

## Quest for the Crown of Trent

### Chapter eight

# Attacked in the Worm Ravine

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*Summary: After helping Drak escape from his prison in another dimension, Jar along with Drak and his two fellow travellers, have started towards the Haln Forest once again. Along the way Drak recounted the history of Valton and their battle.)*

The four travellers had finally reached the edge of the Haln Forest. It stood in front of them like a forboding wall of solid trees. There appeared to be no path through it. The four were discussing how to pass through the trees.

"I suggest that we leave the horses behind," Drak offered.

"You would like that wouldn't you," Tran growled.

"Then we would be at your mercy."

The wizard merely glared at the dwarf. "I really cannot see any other alternative," Jar said. "I think that we are going to have to leave them behind. Hopefully, we will be able to obtain some when we reach the other side."

Though muttering something about the shiftiness of wizards, Tran finally gave in to the idea. Althar agreed also. After removing their packs from the horses the group started into the woods. The trees were growing close together so that in spots they had to take wide detours. Their forward progress was painstakingly slow.

The forest had an eerie silence, as if the creature that lived there resented the presence of the intruders. Little light was able to filter through the dense foliage above. The floor of the forest was covered with dead leaves and rotting branches that had fallen from the lower sections of the trees. It was like walking in a dead world.

After what seemed like an eternity in the brooding forest the group came upon a small clearing. They stepped out into the warm sunlight and looked about. On the opposite side was a steep parapice with a ravine cut through its center. The group was confronted with a decision. Should they travel through the ravine or go around it over the wall of rock.

"I suggest that we go over the peak rather than through the ravine," Drak said.

"Why?" Tran asked, immediately suspicious.

The wizard cast a look of anger at the dwarf before answering. "I have a feeling



## Drathane--the great dragon of the Ravine

that something powerfully evil waits in there. There is no way I can tell what it is but I am certain that it is waiting for us."

"That would be convenient wouldn't it," the dwarf replied.

"First you tell us to leave our horses because it would be too hard to travel through the forest and now you want us to take the longer route through this ravine. I think that you are trying awfully hard to slow down."

"Why would I want to slow you down? I am in just as much of a hurry to end this quest. Don't forget that I didn't have to come along with the three of you."

"That's right," Tran retorted.

"So why did you?"

Before the wizard had a chance to answer Jar cut into the argument. "We have enough to worry about without you two fighting. The decision has been made. The biggest factor is time. Because of the time lost in my sojourn to the Shaman and to your realm Drak we are forced to go through the ravine. Besides there is something pulling me in that direction."

Drak looked far from pleased with the decision. "Suit yourself," he said, "but remember you have been warned."

Drak dropped to the back of the group as soon as they had entered the ravine. Jar noticed it as did Tran. The dwarf was about to comment when Jar cut him short. It was obvious to everyone the lack of trust or fondness the dwarf had for Drak. It was something that Jar knew could present a prob-

blem later on.

Once they had entered the ravine, the four companions were flanked on either side by steep walls of multi colored rock. The floor was littered with rock and bones, the bones bleached white by the hot sun. There was no vegetation at all.

The sun was unbearably hot causing Jar to sweat. He wiped the sweat from his eyes and looked back at his companions. They were suffering from the heat as much as he was. Even Drak appeared to find it uncomfortable, despite his powers.

The ravine twisted and had a downward slope. The group made their way down it looking all the while for the danger that might be awaiting them. Jar led the group, his sword held at the ready. Tran and Althar both had their weapons drawn, though Tran looked as if he was preparing to defend himself against Drak rather something else. Curiously the wizard was taking no defensive measures.

The ravine took a sudden twist to the right. When Jar rounded the turn he saw a cleft in the rock. It was covered by an opaque material that allowed him to see the vague outline of someone behind it. The person appeared to be trying to peer through the covering. The rest of the group came up behind Jar and stared at the cleft. At that very moment a rustling sound caused them to turn. Coming out of the sky was a large dragon. Its wing span was close to twenty feet. Gracefully it landed not more than ten feet away and folded

back its wings. Blood red eyes glared at the travellers.

Without warning the dragon rushed at Jar. Caught off guard he was just able to avoid the outstretch talons of the creature's fore legs. As the dragon turned for another attack Jar swung his sword. With lightning speed the dragon flew up and Jar's blow swung harmlessly through air.

Tran and Althar joined in the battle. Jar noticed that Drak was merely standing by watching, offering no help at all. He thought it strange but his thoughts were soon turned to the dragon as it swooped it for another attack. This time the intended victim was Tran but despite his stockiness the dwarf was able to move quickly. As the dragon flew by he swung his broadaxe at the right foreleg. It bit into the flesh causing the giant creature to roar in agony. It turned almost on the spot and attacked Tran once again. This time the dwarf was not as lucky and a talon ripped across his chest.

As the dragon was attacking Tran, Althar and Jar were able to move in along side it. Jar thrust his sword into the side of the creature but it was turned aside by the tough scales covering the dragon. Althar too attempted to skewer the beast but met with the same results. A second chance was not provided them as the dragon flew off.

Jar realized that the only way to kill the creature was to get a blow in on its soft underbelly. There many of the

scales had been rubbed away by its scraping over the rocks of the ravine. The three companions placed themselves in a triangle waiting for the next attack. Still Drak had made no move to help them or just not interested in the outcome of the fight, Jar could not tell. It seemed strange to him though that the wizard would stand by idly.

The three were prepared for the next attack of the dragon. It came out of the sun making it difficult for the waiting companions to see it. The creature made no sound as it dropped out of the sky at a blinding rate. It was on them suddenly. Tran swung his broadaxe over his head in an attempt to strike the dragon's belly. He missed the belly but was able to tear the fabric of the right wing. This caused the dragon to veer to the right.

When the creature veered it provided Jar with the opportunity he had been waiting for. With a quick thrust upwards his sword slid into the belly. Greenish icor squirted out and coated his clothing. The great beast crashed into the ground. Althar ran over to it and sliced at its neck just as it rose from the ground. The sword sliced into the neck just below the head. With a final twitch the dragon died.

The three men ran to each other and hugged in congratulations and relief. There joy was short lived. Drak's booming voice brought them out of their reverie. They turned to see the wizard standing fifteen feet away. His cloak was drawn back to reveal a black and silver robe. He was surrounded by a strange greenish glow.

"I warned you not to enter the ravine," he shouted. "I had hoped that the dragon would finish you off and save me from doing it. Now it is up to me."

Tran growled at the wizard. Brandishing his broadaxe he stepped forward. "I knew we shouldn't have trusted you. Your whole story about Valton is false."

"You're right Tran," Drak replied. "But little good that is going to do you now. You and your friends are about to die."

Drak raised his arms to bear on the three. They stared at him helplessly.

(continued next issue)