

Inside the Turin Keep



(Summary: After being shipwrecked on the coast of Nymn Jar set out in search of his companions. He was able to find Tralick, who had received a wound to his chest. While Jar was patching the wound Tran shows up. The three start out to find the Turin Keep).

Not much distance had been put between Jar and his companions and the shore before nightfall. After travelling a short distance the three had cut inland. Whereas the land of Haln had been covered mainly by open plains and one mountain range, Nymn was covered with many dense rain forests. The group was forging their way through one now.

Jar decided it was time for them to stop. What little light remained was not enough to continue. Tralick complained at about having to spend the night in the forest. Jar pointed out they were likely to spend most of their nights in forests, such as this.

They made camp under a huge tree whose limbs were covered with broad leaves. Jar assumed this would be the best place to be should it start to rain, which it likely would. Tralick went off in search of wood while Tran and Jar prepared the meal. The sky overhead was beginning to cloud over. It looked like they were going to be in for a wet night.

Tralick returned with a good supply of wood. Soon he had a small fire going which

helped to dispell some of the forest's gloom. While they were eating the men discussed their chances of finding one of the few towns that dotted the continent.

"Towns are few and far between," Tralick was saying.

"Well, I suppose we could find Turin Keep without a guide but I would prefer to have one to help us," Jar replied.

Tran glared into the fire. "I doubt if anyone would help us find that accursed keep."

"That's certainly possible Tran," Jar agreed. "But we still have to find a town. Our supplies are very low and I don't really feel much like wasting time hunting our meals."

Tran had no reply. He simply continued to stare into the fire and curse to himself about his foolishness for letting himself be talked into coming on the quest. Jar did not completely miss all of the dwarf's muttering but chose not to say anything about it. He realized that tempers were bound to be short after what they all had gone through. He rose and walked over to the base of the tree nearest the fire. Lying down he spread his cloak over himself. He was soon asleep.

Sometime during the night he was awakened by rain. The fire was completely doused and all that remained were a few smoking embers. Jar pulled his cloak tighter about his body and tried to

get back to sleep. This proved to be an impossible task so he decided to try and get the fire going again. Fortunately, Tralick had the sense to stack the wood under the shelter of the tree. Jar used some of it to start a fire. After a few unsuccessful attempts the sparks from the flint finally set the dry bark afire.

Jar huddled under his cloak near the fire. The rain showed little sign of letting up. The forest was silent except for the sound of rain hitting the broad leaves of the trees and the dripping of water as it hits the ground. These sounds through their monotony soon caused Jar to slip into a daze. The fire became a blur to his eyes. Slowly an image formed in the hazy flames. As clarity came to it Jar realized he was looking at someone's face. It was a sharp visage and the eyes seemed to stare right through Jar. The hair was long and black, dark thin brows covered the black glaring eyes. The hawk nose gave the face a predatory air.

A sense of danger came through to Jar and he tried to shake the lock of the malevolent eyes. Try as he might he could not summon the will to break the hypnotic spell. He could feel a groping in his mind as if whoever the face belonged to was trying to discern some information. One word formed in his head. Where? Jar wondered if the face was trying to find out where he was. Suddenly he

was able to realize whose face he was looking on - the latest king of the Turin Dynasty. That face belonged to the one responsible for the theft of the Crown of Trent. Anger began to burn slowly in Jar so that he was soon able to break the spell. As the face faded an evil laughter filled Jar's head. With a start he awoke to find himself lying face down near the glowing coals that remained from the fire. Had it all been a dream? Or had it been real? In either case Jar decided to say nothing to his companions.

Jar greeted Tran and the dwarf merely grunted in return. The night's sleep had obviously done little to help his disposition. Tralick on the other hand was in a fine mood. It seemed the greater the adversity he faced the better he liked life. The sea captain was a man who thrived on danger. Jar was glad he was a member of their party.

Not many words were exchanged as the group prepared for the day's journey. Tran did not speak at all and Tralick seemed to prefer to sing old sea shanties. Whereas the previous night had been cold and wet the day promised to be hot and humid. Already the ground was dry of the night's rain and a haze could be seen in the air ahead. Jar wondered at the difference in climate between the two continents. Nymn was further north than Haln so Jar had expected it to be more barren.

The morning saw little change in their surroundings. Jar was considering stopping for a quick meal when they happened to be on a clearing. They came on it quite suddenly and had stepped out into the open before they realized anything. Dead ahead stood the unmistakable stone wall of a keep. They had found the Turin Keep. Jar quickly motioned for the others to step

into the foliage. He did the same.

From his vantage position he scrutinized the wall. There appeared to be no guards. This seemed extremely unusual to Jar. His "dream" came back to him and he wondered at the lack of upheaval on the Haln continent. This was what the rulers of Haln had tried so desperately to achieve but only the return of the Crown of Trent would guarantee. Jar tried to figure out what Drak's role was in the overall scheme. He had so many questions concerning the quest and all of the answers lay beyond the wall he was looking at.

Satisfied there were no guards Jar motioned for Tralick and Tran to follow him. The three hurried the short open space and came to a rest against the wall.

"I'm going to follow this wall until I can find some way to get into the keep unnoticed," he panted.

"I'm comin' with you" Tralick warned. Tran grunted his agreement.

Jar knew he could not really stop them. "All right, but be very careful." Tralick grinned at him. Jar looked at Tran and thought he could detect a smile behind the dwarf's beard.

Carefully Jar crept the length of the wall. He peered around the corner. No one was about. There was something wrong. Jar could feel it. It did not make sense for the keep to be so unprotected. Jar motioned for the others to keep up then went around the corner. There was a breach in the stone wall so Jar stepped through. He could not shake the feeling that things were going too well. As he turned to see how the other two were doing he felt his world cave in. Jar fell to the ground and as blackness overcame his vision he saw who the face of his "dream" belonged to.



(to be continued next issue)