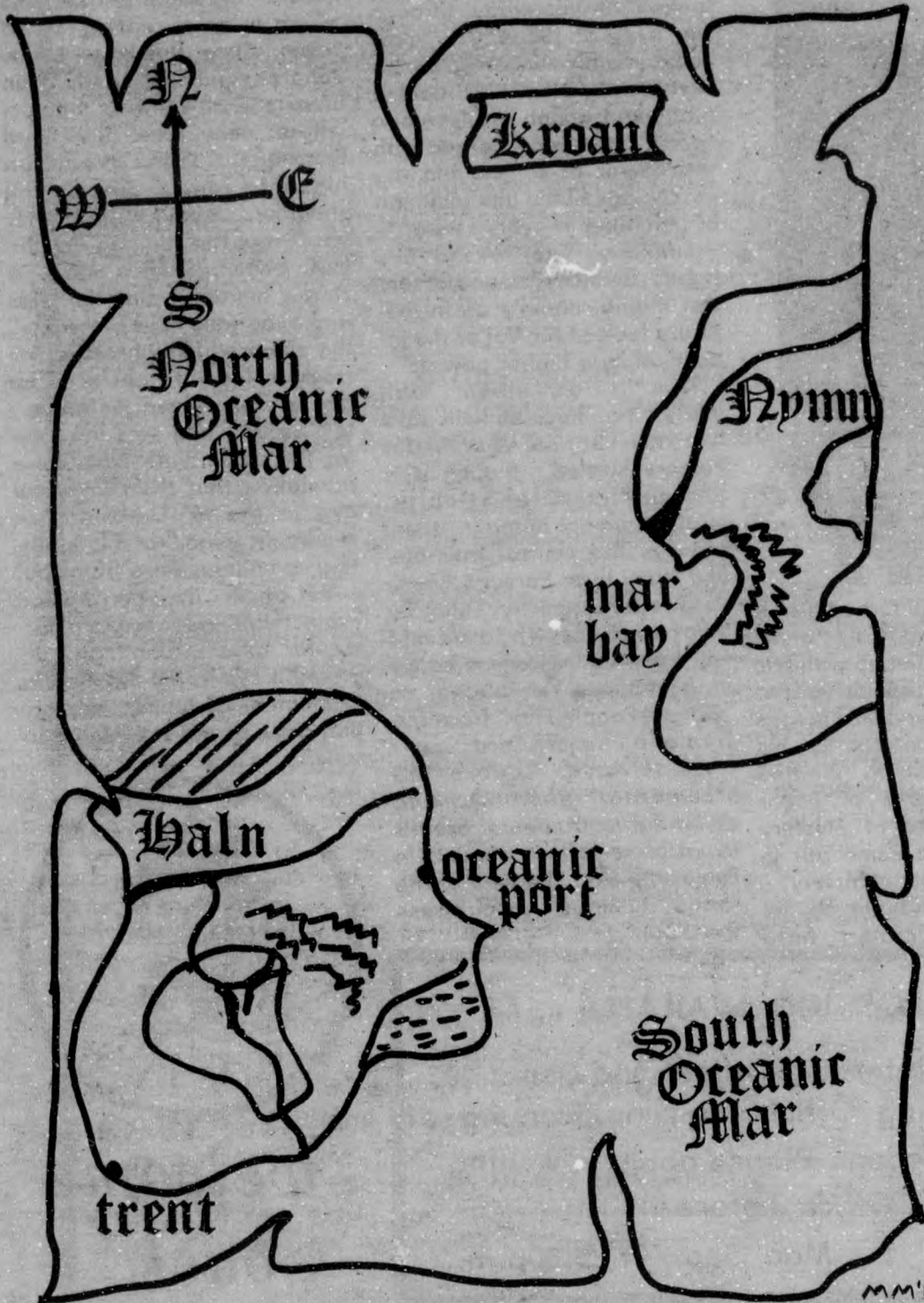


Quest for the Crown of Trent



by Mike MacKinnon

Jar Farnel, accompanied by an elf and a dwarf, has to journey to the land of Nymn to recover the stolen Crown of Trent. Should Jar fail in his attempt to recover the stolen crown from King Turin war will break out between the Turin Dynasty and Trent. This then is the tale of the three men trying to prevent that war and of their quest.

Jar sat atop his black steed, scouting the land that lay before him. He was flanked on one side by a tall elf on a chestnut horse and on the other side by a stout dwarf looking uncomfortable on his mount. As he looked around he laughed silently at the exchange between his companions. Tran, as is common with dwarves, did not enjoy being on a horse and Althar, typical of his race, was enjoying teasing Tran about the fact.

The three stood atop a small crest on the plain. Stretched out before them lay the South Plain. Two days had passed since they had left Trent-on-Coast, their home. Jar thought fondly about his coastal home. There, three-quarters of the population was man, the remaining quarter consisting of elves, dwarves and the occasional wizard. The last three races were scattered throughout the continent of Hain while Trent-on-Coast was the only known area populated by man. Most of the latter race preferred to live on the continent of Nymn, Jar's destination.

Jar urged his horse down from the crest and the others followed his example. The plain was flat allowing Jar and his companions to set a easy pace. The three had decided to take advantage of areas

such as this because they would be crossing regions where speed would not only be impossible but also unwise. There was only a little time before the people of Hain demanded justice for the theft of the Crown of Trent.

When Jar thought about the theft, suspected to be the work of King Turin of the Turin Dynasty, his anger threatened to become uncontrollable. The crown belonged to the ruler of Hain who resided in Trent-on-Coast. Presently the ruler was a man but the royal line had included also elves and dwarves. The wizards had declined to participate in the ruling of the land preferring to use their magical abilities in other manners.

The three companions were riding across the plains at an impossible speed when suddenly a number of transparent shapes rose from the ground in front of them. Jar recognized them in an instant as hauled back sharply on the reins of his mount. Plain-wraiths. Here were the souls of men who had died on the plains during one of the numerous Hain Wars. Unable to rest because of their violent deaths this strange combination of man, elf and dwarf spectres wandered the plains to haunt those travelling them.

Jar's horse was spooking at the presence of the unnatural as were the horses of the others. As he tried to control his mount Jar removed his sword from its scabbard. The light glinted off the polished metal of the blade as he swung at the head of the nearest wraith. The blade passed through the intended victim without any apparent harm. To Jar's surprise the wraith clutched at its head and fell to the ground without a sound. Encouraged by the success of Jar, Tran and Althar joined the battle.

As he fought Jar wondered what effect a blow from one of the wraiths would have on his mortal body. He preferred not to find out. A shout from Tran caused Jar to turn just in time to avoid a blow from a wraith dwarf. The transparent broadaxe came frighteningly close to decapitating him. With a quick thrust of his sword Jar was able to remove the threat of the dwarf repeating his act.

As Jar and his companions fought their silent adversaries the only sound was the occasional grunt from the three and the swish of their blades as they passed through the air. Fighting wraiths was an unsettling experience and Jar could feel it already getting the better of his nerves. He knew that they would have to soon finish this affair or else the effects would become irreversible. Many a soldier had returned insane from fighting these spectres.

About them the wraith bodies were beginning to pile up and yet there seemed to be no end in sight. As a wraith fell to the ground another would step up to take its place. The uncanny thing was that as each wraith fell there was no sound or sign of a wound.

Suddenly an idea came to Jar. Motioning for the others to follow his example he started to circle around behind the attackers. Tran and Althar caught on and started to circle around the other side. Soon the wraiths were forced to fight in two directions and their attention became distracted. By the time they caught on to the plan it was too late. With a loud shout Jar burst through the remaining wraiths closely followed by Althar. A quick glance over his shoulder showed him that Tran had not been so lucky. He was swinging his broad axe in broad sweeps. Jar turned his mount and rode into the rear of the circle, scattering the spectres. As he slashed away at the wraiths Tran rode free. Jar turned to follow and felt a coldness stab at his leg as burst free. A blow from one of the wraiths had hit him in the leg and what he now felt was the coldness of death. Although there was no physical pain Jar knew he was in trouble. The coldness of the strike was already starting to creep up his leg. Unless stopped the death would spread through his body and he would fall into a coma. He would stay that way until natural death came to him.

The three rode from the wraiths as quickly as their mounts would go. Jar looked behind to see if there would be pursuit and was surprised to see that all the wraiths had disappeared, including those that had fallen. With a shake of his head he turned around and forced himself to think of a more pressing problem. He had to find someone to heal the wound in his leg.

(to be continued next issue)