slowly at first you take each step, however they prove an easy climb and it does not take long to make the threshold of an arched passage that reaches for a short distance into the stone. Without any other course you follow the corridor and find it in turn opening into a small circular chamber. Here you find a most unusual artefact.

At the centre of the chamber stands a curious ring of black stone embedded upright upon a stepped platform. The ring is large, easily able to accommodate ten men walking side by side through its widest span, and it is intricately carved. Its black obsidian curves are a complex tracery of vine and branch, twined in an embrace that twists along its entire circumference. The platform itself is no less artifice and as you notice more about the room you begin to see the same carvings covering every surface, a deep complicated array of stone branch and leaf that seems almost real in its detail. Like so many things you have seen on this journey it is a wondrous artefact of the Ancient World, but you have no idea what it is for. Very quickly you

find out.

As you stand before the ring you see a mist forming within its borders, a fine swirling miasma that quickly thickens, coating the inner confines of the circle like a wall of fog. When the mist finds its way to every edge of the ring it becomes a swirling vortex of moving vapours, and as you watch you begin to hear sounds emanating from within its form, and smell odours that have no place in such a dark subterranean cell as this.

To your surprise you can hear birds, and smell the clean hint of snow on cold rock. In the background there arises a definite flapping of wings and the unmistakable rumble of distant thunder. It is so at odds with the deep chamber that it almost feels like an escape, a hope that there may be a way out of this place.

As you look around the room you realise that there are no other exits. The ring that stands tall before you is a portal of some type and apart from returning to the subterranean lake it may be your only way out. If you wish you may walk into the portal and see where it may lead. If this is your choice turn to section 552. If you do not wish to take such a risk and would rather return to the lake turn to section 523.

593

Without looking back you run, the floor a ruin of smashed stone and huge crystalline boulders. Behind you the Druhl is a raging force of nature, sweeping aside debris as it charges down upon you. In these few frantic moments you keep your head and skilfully negotiate the broken flooring, making straight for the small passageway. With the Dragon's massive clawed fist raking the ground at your heels you rush into the dark opening and fall headlong into a pile of dust and desiccated plant remains.

Quickly you pull yourself to your feet and turn, stepping backwards as you come face to face with the beast. Within the safety of the passage it cannot reach you and for a moment you look directly into its spectral eyes, dark bottomless orbits that carry no spark of mercy or compassion. For just a moment the Druhl watches you then withdraws from the opening. Beyond the confines of the passageway the skeletal Dragon bellows, its frustration and malice palpable as it crashes about the cavern, turning all about it into ruin.

In the dark of the passageway you listen as the beast vents its fury

but then the terrible commotion subsides. In the ensuing silence you wonder if the Druhl has gone, its task left unfulfilled, but as you turn to continue down the passage a heavy impact rocks the stone corridor. Quickly upon its heels comes another and soon the whole passageway tremors to the sounds of tearing stone and crushing rock. The beast is coming after you, even if it means smashing a hole through the foundations of the mountain itself.

As the passage walls start to collapse you are forced to run again, rushing along the corridor as it vibrates and lurches to the steady rhythm of the Dragon's efforts to reach you. Quickly you find a small circular chamber and against its far walls a threshold to a stairway that spirals upwards into darkness overhead. With no choices left you do not stop. With the beast at your back you run onto the stairs and do not stop climbing until the Dragon's thundering assault is left far behind.

Turn to section 528.

594

This climb is not beyond you, however the slab is enormous in its reach and the ascent will be taxing to say the least. With your decision made you take a handhold and find a solid purchase upon the stone.

This climb shall take both strength and agility to complete. Test your agility and strength attributes. If you are successful with both turn to section 547. If you fail either of these tests turn to section 563. Please note that if you have previously chosen the Strong Back talent as a part of your character profile you need test only for agility. The same strength that allows you to drag yourself out of pits and other dangers will help you here as well.

595

As you thank Providence for giving you possession of such a rare thing you find the piece of stonewood in your tunic pocket and take it from its wrapping. In the gloom it glows faintly but you know you need more than just the shard to see you beyond this shimmering wall. If you are right the barrier has been constructed to keep the beast within this chamber, but for any other to pass through a Word

must also be spoken. You do not know what that Word might be.

Desperate to escape the doom that approaches you search the walls surrounding the barrier for any clue as to the password that must be spoken. To your dismay you find two words carved into the rough stone, one at each side of the barrier itself - "emru" and "nethel". With the beast charging down upon you there is time to only utter one of them. Which do you choose?

If you choose "emru" turn to section 558. If you choose "nethel" turn to section 532.

596

There is a short moment when you consider whether it is possible that the shield which protects you might also be an effective defence against the Dreyadim. It proves quickly to be a vain hope. As you advance towards the Hresh the creature raises its rusting scimitar and swings wildly, cutting easily through the sphere before charging into you. The shield may protect you from the power of the Shan'duil but the Dreyadim has no trouble breaching its protective field. To the sound of metal clashing against metal the battle begins.

Acting only on instinct the creature stabs and hacks at you, the violence of its assault forcing you on to the back foot as you desperately try and find an answer to its mindless ferocity. Stunned by its reckless energy you defend against its blows but can find no quick victory. Upon the stone bridge the battle is bloody, the Hresh a raging berserker that slashes and cuts in a wild rampage, forcing you into a desperate defence that leaves you incapable of doing anything except fending its blows. Against its attack there is no respite and it is inevitable that the Dreyadim finds an opportunity to strike hard. In one rending arc of its scimitar the spectral warrior tears at your flesh, cutting you ragged from shoulder to midriff. Mortally wounded, blood spraying across the bridge you fall onto the stone and lay still. In this place of Power you have died and in this life your quest is over.

THE END



597

The beast is a monster that you cannot hope to defeat alone. Caught upon two of its tentacles you free your weapon and strike out, severing the limbs and giving you one small moment of opportunity to save yourself. Desperately you pull your pack from your shoulders and grab the flashcharge, giving no thought to its power or proper use. Before you the Sand Lurker writhes in pain, a gelatinous fluid spurting from its severed tentacles, slapping against the stone walls of the passage and burning deep with each contact.

Quickly you back up a few steps and depress the lever on the charge, throwing it hard into the gaping mouth of the monster as it cries out in its anger and frustration. Unsure as to what is about to happen you run back down the passage but get no more than a few steps before the flashcharge explodes.

In a coruscation of blinding light and stinging sand the charge detonates. Designed as a device to stun by the energy of its shockwave its power has nowhere to dissipate and instead tears through the Sand Lurker in a concussive punch that leaves it torn and broken. In the passageway before it the blast funnels straight for you, knocking you off your feet and throwing you forward into the dirt. Before you can raise yourself the ceiling above the beast slumps down then begins to fall in, and in a staggered collapse the remainder of the passage roof also falls. If you are not quick enough you will also be caught in its ruin.

Test your agility. If you are successful turn to section 535. If you fail this test turn to section 589.

598

None of the exits from the cavern give any clue as to which should be taken so you make quickly for the left-hand passage. You cannot be completely sure but your sense of direction tells you that this passage leads into the south-west and as far as you can see it is as good a direction as any other. In the almost complete darkness of the chamber you move forward, the floor a morass of broken stone and crystal, piled in low mounds as if something has carefully arranged the debris for a purpose unknown to you.

It is a terrain that proves both tiring and a challenge to limbs already at the limits of their endurance. As you make a path carefully

around and over the mounds you begin to notice something unfamiliar in the air. It is an odour, both sour and heavy and as you move forward you recognise the smell of ash and decay as well. A muffled sound at your left shoulder brings you to a halt and as you remain still it comes again, like a giant footfall against bare stone it sends a rolling vibration through the floor beneath you. In the shadows you search your surroundings, trying to discover what it is that moves so carefully in the darkness but you see nothing. For the moment it does not want to be discovered.

With an insistent feeling that you are being stalked you move quickly for the south-western exit, drawing your blade as you go, sure that at any step you will be confronted by some hideous beast. You do not have to wait long. From the far side of the cavern a sound of dislodging stone brings you once again to a halt, but this time you can hear the definite sounds of something large moving in the shadows; and it is moving towards you.

At your right hand is a large pile of crystal. If you wish to hide behind this mound and wait to see what the creature is turn to section 529. If you would rather quicken your pace and make for the passage turn to section 566.

599

The power of the images has left your mind racing but you must clear your head nonetheless. There is a decision to be made here and you must make it quickly. The flowing wall of light stands as a barrier to your way forward, however you do not know how to pass beyond it. Like most other things that are unknown in the world you have only the choice of risking a way through or turning back.

If you wish to risk walking through the stream turn to section 561. If you would rather turn around and find another way turn to section 540.



600

The Dragon Windhammer has been defeated and the Tellandra restored, but the consequences of this great victory have left the realms of Arborell in disarray. While the Dwarvendim fight for their freedom in the north, a legion of spectral creatures roam the land, killing Man and Hordim alike, laying waste to towns and villages and destroying everything they encounter.

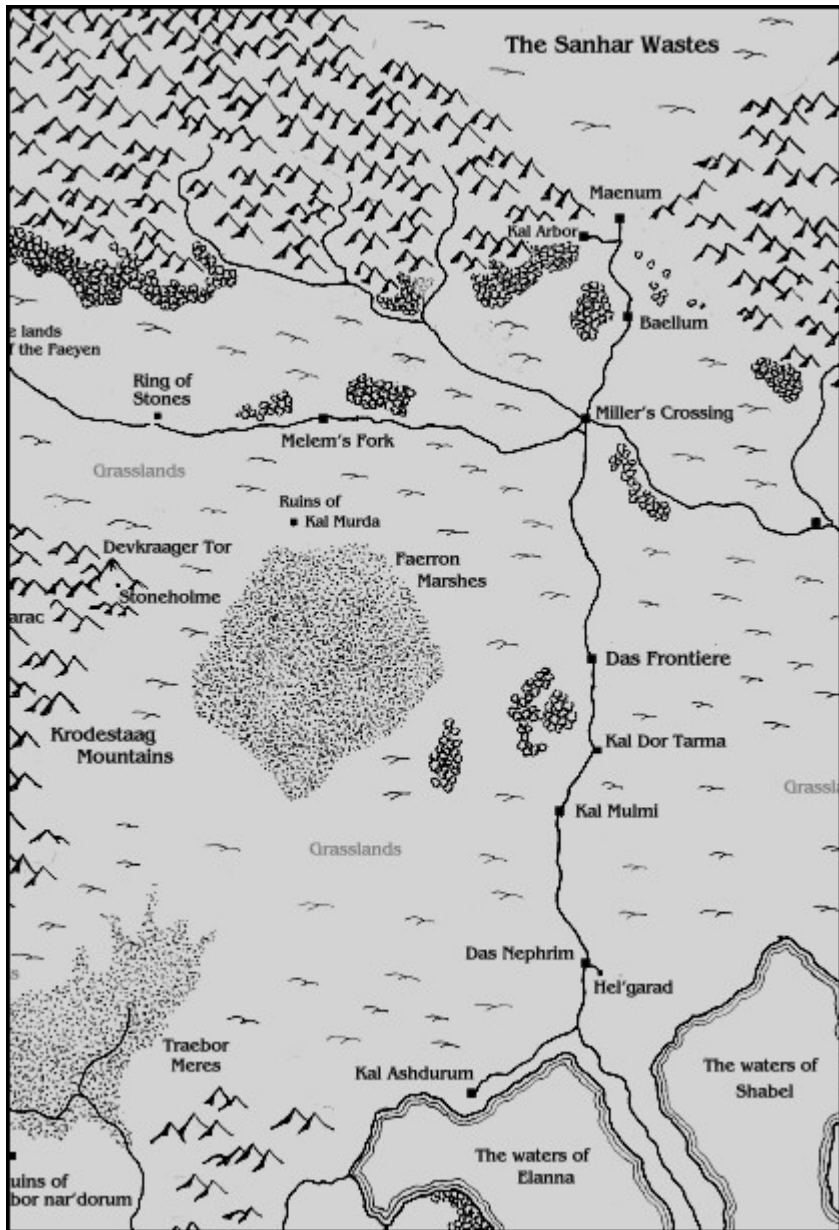
Within this chaos you are found by the mysterious Nab and sent forward on an even more perilous quest. To the very edge of the world you must search for the true source of EarthMagic, and then with shards of the Silvan Tree in hand, use its power to quell the violence of the Shadowch.

In your search for the Silvan Tree you will explore ancient ruins and delve deep within vast underground complexes. Your journey will take you far from the warm grasslands of Kalborea, into the depths of great forests and along the narrow trails of snow-covered mountain ranges. Here you will encounter both friend and foe, and always you will find the lethal malevolence of the Shadowch lying in wait for you. These creatures of mist and darkness are your greatest danger. Born of misused power they have escaped their subterranean shackles and now roam the world in pursuit of mindless violence and destruction. They, above all else, must be destroyed.

Earth and Stone is the second core gamebook in the Chronicles of Arborell series and an interactive fantasy adventure like no other. At more than 1250 sections it is an epic quest, one that allows the reader to explore a land steeped in mystery whilst combating a vicious foe at every turn. This second book continues the adventures of Halokim Vesh and brings into this great adventure new allies and new enemies, all locked in a struggle that will see either the survival of the Four Nations, or the end of all things and the supremacy of a malevolent Being who understands nothing of mercy.

Earth and Stone is currently in development and will be available soon. More information on the entire Chronicles of Arborell series can be found by visiting the Chronicles website at arborell.com.

A Map of Northern Kalborea



A Tour of the Frontier

The map provided with this gamebook illustrates a small part of the world of Arborell known as Northern Kalborea. To those who live there it is simply known as the Frontier, the dividing line between the lands of the Horde to the north, and the settled regions of Men in the south. All that can be experienced in this story is set within this small, but important, part of the lands of Men.

The Frontier can be divided into three separate geographical regions. In the north lies the Sanhar Wastes, a vast land of cold tundra and endless moss-plains that is home to the creatures of the Horde. In the south lay the farthest reach of human settlement in the world, a lonely region of cold grasslands and scattered areas of thick forest. Between these two regions can be found the barrier that keeps them separate, a range of high mountains known to the lands of Men as the Rift Mountains.

For many centuries these mountains have been the only barrier that has kept the Four Nations of Men and the Tribes of the Horde apart; a natural division with few crossing points and only one easy path through. Stretching from the north-west into the east these mountains extend from the western edges of the world to the shores of the Grey Sea and, it is said, are the homes of fell beasts that do not suffer the presence of Men quietly.

At only one point is there safe passage between the Sanhar Wastes in the north and the lands of Men in the south. It lies at Maenum Pass, a narrow gap in the mountains that has been the only crossing point for the Hordim into the south since the coming of Men into the world. It is here within the dungeons of the frontier fortress at Maenum that the story of Halokim Vesh begins.

From Maenum the lands of men extend into the south. It is upon the South Road from Maenum that a traveller will find the first signs of human habitation. At a small fork in the road extends a western path to Kal Arbor, then some distance to the south the garrison town of Baellum, a small community that services the local farming region when not being used as a billet for troops of the Kalborean Army. Up to the time of this adventure it has been more a century since it had been put to that particular purpose.

A further distance into the south is the large walled town of Miller's Crossing. This is a major centre for commerce on the frontier and plays a significant part in this adventure. Miller's Crossing lies upon

the banks of the Laneslem River, the longest in Arborell, and one that finds its source high in the Rift Mountains to the north-west. At Miller's Crossing it is a fast flowing and treacherous watercourse, but in its travel soon widens into a meandering flow that finds its way eventually to the coast many hundreds of kilometres to the east.

After the bustle of Miller's Crossing there is little further settlement on the South Road until a traveller reaches Das Frontiere, the provincial city, and main administrative centre for the entire frontier. Beyond Das Frontiere can then be found the towns of Kal Dor Tarma, Kal Mulmi, and thence the fortress city of Das Nephrim. It is at Das Nephrim that a traveller will find the seat of power of the LoreMages' Guild and a continuation of the road south towards the Lakes of Elanna and Shabel. Beyond these waters can then be found the more settled regions of the Kalborean Union in central Arborell.

It is at Miller's Crossing that a traveller may also find a junction of the South Road with the West Road. At most no more than a rutted wagon track the West Road reaches far into the wilds of the western frontier before meeting with the Provinces of the Faeyen. At the time of this adventure there is little travel between Kalborea and the Faeyen and the road has fallen into disrepair.

Upon the western road there is only limited human settlement. A traveller with the courage to undertake the journey will find upon this road a few frontier farmsteads, the small village of Melem's Fork, and beyond that a lonely trail to the first outposts of the Faeyen in the distant western mountains.

In this western region there are however, a number of places of interest. To the north of the West Road can be found the Ring of Stones, an enormous circle of standing monoliths built long before the arrival of Men in the world. To the south of the West Road a traveller will also encounter the northern borders of the Faeron Marshes, a wetland of ever-widening meres and bogs whose reach expands with every passing season.

It is in the south-east corner of this map of Northern Kalborea that can be found the farthest extent of the Krodestaag Ranges and the home of the Dwarvendim Stone Kingdoms. It is upon the edge of these ranges that the Devkraager Tor rises. As will be seen in this adventure it is deep within the cold stone of the Devkraager Tor that you will find the fortress of Stoneholme, and the object of your quest.

These are the lands within which this adventure is set. I hope you enjoy the journey.

Appendices



A Short Note Concerning The Following

For those who have not previously travelled the lands of Arborell there is much that will be new and in need of explanation. The stories that encompass the Chronicles of Arborell are diverse, and considerable background information is provided in the form of excerpts and appendices that can be found within these books. It is your choice however, as to whether you read them or not.

The truth is that a reader does not have to look through any of these following excerpts to understand what is happening in Windhammer. The introductory section entitled "Maenum", provides everything that you will need to understand the context of the adventure you are about to undertake. What follows here is something subtly different.

The six appendices that follow are part of what scholars in Arborell call a Moot, a collection of seemingly unrelated facts that come together to form a story that is greater than the sum of its parts. These six excerpts from different speeches and volumes form part of the Moot that winds its way through all the Chronicles of Arborell. Indeed all 40 or so titles that will ultimately comprise the chronicles of this world have within their pages a small part of this greater, hidden story. It is however, a story that will not be fully clear until the Chronicles have been completed.

Of most relevance to Windhammer is the first two appendices that appear below and the last entitled "An Enemy of the State". The other three will expand your understanding of Arborell but are not essential to this storyline.

It has been nine centuries...

Taken from an oratory given by the Venerable Siddigh in the Year of Settlement 916, as part of Landfall Day celebrations in Castaal, Kalborea

"It has been nine centuries since Men first stood upon the shores of the New World, and in all that span of years I have been witness to the history that has followed. It is true that there are few men who can make such a claim. Why it is that Providence should bless me with such long life is not a story to be told here today. It can be said however, that all blessings come at a cost, and mine has been burdensome indeed. But that is not why we are assembled here.

Today we gather in remembrance of all those who have passed before; to the labours and struggles of our Forefathers, and to recognise the great cost that we have had to endure in making our lives here in Arborell. Of all who have lived in this world I am the only Man who can now stand and say that he has seen it all, and it is a story that must be remembered. Indeed we cannot afford to forget, for the tribulations of our past will be revisited twice-fold upon us if we choose to ignore them.

How long has it been since we first found landfall on the shores of Dromannion? Nine hundred and sixteen years have passed since that gladding time, and yet I remember that first day as keenly as I now look out upon this gathering. In those times my name was Merriarum, a boy of the NomDruse and a sickly child at best. The rigours of our flight from the Old World had taken its toll upon me, and upon most of our number, but in those uncertain days our resolve was strong.

About us our great Fleet of ships wallowed in a rolling sea, broken and battered after fleeing the Old Enemy. Less than Five Thousand souls had completed the crossing from the Old World, but we had survived the voyage, our one hope that the shadows we were fleeing would not find a passage here as well. Thankfully they did not.

Painful memories remind me that those first years were hard. A new land requires exploration and understanding before it can be taken as a home, and Dromannion proved difficult to tame, but it was not a task that was beyond us. Quickly we founded the first of our settlements and soon the Dromannion Free State brought all Men together in one great Nation. For a generation we prospered on our new island home, free of the fear that had sent us as refugees into the unknown of the Grey Sea. Towns grew, farms spread in ordered lines

from roads that connected the growing populations of the Free State, but we all knew that Dromannion was not the New World, only an island haven on its eastern fringe.

Quietly a need grew in the hearts of many to explore the New World that lay beyond the mists of the western horizon. Many of us did not wish to venture further, the memories of the Old Enemy still too fresh to risk the chance that they might be revisited. I learned quickly however, that you cannot stand against the need of Men to find new horizons, and new lands to conquer.

It was the Kalboreans of the Fleet who first made footfall upon the shores of Arborell and what they found was indeed a New World; one of vast forests and plains, of swift rivers and great opportunity. What they found also were the Oera'dim, the creatures that we know now as the Horde, and ultimately the cause of so much tragedy for the Four Nations. In this world our fates are intertwined and their story is one that must be told also, if we are to understand why it is we are assembled here today."

"To know the Horde it must be acknowledged that they have resided for such a length of time in these lands that their histories have faded into nothing more than legend and myth. It is said that they are the product of EarthMagic, created from the soils of Arborell itself by a race of Beings who have long since fallen into ruin. Once they were slaves, made for the sole purpose of service to their Masters, and held by a powerful Word of Command that kept them obedient and subservient.

If we are to believe the legends of the Horde, it was the Jotun that found a way to break the Word and visit death and destruction upon their Masters. In a Great Insurrection the Oera'dim threw down those that had oppressed them, destroyed the great works of their cities and temples, and took dominion of the world for themselves for more than eight millennia.

It is true that when we first encountered the creatures of the Horde, we looked upon them as cruel and barbarous. Without apparent society or culture we viewed them as primitive and made war upon them, our need for lands and power blinding us to the true nature of their strength. Seven destructive Horde Wars have been fought to push them into the great northern wastes, and yet they are not defeated. Hundreds of thousands of our number have died, and we have prevailed in every contest of arms, but still they survive, threatening us from the cold wastes of the Sanhar. It must leave us to wonder

whether we shall ever know peace.

And yet we too survive. As we remember those first refugees from the Old World we must look to the future and know that Men have a place in this world, even though it must be one forged with blood and iron. If we are to believe the legends of our own great voyage we must recognise that we have nowhere else to go.

It may seem that nine centuries is an ocean of time, a vast gulf within which we have earned the right to say that Arborell is ours, and that our nemesis, the Horde, can now have no claim. If you were to think that you would be wrong. Men may have walked these lands for over nine hundred years, but the Hordim have been here for time without recording, and even now covet that which we have. Arborell was once theirs, and they have not forgotten the bitter taste of defeat that tore it from their grasp. The Hordim may be cruel but they are patient. Above all else we must remember that..."

The Oera'dim and the Four Nations

The Oera'dim

There are few children of the Four Nations that have slept easily after hearing tales told of the Horde. It is a fact of life for all Men that the relative calm of their daily lives is edged with the shadowed threat of the Hordim, and the surety of their existence. It is a truth however, that there are few living Men who have ever seen a Hordim, or had the need to confront one. Apart from the Rangers of the Watch, who guard the many mountain passes of the Great Rift, the southern lands of Arborell have been the domain of the Four Nations for many hundreds of years. In this manner the separation of Men from the Hordim has been total. Because of this the nature of these creatures is cloaked in myth and superstition, only the hard truth of the Horde's existence a certainty that no man can ignore. What follows is a short review of each of the creatures that make up the differing tribes and allegiances of the Oera'dim, or as we know them, the Horde.

The Hresh

It is said in the lands of Men that there is nothing feared more than the Hresh of the Horde. Roughly humanoid in size and stature they are weapons of destruction, purposefully designed by their long-dead masters to fight and die in the forgotten wars of the ancient world. Constructed from the dark earth of Arborell and imbued with a spark of EarthMagic that sustains them, they are the ultimate warriors of their kind, lethal fighting machines who live without fear or the restraint of mercy.

The Hresh of the Horde are easily recognised from amongst their fellow Hordim. Although slightly larger than most men they are heavily muscled with flat uncomplicated features. Each sports a long braided tail of black hair from the back of their heads, and all display the tattoos of their kin and status burned deep into their right arms. As is the practice of all Hordim, Hresh also tattoo the sign of the Three Tears under their right eye. Why this is done is unknown to Men, the meaning of such adornment a mystery that has not yet been uncovered.

Unlike other members of the Oera'dim the Hresh have no specific skin colour, the ancients who created them having given them the

ability to change their skin tone to match their surroundings at will. It is recorded also that Hresh have excellent night vision and acute hearing.

Since the end of the Third Horde War all Hresh live within the cold wastes of northern Arborell, in an area of tundra and crater lakes known as the Lands of Perdition. As is the case with most Hordim they maintain a strong loyalty to the Mutan of the Clavern'sigh. Only the Hresh of the Denmar Kraal have been known to operate independent of the dictates of the Sigh, and they have suffered much because of it.

Although it is not common knowledge, it has been ascertained that the ancients, who we know as Trell, did not bother to provide their warriors with a finite lifespan. Unless killed in combat or by accident Hresh are for all practical purposes immortal, and it is rumoured that at least one of their number has survived more than eight thousand years.

The Morg

It is recorded in the histories of the Trell that the Hresh proved to be effective weapons of war, but served poorly when turned to other pursuits. With a need for farm and construction workers the Trell turned their magical artifice to creating a worker Being that we know as the Morg. For reasons known only to their creators the Morg are small, emaciated creatures, but strong for their size and possessed of an unbreakable loyalty to the Mutan.

In the lands of Men these creatures are known for their skills as saboteurs, and their habit of travelling in groups of up to thirty individuals. It is recorded that the Morg have shown a liking for the application of torture, and to be found alone by such creatures can lead only to a long, painful death.

The Mutan

In the ancient history of Arborell the Mutan were the willing Slavemasters of all other Hordim. Used by the Trell to organise the day-to-day affairs of their great Empire, the Mutan were designed as intelligent and ruthless administrators. Generally around two metres in height, the Mutan are slim of build, dark grey of skin colouration, and possessed of considerable intellect. Such creatures possess no

specific features of note except for two dark, sunken eyes that mark an otherwise featureless visage.

For Men the Mutan are the most important of the Hordim. In these modern times they maintain dominion over all of the Horde, all power being centralised with the eleven Mutan of the Clavern'sigh. It is rumoured that this power is exercised with the utterance of a Word of Command, a powerful spell that binds all Hordim to their will.

The Jotun

Jotun are the largest of the Hordim, and in many respects the least understood. Standing between three and four metres tall they were originally designed as miners and engineers, but proved ultimately to be the downfall of the ancient Trell. Possessed of great intelligence and immense strength, these creatures are formidable adversaries and certainly the most imposing of all Hordim.

Although these giants were designed as builders and delvers of the deep earth, they have proven themselves powerful warriors. At war the Jotun equip themselves with intricately carved chestplates and other armour worn over heavy leather jerkins. It is known that they carry long-handled warhammers as their weapon of choice. Physically Jotun are similar to Hresh, only much taller and longer of limb. Unlike the Hresh however, Jotun sport a white-grey braid of hair and have ochre coloured skin. It is rumoured also that they adhere to a strict code of discipline, and are the most socially organised of the Hordim. Whether this is true is unknown to Men.

The Vardem

Almost nothing is known of the Vardem except that they were the personal hand-servants of the Trell. With the demise of their Masters and the ascension of the Mutan, these creatures disappeared from the world. Their fate is unknown.

The Kraals of the Hordim

All creatures of the Horde give their primary allegiance to the Mutan of the Clavern'sigh but differentiate themselves from other Hordim by their Kraal, or Homeland. Whether Jotun, Hresh, Morg or Mutan, each Hordim has a Kraal allegiance that signifies their status

within the Horde. Only the Jotun find cause for further differentiation, having formed a division into two separate affiliations. The larger of the two is the Jotun of the March, loyal to the Sigh and made up of the more numerous Bruhaj, Amdahl and Traebor Kraals. The smaller is the Jotun of the West, comprising the Delving and Oldemai Kraals; whose loyalties have proven less reliable and who have suffered for it.

The Four Nations of Man

From the time of the great voyage that brought Men to the New World, the Four Nations have fought to find a secure place in a harsh land. From their initial settlements upon the shores of the Dromannion Free State these nations have spread out into the wilds of Arborell. What follows is a short description of each. Detailed maps of all these nations, and of the Horde homelands, can be found within the pages of the Atlas of Arborell at www.arborell.com.

The Kalborean Union

Largest of the nations of Men is the Kalborean Union. Composed of twelve united city-states, the Kalborean Union lays claim to most of central and southern Arborell. Descendants of settlers who made their way to the New World aboard the Kalborean Fleet, they are physically tall, well known for their adventurous spirit, and diligent in their pursuit of wealth and power. Over the years the Kalborean Union has grown into a powerful and sophisticated nation, but they have used that power to subjugate the Dwarvendim of the Stone Kingdoms and the smaller Faeyen Provinces of western Arborell. At the time of this adventure only the NomDruse of the south remain independent of the power of the Union.

The Dwarvendim Stone Kingdoms

As the only Men to master the mysteries of EarthMagic the Dwarvendim have held a unique position amongst the Four Nations. Physically very different from the other nations they are identified easily by their muscular build and short stature. Most Dwarvendim stand less than shoulder high to other men, but make up for their lack of stature with a grim determination and impressive physical strength. Known throughout Arborell for their skill in building and an unusual affinity to stone, their greatest skill lies with their knowledge of the Lore of Stonewood. It is the Dwarvendim who counter the magical power of the Clavern's sigh with the Grand Circle of LoreMasters, and it is the power that these Men once wielded that is the focus of this adventure.

The history of the Dwarvendim is longer than man's habitation in Arborell, and it is one littered with violence and treachery. Many times during the years of settlement in Arborell the Dwarvendim have risen to leadership amongst the Four Nations, only to have that leadership tested with betrayal and warfare. In an effort to bring security to their number they migrated from their first settlements surrounding the Kalborean Lakes to a safe haven within the high peaks and mist-covered valleys of the Krodestaag Ranges. It was there they founded the Stone Kingdoms, and until the destruction of Menion'Barac during the War of Three Nations, maintained a strong presence amongst the nations of Men. At the time of this adventure the Stone Kingdoms lay in ruins, the peoples of the Dwarvendim subjugated to the power of the Kalborean Union.

The Faeyen Provinces

To be Faeyen is to live a life of privilege and ease. Descended from the Merchant and Professional classes of the Old World, the Faeyen have maintained a life different from the other nations. Slim of build and cultured in the arts, they control most commerce within the Four Nations, mainly through a network of Trading Houses and Merchant Guilds that manage the production and distribution of fabric and leather goods, fine metals and spices.

Although the Faeyen frequently travel into the wider world, they do so hesitantly. Very soon after the end of the Fourth Horde War the Faeyen migrated to the rugged west of Arborell where they raised a series of magnificent mountain citadels. Skilled in trade and unsurpassed in their artifice with fine metals, they have grown rich and idle, content to keep to themselves and let their Agents do their work for them.

It is a truth however, that no man in Arborell underestimates the determination of the Faeyen, or the pragmatic ruthlessness of their government. Unlike the Dwarvendim, who fought against the Kalborean Union to the point of their enslavement; the Faeyen, who were allied to the Stone Kingdoms in the War of Three Nations, could see no benefit to such an end and betrayed the Dwarvendim, ceding sovereignty of their lands to the Kalboreans. They do as the Kalborean Union asks, pay a regular tribute and have been left alone because of it.

The NomDruse Homelands

Very little is recorded of this people, except that they dwell in the far south of Arborell, and protect themselves with a powerful magic unknown to the other nations. Since the time of the Horde Wars the NomDruse have had no contact with the outside world, except to make it known that they wish to be left alone. Apart from the aging figure of the Venerable Siddigh, who resides at the National Academy in Castaal, Kalborea, no other NomDruse has crossed the Rabatte that separates the NomDruse Homelands from the rest of Arborell. Why they wish to live in such isolation is a mystery yet to be uncovered.

A Short History of the Horde (Oera'dim)

Condensed from a lecture given by the Tak Mah Horan in the year of settlement 931 to the Combined Assemblies of the Synod of the LoreMages' Guild of Kalborea. Horde translations of certain words are given in brackets.

It is said that the creatures of the Horde were created out of darkness, moulded in the depths of the Earth and given life with the power of EarthMagic. Long are the tales that describe the rising of the Hordim from the Earth, and of their subjugation by the ancient beings known to them as the Trel'sara, and to Men as simply the Trel. Such is the antiquity of these events that there is little that remains of any factual records. Of the stories and sagas of the Hordim (Oera'dim) there is much that is unclear but the history of the Horde is long, and it cannot be disputed that they are our greatest nemesis. Only through an understanding of this enemy can we ever hope to defeat them.

From those records that still remain it is certain that the first of the Hordim were created by the Trel many thousands of years prior to the arrival of Men in the world. At that time the Trel were engaged in a vicious struggle with another race known only as the Forgotten Ones. There is nothing in this world that describes who they were, or how such a conflict arose, but it is sure that the Trel were losing, and in their desperation to turn the tide of the war created the first of the Hordim. These creatures we know today as the Hresh (Hresh'na). Although it is unknown how the Trel were able to harness the powers of EarthMagic to create the Hresh, it is a matter of Hordim legend that they turned the war. Designed as disciplined and merciless weapons the Hresh were totally loyal to their masters, and with the strength of these creatures at their command destroyed the Forgotten Ones and took dominion of Arborell.

The Hresh had proved themselves as potent warriors, but with the fighting done the Trel turned their creatures to new tasks. In their arrogance they put their slave-warriors to work, tending fields, creating the goods needed by their civilisation, and building the great cities and temples whose ruins can be found spread throughout our world. It can be said that in these endeavours the Hresh could not satisfy their masters. They had been created as warriors and that could be their only true calling. The Trel looked instead to new creatures to fulfil their needs and it was then that they created the Morg (Ah'marg).

Used purely as farm workers and manual labourers the Morg were hardy slaves, resistant to all extremes of weather and like their Hresh brethren, completely loyal to their masters. It is believed that a Word of Command held all the Hordim in bondage, and until it was broken by the Jotun (Jotuni) the Trelle lived their lives at ease, sure in the knowledge that they were supreme in the world.

There came a time however, when even the need to control their slaves was given over to a new creature of their devising. The Mutan (Ah'mutani) were created as slave-masters, controlling all the work done by the Hordim, ensuring the efficient management of all aspects of Trelle society. More and more power was concentrated in these creature's hands until eventually it was only the Word of Command that separated the Mutan from their masters. Whilst held in bondage by this most powerful of spells the Trelle could not be challenged, and for thousands of years such was the manner of their lives.

It came to pass that in this time two new creatures were created to further the decadence and excesses of the Trelle. The first were known as the Vardem (Vardemi). These were the personal household servants of the Trelle. All other creatures had proven inadequate to their ever-increasing indolence and it was so that the Vardem served their most basic of needs. It is unknown as to what they looked like, or where they might now be, but of all the Hordim they are the least known, and the most mysterious. The second creatures created in this Golden Age of Excess were the Jotun, and with them the Trelle made a fatal error.

Designed as engineers and miners of the deep earth they were given intelligence and strength. Unlike the other Hordim the Jotun were powerful beings, imbued with the knowledge and intellect to serve without need of supervision. What the Trelle did not realise was that some of the Jotun had come into the world immune to the power of the Word of Command, and as their brethren took their place beside the other Hordim, they worked secretly to bring down their Masters.

It is one of the greatest mysteries of the Jotun as to how they broke the Word of Command, but with its fall came violence and death as the now unrestrained slaves of the Trelle rose against their masters and obliterated them from the world. In this time of destruction the Vardem disappeared; some legends say they fled to the east, but by the end of their insurrection the Jotun had control of the world. Arborell was now under the dominion of the Horde.

All should have ended in that manner, except that the Mutan coveted power for themselves. Apart from the Vardem the Mutan had been closest to their old masters, and knew much of their ways. They used this knowledge to harness the powers of the Earth for themselves, and revived the Word of Command to bring all the Hordim under their thrall. To this time it has remained so, the Mutan in command of the Horde, the Hordim once again subjugated to the powers of those who can harness EarthMagic.

There is a question that must be raised however. What happened to the Jotun who were immune to the Word of Command? There is no further mention of them in the sagas of the Horde, and no indication that they have attempted to wrest control from the Mutan since their rise to power. If ever there was a possible ally to be found amongst the Hordim it would be these Jotun, but the question remains. Where are they?

A Mythology of Arborell

Excerpt from a lecture given at the Academy of Histories at Landfall in
the Year of Settlement 419

“If we are to understand the history of Arborell it is important to recognise that little written evidence survives. What we know of the time before Men made landfall upon these shores is taken mostly from the oral traditions of the Hordim, and the scant texts that can be found carved into the many temples of this world. What is clear is that the story is a long one, and it stretches back into a prehistory that is difficult for Men to comprehend. It is a story however, that is compelling, one that explains the state of our world today, and provides insight into the reasons why the ancient works of this world lie in such ruination.

For all that will follow it must first be understood that the Hordim believe in a world where the supernatural is as important, and as real, as anything found in their waking lives. The history for which I am about to provide a brief overview must be considered from the perspective that for our mortal enemies the world is controlled by three great Powers, and everything that has happened, or will ever happen, is their doing. How these Powers came into being, and how they are bound into a single existence is the essence of Hordim mythology. It is also where we must begin.

The creation myth of the Oera'dim, or Hordim as we know them, concerns the travails of two Creator-Gods, Gedhru and Aume. It is in their celestial home that their son Emur is murdered, and from his remains is fashioned the world as we know it. The tale of the Sorrows of Gedhru and Aume sets the foundations for a world of magic and betrayal that results in the creation of the First Power, the Shan'duil, and thence all the history that follows from it. It can be said truthfully that we have only scratched the surface of that history, but what we have so far uncovered alludes to a past littered with vast empires, ruthless tyrants and genocidal wars. It is quite a story and one that begins with the River of Life.

Long before the arrival of either Hordim or Men in the world there existed only the Shan'duil, the River of Life; and it alone wielded all power, its purpose to act as a good shepherd for all that breathed or grew in the world, intent on balancing the rhythm of creation as it is expressed in the relentless cycle of the seasons. For time unrecorded it stood in solitary dominion of the world, a pulsing life-essence that

bound the fate of all living things together.

In the oral histories of the Hordim it is said that the dominion of the Shan'duil remained unchanged until the roots of a great Tree came into contact with the River of Life. Somewhere within the vastness of the Malleron forests a monstrous Oak delved deep into the bedrock of the world and touched the Shan'duil, turning the tree instantly to white stone. In that moment a new Second Power was born, a sentient, immortal Tree possessed of all the powers of the Shan'duil, that spread its dominion over all other trees. From that chance encounter arose the Silvan Tree, and under its stewardship the forests of Arborell flourished, spreading to all the corners of the world.

In this manner the balance of life was maintained; the Shan'duil continuing its dominion over the cycle of life, the Silvan Tree its stewardship of all the great forests. Within the boundaries of this quiet existence the Two Powers grew in strength, and together found comfort in the verdancy of their world. It was a tranquil dominion that lasted for untold millennia, until the coming of the Forgotten Ones.

It is not known who the Forgotten Ones were. There are no records of their origin, or carven images that might give hint to their nature. All that is known is that they lived in this world and then were gone, but their story is a turning point in the history of Arborell.

From a place beyond the borders of our world the Forgotten Ones arose, settling in Arborell and making a life for themselves amongst the great Trees. Theirs was an existence without material want, nomadic and simple in their desire to do no harm to the world they ventured in. In the course of their wanderings it was inevitable that they encountered the Silvan Tree, and not being creatures of greed or distrust gave their fealty to that Power. In return the Silvan Tree introduced them to the Shan'duil, and in that meeting the Forgotten Ones learned of the great energy that the First Power had woven into the world. This energy the Forgotten Ones called EarthMagic.

Time flowed on and the world, which had only known the quiet dominion of trees, became filled with the voices of the Forgotten Ones. Favoured by the Silvan Tree they flourished, and soon their multitude found homes wherever the trees of the forest spread their boughs. Of all things that found favour with the Second Power it was the voices of the Forgotten Ones that intrigued the Great Tree most. In all the long years of its existence it had never known the clarity of the spoken word, and given the opportunity learned the language of these peoples and bonded it with EarthMagic. The words of the Forgotten Ones

became one with the life-force of the world, a key that could be used to manipulate that great power in ways previously unimagined even by the Powers themselves. The Silvan Tree offered this boon to the Forgotten Ones but they declined, leaving mastery of such magic in the custody of River and Tree. It was not for them, they said, to have such a boon for it would surely be their undoing.

In truth the Forgotten Ones knew the dangers of unfettered power, and rather than wield it themselves built great Temples, and gave homage to the Silvan Tree in gratitude of her offer. Each of the Temples was built near a tributary of the River of Life, and each delved far into the earth, their builders' purpose to find solace with the pulse of the world. These dorum grew in all the corners of Arborell and so the world again continued for many more millennia.

As is the way of things there came a time when even a great Power can fall into folly. Without the care that should have been given the Silvan Tree created a race of Beings it called Trell'sara, or Guardians. The Guardians were to be custodians of the trees, as selfless and caring as the Forgotten Ones themselves, but instead their ambitions proved both treacherous and destructive. In secret the Trell'sara planned a great war, their aim to tear down the Tree and bring extermination upon her loyal subjects. In their plotting and scheming the world would have room only for themselves.

It is recorded as a part of the oral histories of the Oera'dim that in one night the Trell'sara betrayed the Silvan Tree, breaking it up then transporting it high into the western mountains of the world. There it was disposed of, thrown into a deep abyss and left to be forgotten by its traitorous creations. With the Silvan Tree gone the Trell'sara turned their malice upon the Forgotten Ones, and in that act of betrayal found themselves embroiled in a bloody civil war.

The War of Tree and Leaf did not go as planned. The Forgotten Ones proved themselves to be both doughty and effective warriors, and for some years held their own against the Guardians. Desperate to finish a conflict that had taken so many of their lives the Trell'sara searched for a weapon that might turn the tide and give them the victory they sought. In time they found it.

Out of the living earth the Trell'sara, who had been given the power to harness EarthMagic by the Silvan Tree, created the Hresh, vicious warriors designed as weapons of war. With a great host of these creatures they swept the Forgotten Ones from the world, and took dominion of Arborell for themselves.

But the Silvan Tree was not dead. In the depths of the earth the Tree struggled to survive, its tenuous grip on life growing stronger as it gained strength from its proximity to the Shan'duil. Far from the sight of the Trell'sara the Tree recovered its resolve and waited, mourning the loss of the Forgotten Ones and lamenting the folly of its actions.

In the light of day the Trell'sara knew nothing of the Silvan Tree's survival. Quickly they took dominion of the known world and began creating new creatures to meet their need for slaves. The Hresh were effective warriors but had no talent for the domestic, so the Guardians created the Jotun to serve as builders and engineers, the Morg as farm labourers and menial workers, and the Mutan to oversee them all. Only when all these creatures had been brought into the world did the Trell'sara create the Vardem, their personal servants for which little has been recorded.

Again the millennia passed as a flowing ocean of time. The slaves of the Trell'sara laboured hard at the behest of their masters, and no threat came to bother their dominion until the Silvan Tree had grown strong enough to act.

Such was the need for slaves required to meet the indolence and excess of the Trell'sara, that it came to pass that the balance of life and death in Arborell began to falter. All of the creatures created by the Guardians carried within them a small glimmering of the River of Life, and with that spark came sentience and a will to find a better existence. The Trell'sara were cruel masters and thought nothing of the loss of multitudes of slaves in the building of their great citadels and pleasure palaces. Such losses released these sparks of existence into the world, but they had nowhere to go, and soon the burden of such unrestrained energy began to weigh heavily upon the Shan'duil.

In the dark recesses of the abyss within which it had been thrown the Silvan Tree came to an agreement with the River of Life. The cycle of Life and Death had to be restored, and it could only be done one way. In that deep abode the Silvan Tree created a mirror-image of itself, a third Power of the world concerned only with Death, and the force by which the sparks of existence now roaming freely could be gathered up and returned properly to the Living World.

Such a tree was given the name Dreya, and its dominion became known as Hallen'draal. In its domain the sparks of Life were gathered and scourged, to be reborn as new Beings into the world of light above. The Dreya Tree took to its task with great energy and in doing so scourged the memories of those it brought into its Underworld. It

was through the Dreya Tree that the Silvan Tree found its opportunity.

It must be understood that the Trell'sara may have been indolent but they were not stupid. They knew the nature of their creations and placed upon them all a Word of Command, a spell that kept their slaves submissive and controllable. Without it they knew they would fall prey to the unrestrained hatred of their charges, and ensured diligently that the Word would never falter.

In the darkness of the Dreya's domain the Word of Command was scourged from all creatures memory only to be reasserted when a Being returned to the World Above. On a few select Jotun the Silvan Tree assured that the Word of Command could have no effect upon them once they were reborn, and as was the wish of the Great Tree they laboured in secret to throw down their Masters.

Although it is unclear to the scholars of Men how the Great Insurrection started it has been recorded that the rebellion grew quickly, the Trell'sara caught unawares as they pursued their interests in sloth and excess. In a wave of violence and death the Trell'sara were themselves destroyed, their vast cities and palaces torn down stone by stone. When the slaves of the Trell'sara had finished, their masters had been scourged from the world and their empire laid waste; their memory lost to a world that did not wish to remember them.

In a world where there was no longer control the slaves found themselves without purpose and soon spiralled into violence. Within this great upheaval the old overseers of the Trell'sara, the Ah'mutani, or Mutan as they are known to Men, took the Word of Command for themselves and Uttered it again into the world. It was a cruel irony that Arborell now belonged to the slaves of the Trell'sara, and it was the Mutan that now ruled them all.

Eight long millennia saw no challenge to the power of the Mutan. The Oera'dim, as the slaves of the Trell'sara now called themselves, divided along a series of tribal allegiances that spread into all the corners of the world, and such was the power of the Mutans' Word of Command that no challenge could be made against them. Then came the arrival of Men.

Out of the great eastern ocean a ragged fleet of ships arose into Arborell. Settling first on the island of Dromannion the Nations of Men then made landfall upon the shores of Arborell itself. Neither Man nor Hordim, as we have come to know the Oera'dim, understood each other's nature and misunderstanding and mistrust soon turned

to open warfare. The result has been centuries of warfare, and the untold losses that have been endured in those great conflicts.

And now this tale is almost done. Our part in the history of this world began with our arrival upon the shores of Dromannion, but the history of this world stretches far beyond the borders of our understanding. To this date four great wars have been fought against the Hordim and they remain an intractable enemy, one entrenched in a culture of violence we are yet to fully understand. We can only wonder at what the future must hold for all of us.”

On Nahla Bread and Beer

From a manual on Bushcraft distributed by the Brethren of the Deep Guild of Das Vallendor

For every traveller of the wilds of Arborell there is one mainstay that must be carried, and that is Nahla Bread. Made from wild wheat and the soft pulp of the Nahla fruit it is an adaptation of a recipe used by the Horde for millennia, that provides a light and easily stored food for long journeys. Whereas the Hordim prefer to bake the fruit into large cake-like loaves, it has been the practice of Men to create smaller breads that are more easily carried.

On the Nahla Tree itself, and the unusual properties of its fruit, there has been much research. Unlike any other fruit native to Arborell, the Nahla has powerful regenerative properties that can kill a man if eaten raw. It is only when the Nahla fruit is properly processed and diluted to one-twentieth of its potency that it can be safely baked and consumed.

How Nahla Bread affects the traveller eating it is one of the more elusive mysteries of our world. After eating a portion of the bread, energy is restored in a rush of tingling heat, and fatigue fades quickly after its consumption. The only danger after the bread has been properly prepared comes if too much is eaten. Generally only one small loaf, about the size of a finger, can be consumed at a time. Any more and a man will find himself intoxicated. Indeed the effect of too much Nahla has been described as an overwhelming need to run, to somehow burn away an overflow of energy that has no release.

It is rumoured that the Faeyen have developed a way to process Nahla fruit into a liquid, one capable of being stored for long periods. Such potions have not been seen in the wider world, and their existence has not been confirmed by the Faeyen themselves.

There is only one important point that must be mentioned here. Properly processed Nahla Bread is an important food source for travellers, but it does have one curious property that must be known to all who might purchase it. A few unfortunate experiences have shown that Nahla Bread must not come into contact with beer, or any other form of malted beverage. For reasons that are unclear it becomes highly unstable when soaked or eaten with beer, and such contact should be avoided at all cost. In its unstable form it changes into a low-grade explosive dough that is quite capable of killing a man if knocked or thrown. Nahla is truly an unusual food.

An Enemy of the State

From a report forwarded to the High Prefect at Maenum by the
Tak Lovar in the Year of Settlement 947.

As per your request I am forwarding this report regarding the origins and recent activities of the Dwarvendim prisoner known as Halokim Vesh. As you would be aware, this man currently resides in the dungeons of Maenum, and is scheduled for public execution within the next 21 days. Investigation of his background has revealed a number of facts, and an uncharacteristic lack of information, that has led me to believe this man to be a particular danger to the Kalborean Union. The facts that have led me to this conclusion are noted below for your consideration.

Enquiries indicate that there is no verifiable date of birth for this individual. Research undertaken by the Administrators' Guild shows no record of his birth, the earliest information available being a document regarding his indenture as a child labourer at the age of 4 to a small farm upon the western edges of Kalborea. This document does indicate a Mother, but no details have come to light and all efforts to find out more about his heritage have proven fruitless.

As a child the subject spent five years at the Truvo Farm, a frontier settlement specialising in Sempaca meat production. This farm still operates along the west road to Melem's Fork, but apart from the facts of the duration of his stay, little can be determined except that he showed considerable aptitude for languages. It was this aptitude that brought him under the scrutiny of the Novitiate Selection Committee. It is here that the facts of this man's history blur even further.

Although Vesh was placed at the age of 9 into the custody of the Temple of the Suns in Das Frontiere, I can find no documentation within the records of the Selection Committee that he was ever actually selected for placement as a novice. Further investigation shows that there is no record of who brought him to the Temple, however it is documented that his studies were intensive during his attendance, and that he was a student of particular note. What is certain is that at the age of 11 he was thrown into the streets of Das Frontiere and quickly merged into the criminal underworld.

On the matter of why there are no records regarding the subject's admission to the Temple, I have contacted the Administrator General and an investigation has begun. So far the Administrators can give no

reason for the lack of documentation. I must put forward the opinion that there are unseen forces at work here, and I have the suspicion that the true nature of this Dwarvendim is known only to whomever has been guiding his education. I can only surmise that whatever the purposes of this subterfuge, it is not for the benefit of the Kalborean Union.

After the closure of the Temple of the Suns, and the dispersal of its novices, Vesh disappeared for almost two years, only to be subsequently arrested in Das Nephrim on larceny and assault charges. By some unknown device he escaped custody, and was only recaptured six months later during a raid by Kalborean Army units upon a bandit camp on the fringes of the Faeron Marshes. Again he escaped custody, and until his capture four months ago has been outside the knowledge of the Union. As far as can be ascertained he is currently aged 22.

Although this man has long escaped capture, and the inevitable punishment that must be his to endure, there is evidence that implicates him in a string of burglaries, smuggling enterprises and involvement in at least three forgery gangs. Of greater interest to the Guild must be his possible involvement in the theft of a number of priceless artifacts from Hel'garad. On this matter alone he should be interrogated, as some of these artifacts have not yet been recovered, and their loss has stalled a number of investigations currently under way within the Guild.

In the years that I have given to my calling as an Inquisitor I have never found a subject with less documentation. I can only conclude that there has been a systematic alteration of records to hide the true nature of this Dwarvendim, and that fact alone should give cause for concern.

Although I have not been asked for an opinion regarding this individual I feel compelled to provide the following recommendation. This man is an Enemy of the State and should be executed without delay. With that complete a full investigation should then begin into the nature of the conspiracy that surrounds him.

I await your recommendations.

The Tak Malleus Lovar
History and Records Directorate
Maenum

Notes

Notes

WINDHAMMER

CHARACTER STATUS SHEET

A CORE GAMEBOOK FROM THE CHRONICLES OF ARBORELL

STRENGTH (5-11)
 AGILITY (1-5)
 ENDURANCE (15-35)
 INTUITION (1-5)
 LUCK (1-5)

50 CHARACTER POINTS MUST BE APPLIED HERE.

SUB-TOTAL

+

SKILL/TALENT
BONUS

+

ARMOUR
BONUS

=

COMBAT
VALUE

50 POINTS MUST BE SPREAD BETWEEN THESE FIVE ATTRIBUTES. STRENGTH PLUS AGILITY EQUAL YOUR COMBAT SUB-TOTAL. ANY SKILL, TALENT OR ARMOUR BONUSES MUST BE ADDED TO DETERMINE YOUR FULL COMBAT VALUE (CV).

ENDURANCE

NOTE:
YOUR INITIAL ENDURANCE LEVEL CANNOT BE EXCEEDED IN THE COURSE OF YOUR ADVENTURE.

SKILL AREAS

- BUSHCRAFT +5 TO ENDURANCE
- HUNTMASTERY +1 TO COMBAT VALUE
- WEAPONMASTERY +1 TO COMBAT VALUE
- LORE CRAFT +1 TO INTUITION
- BRIGANDRY No ADVANTAGES
- STEALTH +1 TO SHIMMERA

EQUIPMENT

NOTE:
AFTER PURCHASING RATIONS AND EQUIPMENT AT START OF ADVENTURE ONLY A FURTHER EIGHT ITEMS MAY BE CARRIED AT ANY ONE TIME.

CHOSEN TALENTS

- 1)
2)

SHIMMERA

QUEST NOTES

RATIONS

TORCHES

NAHLA

No CARRY LIMIT ON THIS IEM.

ARTIFACTS FOUND

WINDHAMMER

COMBAT RECORD SHEET

A CORE GAMEBOOK FROM THE CHRONICLES OF ARBORELL

CREATURE NAME

	CV	EP	
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CREATURE NAME

	CV	EP	
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CREATURE NAME

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CREATURE NAME

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WINDHAMMER

Here begins the adventures of Halokim Vesh, a thief marked for execution but given one last chance to live. From the frontiers of Kalborea to the dark halls of Stoneholme, he must search for the Tellandra, a pillar of stonewood upon which all the hopes of an enslaved nation depend. In his path will be found the dangers of a wild frontier and ultimately the greatest of all foes, the Dragon Windhammer.

This is a 600 section adventure where the choices you make will lead to either the success or failure of your quest. In this world you are the hero and failure is not an option.

