



# Alternatives

*Author: Sean Gardiner*



Rose just ahead of the sun and set out along the Old Road, a perilous twisting trail along the top of the snowy mountain range. The road led me south, and had soon taken me over the border into Morimoor.

As I rounded the third peak, I had a fantastic view of the castle down on the vast plains covering half of the region, illuminated by the midday sun. It shone a dazzling gold in the late morning light, casting its own glow over the flat earth around it. It was a great shame I would not be getting a closer look, but I had barely two weeks left before my chartered ship departed Yorovash, and had to make haste.

The mountains continued south, with a slight curve to the east. I caught sight of a half-frozen signpost ahead, but slowed as I drew nearer to it. There was a faint sound up ahead.

I crouched low to the ground, and listened.

Heavy breathing. Three people, most likely men, a little further along the trail. Lurking out of sight. But where? There were too many possible hiding places among the mounds of rock and ice.

I stood, sword in one hand and knife in the other, and cautiously advanced. Within moments, the first one was on me, leaping down from a twisted rock. “Bad day for a walk, mate!”

I grabbed his loose pants in midair and redirected him into a face-down sprawl on the snow, then jabbed the point of my knife into his back. “Where are your friends?” I asked, not much louder than a whisper.

“All right, all right! The ice wall!” The ‘ice wall’ was a sheer cliff face, stretching skyward from beside us. I looked up and spotted movement among it.

“Ho, rogues!” I yelled, my voice echoing up the mountain. “I’ll give you one chance to tell me something about the ruler of Morimoor worth this scoundrel’s life!”

Laughter echoed back down. “Ha! Who cares about Relch? Kill him, and then we’ll kill you and snatch that pretty amulet from your dead neck!”

My hostage yelped. “I’ll tell you something! Uh, I don’t know about Morimoor, but I know about Lady Jacquelis and Lady Eorith. The witch sisters, my mum called ‘em. They each only neighbour one Lady, and the rest are Lords. Soon, they’ll all be Lords, I hear!”

“Got what you wanted?” came a second voice from above. “Then get ready to die!”

