

Quest for the Crown of Trent
Chapter Fourteen

The Rescue of Althar



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(Summary: Jar and Tran have arrived at the Oceanic Port. Upon their arrival they went to one of the local taverns for a meal. There they meet a seafaring captain who goes by the name Tralic. Most of the dealing is done through a blind fossil of a man. After a short discussion they agreed the price for passage would be the talisman that Jar owns.)

While Jar and Tralic were dickering over a price, Valton was entering Drak's fortress.)

Valton stared at the fortress that stood before him. He knew that it was more than two thousand years old yet it did not show many signs of its age. The walls were made of black obsidian that reflected the light from the rising sun. This showed that Drak did not care whether his fortress was found or not and that he was confident in his power. Two massive doors sealed the entrance and a drawbridge provided passage over a deep chasm. This chasm surrounded the castle so that it stood on a shaft of rock rising out of the depths. Once inside there would be no chance for escape unless the bridge was down. One tower rose from the center of the castle. Valton knew that was where he would find his foe.

With one last look around Valton stepped onto the bridge. He paused there waiting for some kind of reaction from the castle. He had been here once before and was familiar with the safeguards that Drak had installed. He was sure that Drak was confident enough in his powers that he would have considered his imprisonment

of Valton as permanent. Satisfied that it was safe Valton continued. About half way he stopped once again. He picked up a stick and tossed it so that it landed two feet away. Without a sound a four-by-four section dropped away into the chasm. Valton sidestepped the gaping hole.

He hurried to the end of the bridge and stepped onto the stone dais. Cautiously he crept over to the wall and scrutinized the door. With one quick movement Valton struck the door with his fist and jumped back. A volley of arrows thudded into the ground where someone would be normally standing. Valton opened the oak doors and stepped through with caution.

Inside it was totally dark. Valton relied on his memory to find his way down the corridor. He knew that somewhere there would be openings that would cause the unwary intruder to plummet to the depths of the chasm. There were many shafts that came from the bottom to open in the fortress. Valton placed a hand against the right wall and proceeded.

Slowly Valton was gaining his night vision. It was still too dark but he was able to discern between the floor and the openings by the slight variations in the darkness. The progress was slow but Valton was eventually able to reach the end of the corridor. There was another door that was fortunately unlocked. It opened with a slight creaking that caused Valton to wince. The room on the other side was brightly lit.

There was no one in the room. The far wall was covered with a tapestry that

was sewn with richly colored threads. A number of dust covered stone tables cluttered the room. Other than that the room was bare. The dust on the floor showed the tracks of someone being dragged. Valton followed them.

The tracks went through an opening on the left wall and Valton found himself in another corridor. This was lit by torches held in brackets on the wall. Valton walked down the hall carefully looking at the wall. About a third of the way down he saw what he was looking for. A fine crack in the stone. Valton traced the crack to the floor and marked the spot in the dirt. He then went over to the opposite wall and looked for another crack. He found it and traced it to the floor. He marked the spot. Then he stepped back and made a run at the spot. When he reached it he jumped and rolled to his feet on the opposite side. Nothing happened. Satisfied Valton continued.

The passage opened into a small chamber. There was a narrow corridor that led to the right. It was flanked on either side by a row of cells. Valton stepped to the first cell and peered in through the small grate. There was no one inside. He repeated the procedure until he reached the final cell. Lying on a bed of matted straw was Althar. The wizard controlled his joy and stepped back from the door. He pointed a finger at it and a blue flame burned away the lock. Valton pushed the door open and went to the elf.

Althar was bruised and cut from his fall from the ledge but was breathing regularly. His blond hair was matted with dried blood and his clothing was covered with blood and dirt. Valton shook him gently. The elf's eyes fluttered open and he looked up at the wizard. His eyes showed no signs of recognition.

"Althar," Valton began, "We have to get you out of here." Althar looked at Valton questioningly. "Why do you call me Althar?"

"Because that is your name. Don't you remember?"

Althar shook his head. "I can't remember what happened before you woke me." "Do you remember what the person who brought you here looked like?" the elf shook his head. "Do you remember anything about him?"

Althar began to shake his head again then stopped. "I do remember that he gave me a feeling of discomfort, as if he was evil."

Valton nodded his head. He had expected that. "Do you remember Drak?"

"Yes."

"Did your captor look like him?"

"I can't remember."

Valton realized he was getting nowhere. Whoever was behind this, whether he was Drak or not, did not want his identity known. They were no closer than before.

Valton helped Althar to his feet and they made their way back up the passage. There was still no sign of the presence of their foe. Althar was about to continue when the wizard stopped him. They had reached the spot that he had checked earlier. He knew it was going to be difficult getting the elf beyond that spot. The slightest pressure on the floor in that area would cause the roof to cave in and there was no way that Althar would be able to jump over the spot.

The wizard decided to do his best at throwing the elf over the spot. Althar was lighter than Valton, because of being an elf and the weight he had lost the last few days. Valton explained what he was going to do to Althar then lifted him in his arms. He was surprised at how little the elf weighed. Putting all his effort into the throw, the wizard heaved Althar over the area. Althar

landed awkwardly but with room to spare. Valton then jumped over the spot. He landed just next to where the cracks met the floor. With a loud rumble the ceiling gave in. Valton moved quickly but not quickly enough. A falling

piece of rock caught him on the back of his left leg causing him to stumble. Seeing what had happened Althar grabbed the wizard's arms and attempted to pull him free. His weakened condition made it difficult. Valton tried pushing himself to his feet but his leg gave way. Rocks crashed about as Althar put a final effort into his pulling. He pulled Valton free just as the last of the ceiling over the area gave way. The wizard narrowly missed another hit.

"Thank you Althar," Valton said breathlessly. "Now, lets get out of here."

Althar merely nodded his head. He was too winded to speak. Valton led him to the room at the beginning of the hall. He checked to see if anyone was in the room. When he saw that there was no one he began to wonder why he had been able to get in so easily. He should have met with some resistance by now. Something was definitely wrong.

Valton motioned for Althar to follow him into the room. They were halfway across when a voice from behind stopped them.

"I've been waiting for you Valton."

Valton turned. He was facing two men garbed in the same royal blue robes of a wizard. The one who had spoken Valton knew. The other was a stranger.

"Drak."

(to be continued next issue)

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