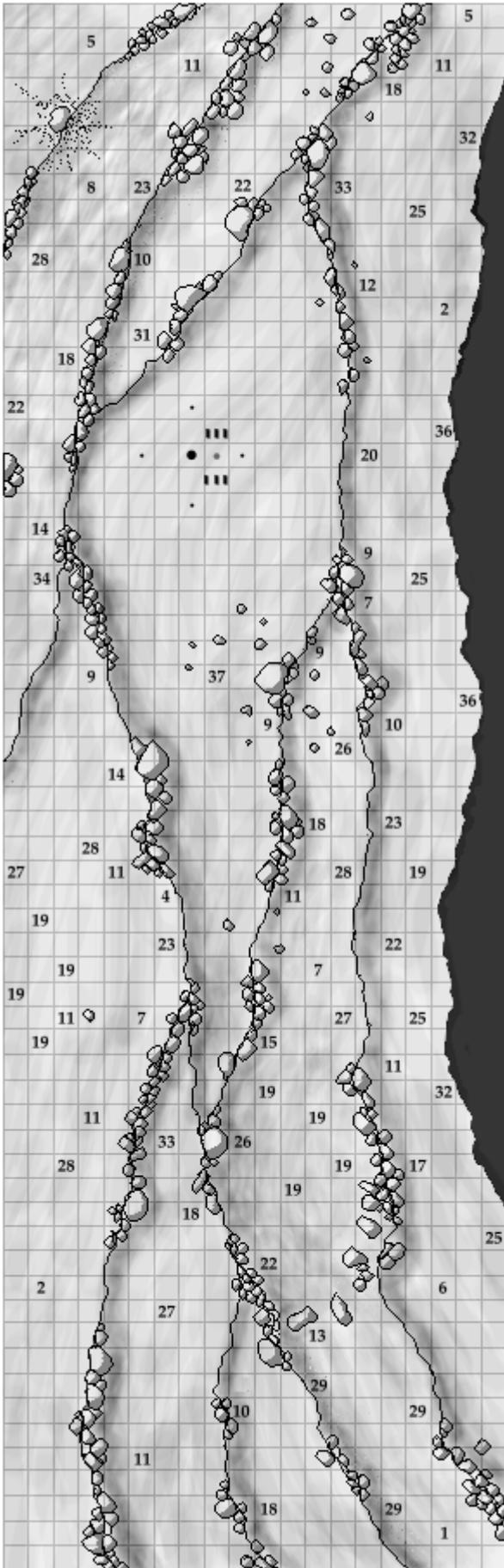


THE STEPS OF LAMAN'THEL

OLD BONES AND MOONLIGHT

A gamebook adventure in two pages.
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Introduction

It is said amongst the free citizens of Arborell that the Brethren are no more than criminals, men of dubious character forced into a vocation no more respectable than the prison terms they would otherwise have served. The truth is that the Brethren are indeed criminals but their training in the Guild changes them, giving them purpose and the skills necessary to survive their new vocation. One such man of the Guild was Alrig Damphousse, a career criminal in his youth but a legend of the Deep Guild remembered long after his death. Ambushed upon a mountain trail by a crue of Hresh warriors, Alrig lost an artefact long sought for and hard won. Another Brother might have thanked the Fates for their survival and made for the nearest settlement. Not Alrig. In the depths of a mountain winter he resolved instead to hunt down the crue and get back what had been taken from him. On the trail of the Hresh he followed them into the mountains of Laman'thel and thence to a plateau of fractured ground known as The Steps. There the Hordim made camp and there Alrig made his plans to recover what he considered his property. This is also your mission. Start at the grid square numbered 1 and find a way to get into the camp unseen and steal back what has been taken from you.

Special Rules

The standard rule set applies to this adventure except for the Torch rules. To successfully find a path to the Hresh camp and steal the *gahdim'al* torches cannot be used, your way lit only by fleeting glimpses of moonlight and the campfire of the Hresh themselves. For the purposes of this adventure the standard Torch rules do not apply.

Using these Section References:

The section references that follow correspond to numbered grid squares found upon the map provided opposite and in most cases need only be read once. The exception are section numbers enclosed within brackets (). These sections must be actioned no matter how many times they are landed upon. All of the numbered grids can however, be used as end of turn way-points as many times as is necessary. It should be noted that if a numbered grid blocks the way forward the player must land on that grid before continuing.

Sections

1: You had found the *gahdim'al* amongst the ruins of a small temple upon the shores of Nen'oram, and that is when your troubles began. It had been a long journey to that isolated lake and there the Hresh had somehow found and ambushed you. In the dead of night the crue had attacked, and only a steep slope and an ungainly fall had saved you from a certain death. When you had returned to your camp the small, jewelled casket had been taken and there was no way such an affront could remain unchallenged. Quickly you searched out the Hordims' trail, and then tracked them northwards, passing east of Araheal and thence to Laman'thel and the Steps. Strangely you had felt the presence of something else on the hunt as well. You had not been able to see it but you had sensed it tracking your progress, and keeping its distance. Its purpose however, was obvious. It was hunting the Hresh as well and those Hordim now lay camped no more than 300 metres ahead. It is the dead of night, a furious wind blasts across the exposed plateau. Between flurries of swirling snow you can see the glow of their camp to the north and you know it is there that you will find your *gahdim'al*. With weapon in hand you move forward.

2: Half covered by snow you find here the remains of a large animal. It may be a Sempaca-Beast but it is hard to tell, its body torn and broken by some massive predator. Carefully you move forward and find not only the remnants of the huge herbivore but three other bodies as well, all hidden by snow. Each is frozen solid and all are Hresh, but not of the number you have been tracking. These Hresh have been laying upon the Steps of Laman'thel for long enough that they have been mummified, their skin taught upon bone. One of the Hordim has a satchel still draped across his shoulder and carefully you pull it away. Inside you find two glass vials, and you recognise them for what they are. These are Nahla potions, powerful regeneratives used by the Hordim to maintain stamina whilst travelling. These you take with you. (If needed each of these potions will restore 6 points of endurance when drunk. Record them then move on.)

3: You decide to chance it and move forward. Within the swirling wind and snow you cross the open ground but luck is not with you. Overhead the cloud cover is a torn patchwork of scudding vapours and as you move beyond the boulders the overcast parts, shining moonlight down upon you. Exposed, you are seen immediately by one of the sentries. To a chorus of shouts four of the Hresh run towards you. If you would run from the Hordim turn to section 16. If you will not leave your property behind and would rather stand and fight, turn to section 30.

4: Against the chill you pull your cloak tighter about you. The camp is no more than a hundred metres to the north and you peer carefully from the cover of these boulders towards its dull red glow. You cannot see enough yet but you have no second thoughts about your objective. The *gahdim'al* is there and you mean to have it back. Carefully you move forward.

(5:) Ahead lie only cliffs and slopes of unstable rock. There is no way forward here.

6: To the north there stretches a vast platform of smooth stone, bordered at its eastern edges by a cliff and an abyssal drop to a valley floor far below. The narrow plateau is covered in snow and ice, only a shallow ridge in the stone upon its western edges, and a few lines of boulders, giving any protection from the raging westerly wind. If you go north you will have to tread carefully.

7: Behind the cover of a long line of boulders you move with purpose, flurries of snow obscuring everything ahead. At least you think, the Hresh will not be able to see you either.

Note: The ridge lines described in section 29 are not boundaries and can be crossed at any time without penalty. Any space between boulders can also be used to find a path between section numbers.

8: Teetering upon the edge of the ridge to the north is a large boulder. It has hit the exposed rock hard, throwing a scattering of broken stone onto the ground about it. You look up but cannot see any point from where it might have fallen. For a moment you consider whether the rock had been thrown, but discount it and move on.

9: From the protection of a few boulders you look out towards the Hresh camp. At its western edge you can see a large round tent and two lines of smaller tents edging the north and south perimeter. A fire burns at its centre and in its glow you can see four Hresh posted as sentries. The larger tent is the Command tent and it is there that your property will be secured. All you need do is get to it without being seen.

10: For a moment you take the time to rest. In the lee of these boulders you are out of the wind and more importantly, out of sight.

(11:) From out of the snow a **Dire Cat** (CV-13, EP-8) lunges towards you. The cat is pure white and just less than two metres in length. Kill it or die here.

12: From the cover of the boulders you look out towards the camp and see something moving in the shadows beyond the light of its fire. It is no more than a dark form veiled within swirling snow but it is big and it moves with purpose.

13: For a moment you take refuge behind a large boulder. The wind grows stronger and in its grasp snow blasts across the exposed plateau. Looking to the north you can only barely see the glow of the Hreshes' campfire but it is closer.

(14:) For a moment you pause and look towards the cover of a line of boulders twenty metres to the north. To get there you will have to cross an area of open ground, the ridge here eroded and too shallow to afford any cover. If you want to move forward here test your Luck attribute. If you are successful the Hresh do not see you. If you are unsuccessful with this test turn to section 3.

15: Keeping to the shadows you peer out towards the camp. The glow of its fire gleams through the snowfalls but you can see nothing else.

16: There is no hope here. Your advantage of surprise is gone and there are too many Hresh to fight in open combat. Turning on your heel you run southwards, the *gahdim'al* now lost to you. In another life you may have better luck but for now your mission has failed. If you wish return to grid number 1 and try again.

17: Carefully you follow the line of boulders, using them as cover from the growing wind. In its embrace thick flurries of snow career eastwards, disappearing over the edges of the nearby cliff and out into darkness. Looking to the north you consider your next move, and as you do so you sense something moving to the west. It is distant but it emanates a ruthless malice that you can feel keenly. The sensation passes however, leaving in its wake only the insistent cold, and the sensation that there is more danger in these mountains than the Hresh alone.

(18:) From beneath a boulder a **Velk** (CV-13, EP-8) attacks. These rodent-like scavengers infest the mountains of the west and this one is too hungry to wait for you to die from the relentless cold. Protected by thick, white fur and weighing up to 40 kilos it is not a creature easily ignored. Drawing your weapon you wait for the Velk to close upon you. If you kill this rodent move on quickly. If it prevails however, you will need to look to a latter life for better luck and greater success.

(19:) Without warning the ground beneath you slumps, a deep sloping crevasse opening up as ice and snow pours towards its gaping abyss. Caught in a moving wave of ice you see the lip of the crevasse rising ahead, and know you will die if you are swept into it. If you have either a stone-pick or a grapple turn to section 39. If you do not have either of these items turn to section 33a.

20: The ridge here affords you some cover and from this vantage you peer out towards the Hordim camp. At its western edge you can see a large round tent and two lines of three smaller tents edging the north and south perimeter. A fire burns brightly at its centre and in its glow you can see a number of Hresh posted as sentries. The larger tent is the command tent and you think it most likely that your property will be secured there. All you need do is get to it without being seen.

21: In the midst of the raging battle everything suddenly halts as the attention of the remaining Hresh turns upon a section of snow behind you. Within the blustering snowstorm you see nothing at first, but then you too see something terrifying rise from the snow itself. Massive in size and covered in a thick fur you cannot recognise it at first for what it is, but the Hordim know it and turn from you. Shouting orders the crue commander sets his warriors to face the creature then runs for his tent. Only then do you realise what it is that confronts you. It is a *Dweo'gorga*, a Shape-shifter of the Ancient World. As one the Hresh close their attack and you are left alone on the snow, but you are not going to remain a passive spectator here. With the warriors fully engaged you run for the command tent. Turn to section 35.

22: Overhead the clouds part and moonlight streams down upon you. Caught in the open you fall into the snow at your feet and wait. Upon the driving wind you can hear no alarm from the camp so you carefully get back to your feet. The moonlight disappears with the scudding cloud and you move on.

23: Carefully you follow the line of the ridge. From a good vantage you look out towards the camp but can still see nothing.

24: From the ground ahead a huge shape erupts from the snow. It is a *Dweo'gorga*, a shape-shifter of the Ancient World, and in that moment you are sure you are going to be attacked. To your surprise you are not. Instead the huge creature runs at the camp, barrelling into the command tent and attacking the Hordim. It is an opportunity you cannot allow to let pass. Turn to section 35.

(25:) Without warning the ground falls away beneath you. Instinctively you lunge forward. Test your Agility. If you are successful you clear the widening chasm and land upon solid ground. If you fail this test turn to section 38.

26: Moving forward you make for a large boulder ahead. Overhead moonlight

breaks through the scudding overcast and for just a moment you are visible within the rushing winds. Instinctively you freeze before the cloud cover once again plunges the landscape into darkness. There are no alarms raised so you move on.

27: Here you find a trail of large footprints moving north. You do not recognise what might have left them but the creature is very big and the trail recent in its making.

28: Against the blustering winds you struggle on, but must come to a halt as the clouds above suddenly part. Immediately the ground about you is washed in moonlight but it is fleeting, the landscape glimmering grey and white before the overcast once again closes in. There is no alarm raised so you move on.

29: Ahead is a curious ridge in the ground. No more than a metre and a half high it is a wrinkle in the stone platform beneath, one that has accumulated snow and ice to form a low wall. These ridges criss-cross the Steps and should afford good cover as you make your way towards the Hordim camp.

30: Four of the **Hresh Warriors** (CV-15, EP-9) rush at you, scimitars drawn. Each of the Hresh have the same combat values and each must be fought individually. If you survive to kill two of these warriors turn to section 21. If it is you who succumbs before two of the warriors fall then your mission here will be over.

31: The camp is very close. Guards stand at each point of the compass and there seems no sure way of approaching unseen. As you consider how best to approach the camp the solution is suddenly taken out of your hands. Turn to section 24.

32: Carefully you approach the cliff's precipitous edge. It is more than 800 metres to the valley below and you have no head for such heights. Quickly you move on.

33: For a moment you rest. The lee of the ridge provides some refuge from the biting winds but you can feel the cold insinuating its way into your bones. When you are ready you move on.

33a: You have only moments to act before you will be swept into the crevasse. With nothing you can use to bring yourself to a halt you slide with the surrounding ice and snow, but then see a piece of jutting rock to your left. In desperation you reach for the stone and take a hold upon it. Test your strength. If you are successful you manage to maintain a grip on the slick rock as a river of moving snow flows into the crevasse. When it subsides you carefully pull yourself back onto a firmer footing. If you are not successful the moving snow pulls you away from your purchase and you slide into the abyss below. If this is your fate your mission here is over.

34: Here you come to a halt but not because you need to catch your breath. Somewhere out in the snow to the east you can sense something moving. It is large but you cannot see it. What you feel is a sickening sense of anger and malice that pervades the air. It lasts for only a few seconds before it is gone. Only when you are sure it has passed do you move on.

35: In the turmoil you run for the tent and find the **Hresh Commander** (CV-17, EP-12) scooping up the *gahdim'al*, his intent to carry it safely away from the melee. This is something you cannot allow. With the clamour of the battle at your back you stand before the Hresh and bar his way. The Hordim smirks and drops the jewelled box into the snow. If you kill this Hresh turn to section 40. If it is the Hresh that prevails your mission here will be over.

36: Carefully you approach the edge of the cliff. You can see nothing beyond its edge but the dark of night and sense the deadly fall that awaits the unwary. You quickly back away and look instead to the Hordim camp.

37: Using the cover of the snowstorm you move closer to the camp. It is a mistake you might come to regret. Immediately there is a call of alarm and a rising clamour amongst the Hordim. Within moments the Hresh have armed themselves. If you would run from this fight turn to section 16. If you would not leave the *gahdim'al* behind and would rather fight turn to section 30.

38: With a bone-jarring crash you hit the side of the crevasse. Swinging your arms wide you take hold of a piece of jutting ice, but it is a precarious purchase. Test your Strength. You have but one chance to pull yourself out before your handhold will give way. If you succeed in this test you pull yourself out before the edges of the crevasse collapse. If you fail this test your strength cannot help you and you plummet into the abyss below. If this is your fate your mission here is over.

39: You have only moments to act before you will be swept into the crevasse. Grabbing for the tool at your belt you slam one of its metal points into the ice, the sharp edge digging deep and finding a purchase that brings you to a jarring halt. About you the remains of the loose snow and ice flows like a river into the gaping maw of the abyss and when it subsides you carefully pull yourself back onto firmer footing. When you are safe you look to the Hresh camp and move on.

40: The *Dweo'gorga* lies silent, the Hresh Commander and the remnants of his crue scattered dead about the snowfield. All have succumbed to the battle yet somehow you are still alive. Taking only a moment to give thanks to Providence you rummage through what is left of the command tent and find the *gahdim'al* half-buried in the snow. It has been broken apart, inside a collection of old bones that you dump out onto the frozen ground. It is the box itself that interests you and carefully you place it in your satchel. Looking about at the remains of the Hresh you wonder what the *Dweo'gorga*'s purpose was here, but know it is something you may never fathom. Satisfied that you have recovered your property you turn southwards and begin the long journey home. Veiled by gusting snow you do not see the *Dweo'gorga* stir, its great form rising from the ground and making for the bones you left behind. Carefully gathering them into its arms the shape-shifter turns for the western mountains, satisfied that it has also got what it came for.

