

Chapter Fifteen The departure for Nymn



(The name of the character Syph was created by T. Allen Roulston)

(Summary: Althar has been rescued from Drak's fortress by the wizard Valton. Just as escape seemed possible they are confronted by Drak and another sorcerer. While this is happening, Tran and Jar are at the Oceanic Port preparing for their journey across the Mar.)

Jar and Tran spent a sleepless night in a rundown hotel, adjacent to the tavern. When the first rays of the morning sun slipped over the horizon they prepared for the journey. Neither had many possessions so they were not long in getting to the street. Even this early in the day there were people about. Some had obviously been up the entire night and were just heading off to sleep. These were those that preyed on the more honest of the town's citizens.

Jar had no idea just what streets to take to the port so he decided to ask around as they headed in the general direction of the sea. Oceanic Port was a large town and its streets were layed out in a maze-like pattern. It had been designed this way during the Invasion Wars. These had been the wars during which the people of Nymn had invaded Haln. After the first war and the first Continental War, the surviving humans had built the city. The Second Invasion from Nymn resulted in the devastation of the city. When it had been rebuilt the citizens had done so with protection in mind.

Either side of the street was cluttered with drunks who had no place better to go. Some shopkeepers were just opening their stalls. They eyed the two companions suspiciously. Jar decided to ask one of them for directions to the port.

He approached a short, plump whiskered man. "Can you tell me how to get to the port?" he asked.

"Corse I can," the old man rasped. "Anyone here can."

Jar waited impatiently. When it seemed apparent that he was not going to get the answer he prompted the shopkeeper again. "Well?"

"Well what?" Tran grinned at Jar. "How do we get to the port?" Jar asked, trying to control his anger.

"Simple." The old man pointed down the street. "Ya have ta go that way. Then ya follow the street to the right and go ta the end of it. Then ya go half way down the street on the left. There another street goes to the right. Take it and you will find the port."

Jar thanked the old man then he and Tran started out to find Captain Tralic and his ship. The streets looked much the same as they approached the port. It was probably part of the defense plan, Jar assumed. When they entered the third street Jar was able to see a hill that rose from the center of the town. The streets were not as close and little easier to follow. Jar guessed from the look of the houses that the richer people lived on the hill.

After a while Jar realized they were lost. The directions the old man had given him were easy enough to follow and he done so to the letter. Yet they were not at the port. Jar realized belatedly that the old man had been playing a game with him. There was no one about to get more directions. There was nothing for it but to wander through the streets and hope they found the port or someone that would help them.

By sheer luck they stumbled on a street that gave them a clear view of the port. Anxiously Jar hurried down, mo-

tioning for Tran to hurry also. He was worried that their wandering had caused them to miss the departure of Tralic. Jar suspected that Tralic was planning on sailing to Nymn regardless of whether Jar had wanted to go or not. Otherwise he would not have agreed so quickly. When they reached the port his suspicions were confirmed. About twenty men were loading supplies and cargo onto the ship.

Tralic was standing at the helm overseeing operations. Beside him stood the blind man. Jar wondered about the peculiar friendship. His pondering was cut short by a wave from the sea captain who had spotted them. He indicated they were to come aboard. Jar stepped onto the gangplank and hurried onto the deck. Tran was less enthusiastic and took his time. Both received dark glances from the sailors.

They were met by Tralic and the old man.

"Syph and I would like to welcome you aboard the Ste. Lucifius. We should be settin' sail soon. I thought you weren't goin' ta make it."

"We were given wrong directions by some old shopkeeper."

Tralic let out a loud bellow of laughter. "I know that old man. He was a bad choice because he is always lookin' for a chance ta play a joke on someone."

Jar did not see the humour in the episode but decided not to say anything to Tralic. He did not want to get off on the wrong foot with him. Tralic got Syph to show them below to their quarters. They were to bunk with the crew. Jar was not pleased at the prospect of bunking with the crew but realized they had no choice. The old man left them in the small room.

"I wonder how he is able to go up those stairs without seeing," Tran mused aloud.

"He must be used to the ship," Jar offered explanation. "Which means he has spent a lot of time on board."

Jar went to the port hole and peered out. He watched the activity on the dock. There was a small crowd watching the loading. As soon as all of the cargo was loaded the gangplank was drawn aboard and the ropes cast off. Slowly the ship slid away from the dock into the open waters of the bay. Jar noticed a familiar figure step out of the crowd, obviously intent on the ship's departure. Just what was familiar about the observer escaped Jar, yet he knew he had encountered him somewhere before.

When the ship was headed toward the Mar Syph came

below and informed Jar that he and Tran were allowed on deck. Reaching the deck, Jar was surprised at how far out they had sailed in the short while they had been below. The waters were not all that rough and Jar found it easy to keep his footing on the slightly rolling deck. Tran on the other hand was finding it a little more difficult. His face had taken on an unhealthy greyish hue and he was leaning heavily against the railing.

"I see your friend does not like the sea," Tralic laughed.

Despite his illness the dwarf still had fire in him. "Shut your face before I remove it with my axe," he groaned.

Tralic boomed out another laugh. "The sea does that to people." He seemed to take no offense at the threat of Tran. "You will be allowed the run of the ship 'cept for my quarters. When we come to bad weather you will have to go below, we don't need ya gettin' in the way."

Tran took offense at the statement. "Think we will get in the way do you?"

"Well, ya sure won't be much help." This time he did not laugh. He was obviously growing tired of the dwarf.

With that, Tralic, followed by Syph, went up to the helm. Jar watched him as he ordered his crew to their various tasks. The sea captain was highly respected by his crew. Despite his grubby appearance he looked powerful standing at the helm, the master of his ship. Jar decided it would be wise to obey the wishes of Tralic, for the time being anyways.

It was a warm morning despite the strong wind blowing from the west. Tran was recovering from his bout of sea sickness and was in a conversational mood, something unusual for the dwarf.

"Did you notice that man in the crowd watching the ship leave?" he asked. Jar nodded his head. "There was something about him that seemed familiar."

"I was thinking the same thing. It felt like I had seen him somewhere before but I can't remember where."

"Well we haven't encountered many people so it shouldn't be this difficult."

Jar stared out to sea, trying desperately to place the stranger on the dock. Just when it seemed he was about to remember the name would float out of this grasp. He fingered the talisman absently as he thought. With a shock he realized the usually cool surface was now quite warm. He glanced down at it and saw that it was surrounded by a soft bluish glow. With a sudden inspiration he pulled it from his

neck. As he did that the name of the stranger slipped into his mind. The Shaman.

"Tran, I have it." Jar whispered to the dwarf. "That was the Shaman on the dock."

"You're right. I wonder what he was doing there?"

Jar laughed coldly. "Obviously watching us. He must be working for Drak."

"It makes sense," the dwarf agreed. "After all, he was involved with your helping Drak escape."

"Something else. The talisman has been activated again. When I tried to recall the Shaman's name it started to warm up and glow."

"It must have been responsible somehow for our lack of memory."

"So our trip is going to cost us more than I had first thought. That talisman has become valuable again."

While the two companions had been discussing the healer and his medallion the winds had been picking up. The water was growing rougher by the minute. They were in for one of the many storms that plagued these waters. Jar decided the best spot would be the quarters below. Without a word from Tralic the two made there way below. Once there Jar felt better but not all that much safer. He preferred to be on deck where he could see what was happening. Above the roar of the wind and the waves he could hear the shouting of Tralic. The storm was going to be a bad one.

As if to confirm Jar's fears a wave crashed against the porthole smashing the glass. Water pour in through the opening before the wave receded. Tran jumped to shove a blanket in the hole. From above came the scream of a sailor. There was a crash as lightning struck the mast. Jar and Tran heard the crash as it hit the deck. Jar decided that they were no longer in a safe place. He made for the deck. Tran followed close behind.

The scene that greeted them shocked Jar. The mast had smashed a hole into the deck, pinning a number of sailors beneath it. Jar ran over to help them. He was nearly there when a large wave caught him and lifted him off the deck. He crashed against the cabin. Tran had made his way to the mast and was trying in vain to lift it. Even his strength was not enough. Jar rose to his feet and tried to get back to help his friend. Once again a wave crashed onto the deck, catching Jar. Tran and Tralic, who had come down to help. The last thing Jar saw was his companion and the sea captain being carried over the side. Then everything went black.

(continued next issue)