

Quest for the Crown of Trent
Chapter thirteen

A meeting in an Oceanic tavern



By MIKE MACKINNON

(Summary: Jar and Tran have separated from Valton and started towards the Oceanic Port on the east coast. Valton journeyed toward the Badlands in pursuit of one of his many adversaries. The identity of him is unknown. Valton's journey ends when he reaches Drak's fortress.)

After Valton had left, Jar was not certain just how he felt about the wizard's departure. Although he did not completely trust him, Jar did miss the protection Valton's presence offered. Jar hoped the enemies might concentrate on them a little less, now that there were two targets instead of just one.

With the absence of the wizard, Jar could really feel the pain of losing Althar. Before the confusion and extra man in the party, he was not really allowed to think about his friend's death. But, now with just two of them, Althar's not being there left a painful void. It would be a long time before he got over losing a friend.

Jar watched Tran as he shuffled along the ledge. He wondered what was going through the dwarf's mind. Though the two of them had often fought and ridiculed each other's custom, there had been a grudging admiration and comradeship between them. Tran would deeply miss Althar, probably even more than Jar

himself did. However, he would never show it.

Though the weather was cold, there was no more snow that morning. They had been delayed enough and were already much behind schedule. Time was running out; soon the forces of Turin and Hain would be at war unless they managed to recover the stolen crown. The chance of the quest succeeding at the outset were not all that good, but with each passing day they grew worse. A few more delays and there would be no hope at all. One thing for sure, Drak and his allies, whoever they were, were doing their best to slow the quest down. It seemed certain that Drak was indeed their opponent and that Valton was trying to help them. Jar hoped that Valton had taken off to ensure they encountered no further delays.

Just as Jar was thinking about the wizard, he felt someone watching him. He looked about - but found no one. On impulse, he reached into his cloak and pulled the small silver disc from a pocket. The fogged filled surface cleared to show Valton standing on the mountain side looking into something in his hand. Jar realized that what he was watching was the wizard checking on their progress. He seemed unaware of Jar's intrusion.

Before Valton had a chance to detect Jar's presence, Jar pocketed the disc. Belatedly, he realized that the wizard

was probably able to see him looking into the disc. He grinned sheepishly before continuing.

By mid-day they had reached the bottom of the mountains. They spent the rest of the day travelling across the plain to the Oceanic Port. When they reached it; it was night. The street they entered the town by was a flurry of activity. There were numerous shops with low dirty awnings. Under these, people were selling crafts, fish and fruit. A dense smoke hovered over the street a few feet above the awning completely blocking out the stars in the night skies.

Children ran through the crowds, darting through peoples' legs. They were ignored by the adults who were busy either buying or gambling. Jar and Tran were only given a glance as they made their way through the mob. Eventually they found a tavern.

Jar led Tran into the low ceilinged building. He was barely able to see the other side of the room there was so much smoke in the air. At their entrance the conversation died down. Everyone turned to stare at them. Jar stepped down from the entrance and walked over to a nearby table, trying to act casually. He did notice that Tran was the only dwarf in the room.

"I don't really like this place," Tran whispered to Jar. Jar glanced around. "Neither do I, but we don't have much choice. I was told the best sea captains come here when they are in port."

Tran was about to comment when a burly, scruffy individual sat down at the table. He was accompanied by an old hunched over man. Jar saw with a start that he had no eyes in his sockets. They were puckered and continually running. It was the old man who spoke.

"Tralick here understands you're interested in crossin' the Mar."

Jar looked at the man called Tralick. He was heavy set, with thick hairy arms and dark hair curling out of his unbuttoned shirt. He had thick brows and a constant scowl.

"How did you know that?" Jar demanded.

"We have ways. Are ya' interested or not?"

Jar nodded his head. "What

can ya' pay?" Tralick growled. Jar was taken back. He had not thought about having to pay for their crossing. "I don't have much," he shrugged.

"What about that?" Tralick was pointing towards the now inert talisman hanging around Jar's neck. He wondered what the captain would want with it. It was useless.

"You can have it if you want it."

Tralick grinned, something Jar found unnerving. "That will pay for your passage." He reached out to take the talisman.

"Not until we are there," Jar said. Tralick did seem happy with that, yet he agreed grudgingly. "When do we leave?"

"Tomorrow at dawn," the old man replied. "Be there with your gear and the talisman." He wheezed when he was finished and Jar wondered how he was still living. He was constantly rubbing at his nose and when he spoke he had to fight for his breath. Jar was curious as to whether he was going to be on the ship as well.

Tralick raised a ham-like fist into the air and the serving wench brought over a platter of meat and four ales. Tralick grabbed one and raised it in the air as a salute and quaffed it in one drink. He immediately ordered another. Jar watched the man as he ate and found himself liking him despite his rough appearance. He felt he could trust the captain. He considered him to be fairly ignorant, if all he wanted was the medallion for the trip. Jar did not notice the glances between Tralick and the old man.

(to be continued next issue)

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