

THE EYE SHIELD

Issue 66

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CONTENTS

[Message From Me.](#)

[Remember This?:](#) Merlin's Throne Room.

[Adventure Time:](#) With Ricky Temple and Andy Marshall.

[Puzzle Page:](#) Lego Knightmare I.

[Classic Quest:](#) Karen, Angela, Pamela and Nicola.

[The Wickedest Show in the Realm:](#) Chapter Four.

[Remember Her?:](#) Gundrada.

[Knightmare Locations:](#) Corfe Castle, Dorset.

[Top 35 Kids' TV Villains:](#) By Ricky Temple.

[Kids' TV Shows I Grew Up With:](#) Hey Arnold!

[The Audio Play's the Thing:](#) When Five Tribes Go to War.

[The Forbidden Fear:](#) Chapter Six.

[Ross "Raven's Eye" Thompson Improview.](#)

[Poetry Corner:](#) Nicola II.

[Jake's Art Desk:](#) Treguard, Merlin & Mogdred and Lillith.

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MESSAGE FROM ME

Welcome to the sixty-sixth issue of The Eye Shield. I hope you enjoy all the Nightmare goodies on offer this month, and as ever my thanks go out to the dedicated fans who have helped me get this issue together by contributing their work, namely Ricky Temple, Andy Marshall, Louise Brockhouse, Martin Odoni, Chris Lunn and (last but certainly not least) Ross "Raven's Eye" Thompson.

My good buddy Ross "Raven's Eye" Thompson is always coming up with new and ingenious ways to make life a bit more fun - such as The Raven's Eye fanzine at <http://www.freewebs.com/ravenseyemag> - and his latest brainchild is the Nightmare Audio Series, which (perhaps not surprisingly) is a whole new series of Nightmare presented entirely in audio form! Read all about it and download the episodes at the following address: <http://nightmareaudioseries.webs.com>

The Nightmare Audio Series was devised by **Ross Thompson**, developed by **Ross Thompson & Jake Collins**, written by **Jake Collins, Ross Thompson & Rosey Collins**, and edited by **Ross Thompson**. It features the voices of **Jake Collins, Rosey Collins, Gemma Dwarwood, Greg Ford, John Lui, Andy Marshall, Juliet Thompson, Ross Thompson** and **Jacob Ward**.

I was very pleased to receive the following missive from Gehn "Lex" Luthor.

Many thanks for a very enjoyable Issue 65, and I was particularly interested in Ross Thompson's graphs and tables concerning the relative difficulty of the different series. That greatly appealed to my nerdy side, I can assure you. Anyway, I saw how you announced that TES is going to cease after Issue 70, so I wanted to take the opportunity to thank you for putting the fanzine together for the last ten years and to say that, although I fully understand your reasons for stopping, I shall nevertheless miss it. I am also glad that

I discovered it in time to be able to make some contributions.

If you still have anything you'd like to share with me about Nightmare or The Eye Shield, you can e-mail me at eyeshield2002@hotmail.com

REMEMBER THIS?

Series 3. Level 2.

MERLIN'S THRONE ROOM

What a brilliant idea it was to include the summoning of Merlin's three steps in series 3! Not only did it add a bit of continuity between the events of levels one and two for the first time (just one of many seeds of development sewn during this series) but it also served to underline the importance of a meeting with Merlin at that crucial point in level two, where he would either reward you with magic, thus ensuring your passage to level three, or judge you unworthy of his aid, thus dooming your quest. As the sole remaining original Dungeon-bound character, Merlin's importance as the Master Wizard was really bigged up throughout this series, and the calling of the three steps showed both the team and the watchers what a crucial point they had reached in a stark and visually pleasing fashion.

It is testament to the fact that series 3 was particularly tough that only half of the teams (exactly six out of twelve) got far enough (and with enough information) to complete this challenge successfully. If Merlin's room was supposed to represent the halfway point of the entire quest, that means that only half the teams in series 3 managed to get halfway into the quest, which just goes to show that this series was ruthless with its punishment of the teams' mistakes. Think of Scott's team, who had missed the first step and were forced to make their dungeoneer take a jump (although a big step would have been better, I'm sure) and so ended their quest thanks to that

one small piece of missing information. And even if the team did manage to summon Merlin successfully, they still had to get both his riddles right ("*Two out of two or it just won't do!*" - **Merlin**) if they were to stand any chance of reaching level three, as Julie's team discovered to their cost.

I always found it much more satisfying to see actions being carried out to invoke the steps rather than simply calling them (as Scott and Martin did, disappointingly) but the gradual appearance of the path was always pleasing and exciting to watch. I've often wondered whether animal noises could have been used to invoke such unused steps as *the cat* and *the dog*; indeed, some steps that were actually invoked did require a noise rather than an action, such as *music* and *laughter*.

ADVENTURE TIME

By Andy Marshall, Ricky Temple & Louise Brockhouse.

Treguard finally managed a smile as he heard the brief but all too frequent curse of one of the team.

"What in the.."

"Ah, welcome back team, I see you have finally been released from those little troublesome temporal shifts that we are constantly plagued by. Now perhaps we should quickly turn our attention back to your friend, before she becomes a victim of Snapper Jack..."

Snapper-Jack stood with his arm around the waist of a squirming devil of black hair and - at the moment - gleaming nails. Jan-Jan hissed and spat angrily while trying to free herself. In front of the pair was a dark-haired female with blue eyes that seemed to glow, matching a small pendant around her neck that fell lightly over the rise of her chest. The young woman called

Midnight was growling as well, and was settled into a half-crouch.

Amy stood closest to the team. The team could see that the hill steeply fell just behind where Snapper Jack and his captive stood. Amy was oddly silent at the moment, unaware truly of what was going on around her as the actions were quick and she was having trouble keeping up.

Midnight growled again, the noise low and guttural. "You may wish to take the fool Snapper- Jack, but if you do not let her go now I shall make you my Snapper-Jack chew toy!"

The blue hue wrapped around the female in faint glowing tendrils, like vines that had been sped up to grow along the contour of a house or gathering of trees.

Snapper-Jack took a tentative step back towards the edge. "I shall offer you a chance to get your little fool back, feline mind. You complete my riddle of three and she goes with you back to your tree, but if there should be one answer wrong... you are the other fool that must come along..."

The team could hear and see everything and they themselves were unsure how to help Midnight.

"There is not much you can do at the moment team, perhaps you should let Midnight make the decision first of all," said Treguard.

Midnight growled low but with that step towards the endless pit behind them, she took a step back herself.

"Challenge accepted, Snapper-Jack. What is your first riddle?"

"I give you a group of three. One is sitting down, and will never get up. The second eats as much as is given to him, yet is always hungry. The third goes away and never returns. What are these three?"

Midnight rose back up to her feet properly as she considered her answer.

"Stove, fire, and smoke are what I believe to be the three, Snapper-Jack."

Jan-Jan began to smile faintly at Midnight, having calmed down once Snapper-Jack had caused her enough of a scare.

"She answered the three already, now let me free!" She began to wriggle and squirm once more.

"Not yet, Jan-Jan, just settle down and soon he shall have to release you."

"What can I do, team?" Amy finally uttered as quietly as possible to her three guides, who seemed to be remaining stoically silent.

"Nothing yet Amy, though I may have a plan," the middle guide stated with a warm smile, before beginning to whisper to the other two quietly.

Treguard had settled down upon his chair once more, observing the various goings-on quietly as he soaked up the heat from the fire beside him. Amy could not hear what they were whispering about, and turned her attention back to the goings-on before her.

Snapper-Jack frowned slightly at Midnight. "The answer is correct and here is my second. Five hundred begins it, five hundred ends it, five in the middle is seen; first of all figures, the first of all letters take up their stations between. Join all together, and then you will bring before you the name of an eminent king. Who is the king?"

Midnight frowned slightly, her hands were clenched at her sides tightly and there was the deep resonating sound of her growl as she contemplated the answer. A minute passed slowly and the team had begun to shift on their seats before Midnight answered, a frown on her face, unsure of her answer.

"David is the king."

Snapper began to snap frustratedly against Jan-Jan as she continued to wriggle; his grip was loosening slightly but not enough for her to escape.

"Correct is your answer and now here is my third and final riddle, feline of two. What does man love more than life, fear more than death or mortal strife, what the poor have, the rich require and what contented men desire, what the miser spends and the spendthrift saves, and all men carry to their graves?"

"Love!" Midnight answered quickly, and probably with little thought as Snapper-Jack's grip tightened on Jan-Jan, causing her to howl in pain.

"The answer is wrong, for the answer in truth is nothing. Now for you fools two, I have a new home for you..."

Midnight growled angrily and Jan-Jan howled.

"Amy, quick... use the SNAP spell Queen Kalina gave you!"

Amy stood as tall as possible and began to yell at the top of her voice, drawing the attention of Midnight, Snapper-Jack and Jan-Jan alike, even as Snapper-Jack continued to try and drag the caught female along.

"Spellcasting: S-N-A-P."

The ground began to tremble gently beneath their feet and then a low rumble that sounded like thunder appeared to come from the steep mountainside. Midnight's ears seemed to twitch while Jan-Jan finally dug her nails into Snapper-Jack's skin deep enough that he yelled in pain and released her arm.

Amy, not wishing to miss the spell, lifted the helmet slightly and brought up the shield, looking through the eye and seeing properly for the first time. Midnight was trying to reach for Jan-Jan while Snapper-Jack tried to pull

her along. Two wide red eyes suddenly appeared at the top of the mountain, followed by a large puff of dark grey smoke. Green scales seemed to be surrounding the eyes and shone like emeralds. Teeth came into view as the head of a very large snapdragon appeared. Its mouth opened wide as its eye fell on Snapper-Jack, looking on him hungrily.

Snapper-Jack's eyes filled with terror and he rapidly forgot about Jan-Jan, releasing her and quickly disappearing from sight along the mountaintop yelling, "DON'T EAT ME!"

Amy could not help but chuckle and valued these rare moments of sight. Jan-Jan ran and jumped onto Midnight's back, her arms tightening around her neck as she stared frightfully up at the dragon. Midnight began to talk in a odd guttural language that caused the dragon to pause. An amused look crossed the gleaming eyes and the head disappeared from view, back into the depths it came from. The ground ceased shaking and the rumbling thunder faded out of earshot.

Midnight turned to face Amy while Jan-Jan jumped from her back and onto the ground. "Thank you, Miss Amy, you have kept your part of the deal and I shall..."

"SHINY-SHINY!"

Jan-Jan's squeaking voice sounded with excitement as she moved along the ground on all four limbs and picked up what looked to be a looking glass. Midnight's attention was briefly drawn to the girl, but something caught her eye and she lifted a hand up towards Amy, almost seemingly going to strike her. The three guides inhaled sharply, as did Treguard, suddenly concerned a moment until Midnight's hand landed on the helmet, pushing it down gently and in turn the shield.

"You should only look through that magic eye briefly, Miss Amy, before you become lost like others before."

"Ma-Ma, I found a shiny..."

Jan-Jan ran up to her waving one hand victoriously, catching the brief glimmers of sunlight. Midnight reached out surprisingly fast and retrieved the object from Jan-Jan's hand. The girl began to pout and then her cheeks began to redden as frustration grew.

"MY..."

"Not yours to play with, Jan-Jan... I think in return for helping us this may well help her..."

Midnight held her hand out to the girl with a smile. "Here you are, Miss Amy, I hope this helps you but do not look too long within it for it could bring you pain rather than gain... and wait 'til myself and my daughter are away from here."

Amy thanked Midnight and then Midnight and a still somewhat sullen Jan-Jan set off back into the forest. Just before she vanished from sight Jan-Jan turned round and looked at Amy, then bounded back and hugged the startled girl.

"Jan-Jan thank you. Bye-Bye." This said, Jan broke the hug and darted off after Midnight.

Amy waited until Midnight and Jan-Jan were gone before raising the spyglass to the eye shield. It showed an image of an antechamber, but it was not one that the advisors were familiar with and neither was Treguard.

"Hmm, strange this is neither the throne room of Marblehead nor Linghorm, and neither is it the antechamber of the Grey Sisterhood's new seat of power, Ambrohaim."

The room in the spyglass had a reddish tint to it due to the stone it had been built from, however there was something unnatural about it and on

closer inspection, metal augmentations could be discerned in the construction. As the advisors continued to watch, two figures entered the room, and they were most certainly familiar to Treguard.

"Well well, if it isn't Miss Sidriss's kidnappers, the Opposition's brother and sister act, the Goblin Master Skarkill and his sister, the Techno-Sorceress Sinstar. But why there are in this place as opposed to their master's throne room at Marblehead, I am at a loss to explain."

Skarkill looked around the room. "Cor, sis, this is one heck of a place you've made," he said, in awe of his surroundings.

Sinstar smiled. "Thank you, brother," she said. "But this is merely child's play and nothing compared to what I am truly capable of sculpting with my skills. However, it will serve our purpose and that of our little society."

"But why build it so far underground, and why in Malepith of all places?" Skarkill asked.

"Simple enough, brother dear," Sinstar sighed. "First off you don't plan a rebellion in full view of those you are seeking to rebel against, and 'His Lordship' is so egotistical he would never expect a rebellion against him to come from such an insignificant area of the realm, and as an added bonus, even if he did suspect something and try to locate our little citadel, the unique properties of Malepith would render his powers all but null and void."

"Er, but sis, wouldn't your own powers also be depleted here?"

This caused Sinstar to laugh loudly. "No, brother, they are not - remember I am able to wield both the powers of the old ways and of the new age, so therefore I am all but immune to this region's natural magic dampening field. But to more important matters, brother... have you seen to it that my instructions regarding our prisoner have been carried out?"

"Huh? Oh... Yeah... Yeah, I've seen to it sis, she's been secured on the

Island of Ice in the middle of the Sea of Blue Fire, in Winteria."

"Good," Sinstar said with a smirk. "She can cool her heels there, 'til I decide how best to deal with her."

"Er, sis?"

"Yes?"

"Forgive me for not quite understanding here, but why're we wasting this opportunity to take over the Opposition by focusing all of the Scourge's resources on Sidriss?"

"That's okay, dear brother, I'd forgive you most things," Sinstar said with a smirk. "After all, blood is thicker than water and I value that bond we share over anything else. As for why I have not instigated a takeover in the absence of Lord Fear, it's simple enough - we're not yet ready. The Scourge is not yet strong enough. After all, the secret of a successful takeover is not the taking over itself but the ability to hold onto and consolidate that which you have taken, and as it stands at the moment Lord Fear could easily remove us upon his return. Also I take the long view, so I'm looking to the future and that is influencing my current actions. You see, brother, the struggle in this realm between the forces of light and dark has always been balanced in the same way - one powerful force of the light backed up by the Powers That Be and one powerful force of the dark leading the Opposition. In the past it was Merlin against Mogdred, today it is Lord Fear locking horns with Hordriss. But Hordriss and Lord Fear's time has come and gone. In truth, brother, in the case of Lord Fear it was never here."

Skarkill looked blank, "Pardon, sis? That's quite a thing to say seeing as how Lord F revolutionised the Greater Game."

"Yes, yes," Sinstar said, waving her hand dismissively. "I'll grant him that but his techno-sorcery is at a dead end. Me, on the other hand..." She turned and looked at Skarkill. "I am the true future; I am the evolution of dark

magic. I wield both the power of the old ways and of techno-sorcery. And as light is to dark so Sidriss is to me. Her powers are a union too, for she wields the power of both the Confusers and of the Fay, being the daughter of both Hordriss and of Morghanna. I and she are the future combatants of this realm - she is the light and I am..."

Sinstar's words trailed off and her eyes narrowed, then she suddenly swung round and looked directly at the advisors through the spyglass. "Aware of you, little spies! Didn't your mothers ever teach you that it's not nice to pry? Well, let's just see if my little pet - the Creeping Horack - can't teach you that little life lesson."

She raised one of her hands and some black tentacle-like things began to seep out of the spyglass.

"AMY, DROP THE SPYGLASS!" the advisors yelled at once.

Amy did so but to their horror the black tentacles of the Horack just kept on creeping out of the spyglass.

"The Horack is a frightful beast, used by practitioners of black magic like a nobleman may use a hunting dog, and it has Amy's scent. Get her away from it or it will surely end your quest!" Treguard said urgently.

The team hurriedly directed Amy away from the beast. Thankfully the eye shield picked up an elf path nearby.

"Well, well," Treguard said thoughtfully, as the team directed Amy towards the elf path entrance. "It would seem that all is not well in the ranks of the Opposition. Sinstar and Skarkill plot open rebellion and to that end they have seemingly got allies as yet unknown and unseen who call themselves... the Scourge. A most interesting development to be sure."

Amy passed through the elf path entrance and now found herself in a room that was bare and nondescript... save for the very large iron door in front of

her.

"Ah, the end of level one and your way to Level two team, for beyond that great door lies the Great Wyrm Smirkenorff. The only question is... how to open it?" Treguard mused.

The team were discussing this problem when one of them caught sight of something in the pool.

"OH NO! THE HORACK! IT'S FOLLOWED US!"

The other two advisors looked into the pool and to their horror saw she was right. The black tentacles were slowly creeping their way into the chamber, still following Amy's scent.

"You must do something, team, and fast!" Treguard said.

The advisors directed Amy as far from the beast as they could but there was nowhere to run. The team had given up hope when all of a sudden the iron door raised and a big puff of black smoke rushed into the chamber.

"And just what, pray tell, is this abominable thing?" a majestic voice boomed out as the head of Smirkenorff came through the gate and peered at the Horack.

The Horack actually seemed to retreat as Smirky got closer to it. "Humph!" the dragon snorted. "Another Opposition monstrosity, no doubt... Well, as I've often said about the Opposition..."

He reared his head back and then blew out a searing hot jet of flame. There was a shriek from the Horack and it seemed to disintegrate. Smirky observed the remnants of it. "They do singe rather nicely."

Smirky then turned his attention to Amy. "Ah, the young emissary... I've been expecting you. Hordriss the Confuser told me he was sending an

emissary of his, a young dungeoneer whom I was to fly to level two, and he has already paid your fare. So hurry up and get on board in case that beast isn't quite dead yet."

Amy's advisors didn't need telling twice. They hurriedly guided Amy onto Smirky's back and into the saddle.

"Thank you for saving me, Smirkenorff," Amy said once she was seated.

"Ah, my pleasure, I always enjoy roasting the Opposition," Smirkenorff said, and then took off towards level two.

Amy enjoyed the sensation of flight, feeling the wind on her as Smirky flew at great speed through the air. A few minutes later she realised they were descending.

"I'm afraid it's a short flight today, dungeoneer." Smirky said. "There's too much low cloud about and it would be very unsafe to fly further. Hold tight for landing."

Smirky landed quite smoothly. Amy got up from the saddle and, after thanking Smirky for the ride and with the aid of her advisors, navigated her way down his tail.

Amy found herself outside the ruins of what had once clearly been a majestic citadel. "Ah, it seems Smirkenorff has dropped you off at the ruins of Witch Haven, the place that was once the power base of this realm's biggest witch coven, the Grey Sisterhood. This once thriving citadel was destroyed by Lord Fear and now mostly lies in ruins... however some parts still remain intact."

The advisors were discussing what to do when two shadowy figures in black robes wielding long-bladed knives appeared behind Amy and began advancing on her.

"Warning, team, assassins present in the level - act with haste!" Treguard intoned.

The advisors quickly guided Amy into the relative safety of the ruins and then into one of the few buildings that seemed to still be intact. Amy was in a resplendent throne room; this opulent room looked totally at odds with the state of the building in which it was housed. The advisors noted that at the far side of the room was the silver goblet that Queen Kalina had asked them to find. They were still taking this sight in when the two assassins appeared behind Amy again and continued their advance on her, their fearsome looking knives still held high.

The advisors started panicking and were about to guide Amy out of the room when a figure appeared in the chamber in front of Amy. She was very beautiful, in a way reminiscent of the finest porcelain doll. The lady observed Amy seemingly with disinterest in her blue eyes, which only served to heighten her imposing presence as they hinted at great power and intelligence. Those blue eyes flash dangerously as they alighted on the two assassins.

"You will not shed innocent blood in my presence!" she said in a commanding voice. "Lest you would prefer me to unleash MY two living blades on you!"

This show of resistance was enough to send the two assassins scurrying away in fright. The lady smiled with satisfaction at her effect on the two assassins, then turned her attention back to Amy.

"And now... to you," she said slowly and majestically, approaching Amy.

"Caution, team," Treguard said in a wary tone, "for this is Lady Constance Isobel Mercury. She is one of the leading members of a group of renegades and miscreants who have fast made a name for themselves and garnered... a modicum of influence in the realm, and to a lesser extent within the spectrum of the *Greater Game* itself. She's a powerful sorceress, an expert politician and bargain-maker, but also highly unpredictable."

"Amy, don't be impolite or discourteous," one of the advisors said.

"Yes, we don't want to offend this hottie," the male advisor said, quickly being silenced by a short elbow shot to the ribs by one of the other advisors.

"Amy, just act like you did with Queen Kalina," the other advisor said.

Lady Mercury continued her scrutiny of Amy. Amy could feel her eyes on her and decided that following the same course of action she had taken with Kalina was indeed the best idea, so she curtsied. "Your Ladyship, thank you for saving my life."

Lady Mercury smiled. "Well, it's nice to see at least one of Treguard's lackeys has some manners and common courtesy. Mind, since he himself is lacking in those, one shouldn't expect much from his followers."

This comment drew a mumbled, bristled retort from Treguard and a snigger from the advisors.

"Is there anything I can do to repay you for your help, Your Ladyship?" Amy enquired.

Lady Mercury raised an eyebrow. "Normally I would charge for my aid... but as it is I'm more concerned with finding some of my colleagues."

"Hmm," Treguard mused, "this seems to be something of a running theme of late, as all teams so far have encountered at least one member of this group, as have you before now. And all of them have been searching for the others. It would seem that somehow they have become separated."

"Could I possibly be of any help?" Amy asked.

Lady Mercury laughed slightly. "I hardly think so, little one. You see, we

were attending to some... business for an associate of ours when the realm decided to go into phase shift and we were all swept up. Knowing this realm's sense of humour, it probably dumped us all where it thought we belonged. It placed me in the throne room of Witch Haven, which is suitable seeing as how the... needs of the Witch Queen and myself have often found us entwined." Lady Mercury said this with a slight smirk. "So unless you have some kind of clue or information that I can..."

Lady Mercury stopped mid-sentence and looked hard at what Amy had in her hands. "Let me see what you are carrying, dungeoneer."

Amy immediately held up her hand in which she still clutched the crossbow bolt she had picked up in level one.

Lady Mercury smiled. "What is your name, dungeoneer?"

"Amy," came the response.

"Amy," Lady Mercury said softly. "Please hand that crossbow bolt to me, for it belongs to one... so close to my heart and it may allow me to trace him."

Amy was unsure what to do - she could tell from Lady Mercury's voice that she was sincere in what she said but she also knew that in this realm you didn't get anything for nothing.

Lady Mercury looked at Amy quizzically before realising. "Ah yes, the Adventurers' Code... but sadly I have no reward to grant to you."

"Amy," one of the advisors said. "Say if she lets you take the silver goblet she can have the crossbow bolt."

"Your Ladyship, if you could see fit to allow me to take that silver goblet that is behind you, I would gladly give you this crossbow bolt," Amy said.

Lady Mercury turned round and noticed the goblet. "Oh... Well, by all means, Amy. I have no use for it and I would have thought if Greystagg had, she would have taken it with her when she and her coven abandoned Witch Haven."

Amy curtsied again. "Thank you, Lady Mercury," she said and handed the crossbow bolt to her.

Lady Mercury smiled. "Thank you, Amy."

She clasped the crossbow to her heart and closed her eyes. A smile appeared on her lips. "My love," she half-whispered. "I feel you and I am coming to you."

As she said this she faded from sight. The advisors relayed this to Amy, and after directing her to the goblet so she could pick it up, they guided her out of the room. Amy now found herself in another room that was seemingly untouched by the devastation she had encountered outside. There was nothing in the room and no visible threats.

"This would be a good place to summon Queen Kalina," one of the advisors said. The other two agreed and instructed Amy to use her calling name.

"KALINA, KALINA, KALINA!" Amy called out loudly.

There was a bright flash of light and Queen Kalina stood before them. "Well met, Amy," she said grandly. "Ah, I see you have fulfilled your end of our pact and retrieved the goblet for me."

"Yes, Your Highness," Amy said, curtsying to Kalina again, not wishing to offend her now after all she'd been through to get the goblet.

Kalina smiled. "You really do have such impeccable manners, dear Amy... such a pity that you're not a part of my royal household permanently... but to the matter at hand." She held out her hand. "Bring the goblet to me."

Amy walked towards Kalina and presented the goblet to her. Kalina raised the goblet and smiled.

"The second piece of the puzzle," she said mysteriously, before turning her attention back to Amy. "And now to your reward, dear Amy. I have both a small spell and some useful information for you. First... the spell is a simple offensive spell called AXE. As to the information... I have learned that a servant of Fear is lurking somewhere in this citadel - one who calls himself Torenvalk. Be wary of him for he presents himself as a noble knight and can speak the language of an adventurer, though he does not understand it. But you may know him for certain by his pitch black falcon he always has with him. Now our business is concluded and I can do no more for you. My thanks to you once more, Amy, and farewell."

Queen Kalina raised her arms; there was another flash of light and she was gone. The advisors guided Amy on through the ruins of Witch Haven. The next room that Amy entered had two doors at the far end, both of which led on to long corridors.

"Hmm, another decision of direction to be made here, team," Treguard pondered.

As the advisors were debating which corridor they should take, a man walked into the room. He was dressed in chain-mail and a tunic not unlike one a knight might wear. He had on a red cloak and emblazoned on his tunic was a knight's helmet; however, it bore an undeniable resemblance to a frightknight's helmet. There was a long sword strapped to the left-hand side of his belt and - somewhat oddly - on his left hand he was wearing what looked like the sort of glove a falconer uses.

He smiled at Amy. "Good day to you, fair maiden. What brings one such as you to this dreary and frightful place?"

The advisors didn't trust this character - Kalina's warning was still fresh in

their mind, but they told Amy to tell him anyway.

"I'm a dungeoneer on a quest to free the maid Sidriss," Amy replied matter-of-factly, also not trusting this character yet.

"A young warrior maiden and a fellow adventurer, is it?" he said good-naturedly. "Well I have just arrived here but let me aid you in your quest with some information, fair maiden. The right hand corridor is blocked off partway down due to the roof caving in. So in order to leave this place you will have to take the left-hand path."

"Something is surely amiss here, team," Treguard said suspiciously. "How can our 'friend' here know that corridor is blocked if he himself has only just arrived in this place?"

"What should I do, team?" Amy asked.

"Don't do anything yet, Amy," one of the advisors said. "We think this is that Torenvalk character that Queen Kalina warned us about so we're trying to decide what to do."

"But what if it's not Torenvalk and he's telling the truth and we go down that right corridor only to find it blocked off? We can't just go back, after all!" one of the other advisors pointed out.

She and the male advisor were discussing the situation while the other was still looking in the pool. Just then she spotted something and smiled. "It IS Torenvalk and he IS lying."

"How do you know?" the male advisor asked.

"Look up there on that shield that's above the entrance to the right-hand corridor," she said, and pointed.

The other two followed where she was pointing and saw what it was that she

had seen. There, perched on the shield and looking down at the situation below with evil eyes, was a pitch black falcon.

"Amy, ignore him, he's trying to trick you. Just walk away from him and go down the right-hand corridor," the lead advisor said.

Amy did just this - she didn't speak to Torenvalk or acknowledge him, she just set off walking towards the right-hand corridor.

"Where are you going, fair maiden? Did you not hear me?" Torenvalk said, laughing slightly... but when Amy didn't acknowledge him or stop, his mask began to slip. "Hey! Did you not hear what I said? That corridor's blocked!"

Amy kept on walking.

"HEY, I'M TALKING TO YOU, GIRL!" he yelled, his 'noble knight' act slipping completely.

"That may be so... Torenvalk... but I'M NOT listening!" Amy said defiantly.

Hearing this and realising his cover was blown, Torenvalk drew his sword. "Very well then, dungeoneer, prepare to become goblin fodder!" He raised his sword and charged.

"SPELLCASTING:" came the call from Amy. "A....X....E!"

A strange humming noise started up as a spectral axe formed in midair above Amy. It hovered for a moment and then began advancing on Torenvalk, whose face went white. He slashed wildly at it with his sword but the blade just sailed through the axe as it bore down on him. There was a clatter as Torenvalk dropped his sword and took off running in the opposite direction, still pursued by the axe, his pet falcon flapping behind the axe trying to peck at it. The advisors laughed at this sight as Amy continued on down the right-hand corridor.

Amy next found herself in a courtyard. It was deserted and - like the rest of Witch Haven - a ruinous wreck. In the middle of the courtyard there was a barrel with objects laid out on it. The advisors guided Amy over to it.

Upon the barrel were a bag of gold coins, a large clue scroll, a smaller scroll that was tied with green silk, a spyglass, a pearl necklace and a bizarre emblem or crest made from bronze that had an S formed from a two-headed serpent emblazoned in the middle.

"Supplies to be had here, team, and who knows... perhaps some useful information also.," Treguard mused.

At her advisors' suggestion, Amy picked up and read the clue scroll first.

The littlest things pack the biggest punch. To be used when in dire need but don't forget to call her.

The team discussed this, finally settling on the idea that the scroll's meaning was that they should take the smaller scroll. Amy then picked up the spyglass. Once more the image of Sinstar's antechamber appeared in the shimmering surface. Sinstar was addressing the ashen-faced figure of Torenvalk through a large crystalline structure.

"I don't care for failure, Torenvalk; you were instructed to waylay that dungeoneer," she said in a deadly tone.

"I'm sorry, my lady," Torenvalk said crawlingly, "but I was unable to convince them that they should follow the path upon which your trap had been laid. Somehow they were able to see through my disguise."

Sinstar sighed. "Torenvalk, how many times must you be told? It's all very well being able to speak another language, but without knowing the meaning of what you are saying you may as well not know it. Even though you can reel off the contents of the Adventurers' Code and speak the language of a heroic knight, it is all rendered worthless because you cannot grasp the

subtexts and deeper meanings of what it is you're saying! Therefore your 'disguise' is easily penetrated by anyone who has even the most basic knowledge of the Adventurers' Code... and always carting that Falcon with you wherever you go doesn't help either!"

Torenvalk didn't have anything to say in response to this.

"Oh, get out of my sight, Torenvalk - take yourself to Dregas point and keep watch on the road, for that is the way his Lordship will surely return by. Alert me when you sight him."

Torenvalk bowed. "By your command, Lady Sinstar."

His image faded from view just as Skarkill appeared in the chamber. "The goblins just reported back - the little brat's still somewhere in the ruins of Witch Haven but there's so much decay and whatnot left over in that place from when Lord F put it to the sword, they can't pick up a clear enough sent to track her properly like."

Sinstar rolled her eyes. "Even without being here, Lord Fear thwarts me. Well, no matter - I've sealed the entrance that they must use to enter level three; no one may now pass the Tower of Time without the Emblem of the Scourge. But just to be on the safe side..."

Sinstar turned to the crystalline structure one more time. "Serpenter! Serpenter, respond... Come, it is your leader who requests your attention."

The face of another female appeared in the crystalline structure, but there was something odd about this face for although it was clearly human, there something almost reptilian to it.

"My, but Sinstar does indeed have strong allies in the ranks of the Opposition," Treguard said ominously, "for this without question is the serpentine witch known as Serpenter. She's the Opposition's Reptile Trainer, responsible for keeping their legions of snapdragons and the like in check,

and she's extremely dangerous."

Serpenter had long black hair; it was shiny but in a way that was more reminiscent of how a snake's skin shines. Her skin was very pale and her eyes were a bizarre sight - green-yellow in colour and almost reptilian in look.

"Yess, my Queen? What iss your command?" the serpentine witch asked.

The team couldn't fail to notice the snake-like hiss that accompanied her speech, nor the fact that when she opened her mouth, two snake-like fangs were visible alongside her human teeth.

"Take some of your minions, Serpenter, and guard the way to the Tower of Time. Kill anyone who tries to pass who is not a part of the Scourge. You understand, Serpenter?"

"Yess, my Queen," Serpenter said, with obvious relish at the task she had been given.

"Good, then go!" Sinstar said, and the image of Serpenter faded from sight.

"Hehehehehehe! That should sure give that dungeoneer a LOVELY surprise, sis!" Skarkill sneered.

"Indeed, brother dear," Sinstar said, before once more turning and looking straight through the glass at Amy and her advisors.

"So, Amy, how are you going to get out of this one, sweetie?" she sarcastically asked, causing Amy to drop the spyglass in shock.

There was a brief discussion before it was unanimously decided to take the bronze emblem as well as the little scroll. Amy was then guided out of the courtyard and finally out of the ruins of Witch Haven.

Amy was now walking down a long, winding path with woods on either side. The path seemed to go on forever. Just then there was a sound she definitely did not wish to hear - the loud, bloodcurdling screech of a horn.

"A goblin horn!" Treguard declared. "The goblin hunting party that Skarkill talked about must have picked up your trail, team."

The advisors hurried Amy along the path. Thankfully, the sound of the horn faded into the distance. The path eventually emerged from the woods onto a big field. In the distance, a tower loomed large.

"The Tower of Time, team - your way to level three. All you have to do is reach it," Treguard said.

Amy set off walking towards the tower; the team could make out a dry moat surrounding the tower as they got closer.

"This is too easy," one of her advisors commented.

Almost as soon as the words had left her mouth there was a loud hissing sound and a giant lizard crawled out from the moat. Riding on the back of the giant lizard was Serpenter.

"Thiss iss assss far assss you go," she said. "My mistress commands that you not be allowed into level three, and I'm more than happy to oblige as my pet here is hungry and you'll make a nice snack for him. Game over for you, dungeoneer!"

"Hurry, team, before Amy becomes lizard food!" Treguard urged

But before the team could act, temporal disruption set in.

"Oh... what a pity. Still, at least it will give them time to think of a way out of this tight spot." Treguard mused. "And as for you lot, tell me... just how would you armchair adventurers get out of this one?"

PUZZLE PAGE

Lego Nightmare I

There have always been two great passions in my life - Nightmare is one, and Lego is the other. My extensive Lego collection dates from 1979 to the present day, and I have used a few carefully selected pieces and minifigures to recreate some scenes from Nightmare, thus combining my two passions! Unfortunately, the pictures were taken with a disposable camera of doubtful quality and are very blurry, but I'm sure you'll get the basic idea!

Which dungeoneer is being killed in this scene?

- a) Leo
- b) Martin II
- c) Helen II
- d) Alistair



Answer: b)

CLASSIC QUEST

Series 2

Quest: The Chalice.

Dungeoneer: Karen Swanson.

Advisors: Angela, Pamela and Nicola.

Home town: Denholm, Dumfries and Galloway.

Team score: 6 out of 10.

Only the second ever all-girl team, they were only brought in to fill up the last episode-and-a-bit of the series with some suitably interesting Nightmare moments, thus being denied their chance to win, yet they made a pretty good stab at what they were given!

Level One: The Wheel of Fate takes Karen to the kitchen (in the most obviously fixed pull of the lever ever, as the other two rooms are only ever found on level two!) where she meets Gretel. The maid is undergoing a so-called beauty treatment (which is actually the result of a practical joke by Mildread) and after Karen shares some of her own so-called beauty tips, Gretel reveals that it is Back-to-Front Day in the Dungeon, which basically means that Treguard will be saying some amusing yet erroneous things until they reach the clue room. Sure enough, Treguard encourages the team to

make friends with a giant spider and a coiled snake, before advising them to ignore the "poisonous" food in the clue room.

As a result of this highly amusing setup, the advisors no longer trust Treguard and fail to call out "I command you" when he tells them to, as they earn a perfect score with Granitas. Undoubtedly it is then explained to them (during the filming break) that they can start trusting Treguard again because they have learned the object of their quest, signifying that Back-to-Front Day is over. Despite the lack of an extra clue, however, they pick up the only object they need to complete the level - a bottle of old toenails. The Corridor of the Catacombs follows, where the Automatum goes in for the attack, and a hasty exit is called for. Karen next arrives on the ledge that usually houses the Troll, but this time Mildread is present instead, practising her broomstick flying - the addition of the L-plate is a very nice touch!

Apparently Mildread is experiencing some difficulty, but Karen has just what she needs to bring the witch down safely - a bottle of old toenails! Following Mildread's instructions, Karen holds up the toenails and recites a quick incantation, bringing Mildread safely down to earth. For once Mildread is unambiguously grateful, and rewards the team with the spell RUST - the only spell she actually ever gives out! This comes in handy in the wellway room, where the Automatum appears and firmly bars Karen's path. The advisors are quite slow to react here ("*Cast the spell on 'im or summan!*" - *Karen*) but the RUST spell puts the Automatum firmly out of commission (as we are treated to a great prat-fall from Edmund Dehn) possibly forever, as it is doubtful that anyone ever bothered mending him. Karen climbs into the wellway and falls into level two...

Level Two: ...right onto Bumptious's dynamite plunger, blowing a hole in the wall and stunning the dwarf in the explosion! Gretel quickly arrives to administer first aid, and Bumptious (as soon as he's recovered) starts trial proceedings to assess Karen's suitability to handle explosives. With two out of three explosive-related questions answered correctly, Bumptious is pleased with the team and awards them the spell FLIGHT. This is used in

the Bridged Vale, as the middle of the bridge is missing and a flight across the gap is required.

A quick trip across the Mills of Doom (where a cavernwraith is lurking) leads to the clue room, where Karen does a very funny stumble down the stairs. She has a quick conversation with Casper before picking him up (along with a lantern) and the quest season comes to an end in the next chamber, which turns out to be Merlin's level three room with the Wall of Jericho. What a strange place to put this room in - perhaps they had a vague idea at the time that every series would end here, but it didn't turn out that way in the end!

Summary: A competent and entertaining quest - what a shame they were always destined to leave undefeated!

THE WICKEDEST SHOW IN THE REALM

By Ricky Temple

Zyssa struggled and thrashed as the cavernwight tried to get a better grip on her with its sharp, knifelike teeth, and devour her. She yelped and screamed each time its teeth sank into her tender flesh. Blood was by now trickling down her left leg from all the puncture marks and deep bites, the smell of which further excited the cavernwight and served to increase its savage attack.

"Someone, help me! RIO!!" Zyssa screamed in terror. The cavernwight reared up; Zyssa realised it was going for a death bite aimed at her neck. "Rio... I love you," Zyssa said in a quiet voice, and then closed her eyes - she just hoped it would be over quickly.

She held her breath and waited for oblivion to take her, then all of a sudden she heard an awful gurgling, screaming sound. She opened her eyes just in

time to see the beast keel over and writhe for half a minute, before its death throes ended and it lay perfectly still, an arrow protruding from its neck. Zyssa looked hard at the arrow; it had a green shaft, which could mean only one thing - the person who had fired it was - or had once been - a Green Warden. Zyssa looked in the direction the arrow had undoubtedly come from; her breath caught as she saw the figure.

"Gloriana..." she said softly.

The tall, blond figure came towards her. Gloriana smiled weakly at Zyssa.

"Hello, cousin," she said.

Zyssa half-smiled back. "Hello, cousin."

"Can't let you alone for two seconds, can I young Zys?" Gloriana joked, using Zyssa's childhood pet name. Zyssa didn't know whether to laugh or to cry. This was the first time she had seen - let alone talked to - her cousin since Gloriana had gone AWOL from the Green Warden service.

"How did you find me?" Zyssa asked.

Gloriana laughed slightly. "I've been keeping tabs on you for certain interested parties... ever since your paths crossed at the estate of one Hubert Dracher. Guess you could say I've been made yours and Rio's guardian angel."

Zyssa wasn't sure how to take this, but it did confirm her worst fears - the rumours she'd heard about Gloriana's new associates with were true.

Gloriana unsheathed her dagger and made to cut Zyssa's bonds, but then she suddenly stepped back and looked suspiciously at Zyssa. "If I untie you... Ranger," she said, her tone now different and colder, "are you going to hug me or arrest me?"

Zyssa bit her bottom lip - she was in major internal conflict over this decision. As a Ranger she was duty-bound to arrest Gloriana on sight, not only for her going AWOL but also for her association with some of the less than desirable elements of the Dungeon realm.

"I can't answer that, Gloriana... I don't know what I'll do," Zyssa said honestly.

Gloriana nodded. She reached up and cut the rope that bound Zyssa's left arm to the wall. The two cousins looked at each other for what seemed like an eternity, but was really no more than a few moments. Then Zyssa threw her free arm around Gloriana and hugged her close to her.

"I missed you too, cousin," Gloriana said as she hugged back.

"Oh... Gloriana," Zyssa sighed. "Come back with me... turn yourself in... I'll plead your case to Treguard... I'm sure he'll understand."

Gloriana sighed and broke the embrace. "No, Zyssa, not until ALL of us are back together." She embedded the dagger in the wall where it was just within reach of Zyssa's free hand, and stepped back from her.

Zyssa tried to grab hold of her. "Gloriana, she's not worth this!" she cried.

Gloriana shook her head, turned around and walked off into the blackness. "You have two choices, Ranger Silverdale... either follow me and do your 'duty' or... you can do the right thing, like me, and climb out of here and go to help the one you love."

Zyssa gasped. "Rio!"

She quickly grabbed the dagger and began cutting the rest of her bonds. By the time she had cut herself free, Gloriana had vanished. Zyssa looked forlornly for a few moments in the direction Gloriana had gone, a side tunnel that had been built into the old well after it had run dry.

"But cousin..." she said softly. "I love you also."

She wiped away the tears that had formed in her eyes and began to scramble out of the well.

Rio, meanwhile, having - during his own struggle to get free - smashed the viewing mirror that the demented jester Heckle-Jeckle had 'thoughtfully' left for him to observe Zyssa's demise, had missed all of this. In truth, due to both the exertion of his struggles and also the soul-crushing belief that Zyssa was probably dead, his attempts to escape had lessened.

"Well, Ranger Bolt, is the show over?" a mocking voice came from the door. Rio looked over to see the figure of Heckle-Jeckle leaning against the doorframe. "Oh, but you broke the mirror so you'll have missed your friend's demise and on top of that, that's now seven years' bad luck... although," Heckle-Jeckle added with a sadistic chuckle, "you'll be lucky if you've got seven minutes left in this life!"

Heckle-Jeckle laughed and then walked across the room, into the back of the trailer. "I won't keep you too long, Ranger," he called through to Rio. "Just selecting which one of my toys will be best to dispatch you with... I have a boat to catch tonight, after all."

Rio didn't respond - he was beyond caring. Zyssa was dead, whatever Heckle-Jeckle did to him... it didn't matter because at the end he'd be with Zyssa again in oblivion, and what neither Heckle-Jeckle nor his mistress Madame Cruithne knew was that Ariel Martinez would be raiding their little sideshow come first light, and she would see to it that Heckle-Jeckle, Madam Cruithne and the rest of her gang would rot in jail, if not swing from the local gibbet.

Just then he felt two gentle hands on his shoulders. He looked round and almost gasped in shock and disbelief, but one of those delicate hands clamped over his mouth and that beautiful face - which he was so sure had

to be a cruel trick of his mind - smiled slightly. She pressed one finger to her lips, indicating for him to be silent. Then she leant forward and kissed him softly and quickly. It was then he knew he wasn't hallucinating - it was Zyssa, and she was alive.

Rio felt his will to fight and to survive returning. Zyssa motioned for him to remain still and quiet. She then made her way as quickly as she could (she was visibly limping quite badly due to the cavernwight's savaging of her left leg) to a position where she could not be seen, and waited.

A few moments later Heckle-Jeckle re-emerged, with a set of horrendous looking instruments of torture. "Well, Ranger Bolt," he said with a sick smile, "do you have any preference for which of my toys we start with?"

Rio did not reply but just glowered at him. Heckle-Jeckle picked up one of his 'toys' - it looked like a three pronged spoon. "I think we'll save this one for last... when I remove your heart you should survive just long enough to see it stop beating!" the demented jester said with sick glee.

Zyssa had heard enough. Quietly she slipped out of her hiding place and picked up a heavy looking jewellery box that lay on one of the sideboards near her. She slowly crept towards Heckle-Jeckle and raised the box above her head, intending to strike him with it. Heckle-Jeckle had finally decided on which of his 'toys' to start his torture of Rio with. He turned back to Rio, and saw the image of Zyssa creeping up on him reflected in Rio's pupils. As Zyssa swung the box at him he spun round and grabbed her wrist. Zyssa just had time to register this before Heckle-Jeckle slashed at her with the sharp implement he had been intending to use on Rio. Zyssa managed to dodge the slash.

"Well, well, Ranger Silverdale. So you escaped my little pet, did you? Well, I'll just have to handle you myself!" he leered at her.

Zyssa just glared back. "Don't flatter yourself, Heckle-Jeckle," she retorted, her voice once again losing its quiet, soft tone. "It'll take more of a

man than you to handle me."

Heckle-Jeckle laughed at her and again tried to slash her while keeping his tight grip on her wrist. However, this time Zyssa met his incoming hand with a knife-edge chop to his wrist. The sadistic jester let out a yell of surprised rage and his weapon clattered to the floor. Then, before he could react, Zyssa threw herself backwards, taking him with her. As she hit the ground, Zyssa raised her knees up so as Heckle-Jeckle came down on her, his ribs and stomach connected with her knees, winding him.

Gasping for air, Heckle-Jeckle had next to no time to react to what Zyssa did next. She snaked both her legs around his neck and locked him in a vicelike grip. Heckle-Jeckle thrashed about and struggled to breathe, but Zyssa had deceptively strong legs - even after one had been mauled - and she kept him locked firmly in position, cutting off both his airway and blood flow to the brain by putting pressure on his windpipe carotid artery. Eventually his struggles stopped, and his body went limp and flopped to the ground. Zyssa slowly and tentatively released her grip in case he was playing possum. But Heckle-Jeckle lay still on the floor, having blacked out from lack of oxygen and blood to his brain.

Zyssa checked to see if he was still alive; when she was sure he was, she quickly found some cord and bound his wrists and ankles. Then she released Rio from his bonds. The two embraced.

"I thought you were dead," Rio said.

"No, my love," Zyssa reassured him. "Guess my guardian angel was looking out for me this evening." With what Gloriana had said, this wasn't really lying to him. She winced slightly as one of Rio's hands brushed over her left hip and found the area that had been mauled.

"How bad?" he asked.

"Later... later. That's to worry about later - for now let's just get out of

this manmade Circle of Hell!" she insisted.

Rio nodded and, after he regained possession of his two crossbows, the two slowly made their way out of the caravan. And as quickly but as stealthily as possible, they made their way through the campsite until they were on the road back to town, at which point they started running as fast as their battered bodies would allow. They could never remember how long they had run for but it seemed like hours. They rounded a corner and came face to face with possibly the most welcome sight that could have greeted their eyes at this point.

"Rio! Zyssa! What in the name of Dunshelm happened to you?" Ariel Martinez said, shocked and horrified at the sight of her two friends' condition. She dismounted her horse and ran to them. Behind her was a whole group of Powers That Be militiamen, as well as the local Justice of the Peace and Lieutenant-Inquisitor Finley.

"We were extended a very 'gracious invitation' by the mastermind behind this whole killing spree," Rio said with a humourless smile, "and she is such a great hostess."

"She?" Ariel said in disbelief.

Rio nodded. "It's the fortune teller, Madame Cruithne, who's pulling the strings of this outfit; she had her messenger boy come and collect us from our inn." He turned and looked at Finley. "And we just couldn't say no, especially when her messenger boy was the Cossgrove Fiend himself, the one Inquisitor Finley here said couldn't possibly still be alive!"

Finley looked uncomfortably at his feet.

"I take it you're on your way to raid their carnival now?" Zyssa said.

"Yes," replied Ariel.

"Well, you'll find one of her henchmen tied up in one of the trailers but Cruithne, the Fiend, Norman Easter, and another of her henchmen - a pigmy called Olmec - are heading into town."

"WHAT?!" Ariel cried.

Rio nodded. "She's located what she's been looking for and is going to collect it in person with her little entourage."

Ariel turned to Finley and the Justice of the Peace. "You two take some of the men and secure the carnival - arrest anyone you find there! I and the two Rangers will take the rest of the men back to town and try to find this Madame Cruithne and her men."

The Justice of the Peace nodded, Finley being too embarrassed to speak, and they led half the men onwards down the road towards the carnival.

Ariel turned to Rio and Zyssa when they were gone. "Do you know where in town she was heading?"

Rio and Zyssa shook their heads. "Didn't your men's enquires turn up any more of those figurines?" Rio asked.

"Yes, two of them," Ariel replied. "But we don't have time to go to both houses because they're on opposite sides of Glameldal."

Rio cursed, but then suddenly Zyssa had a brainwave. "Ariel, quickly, is either of those two houses near a river, or anywhere the criminals could reach the open sea?" she said excitedly.

"Yes... as a matter of fact, one of the figurines belonged to the port master of Glameldal," Ariel answered.

Zyssa looked at Rio. "Remember what Heckle-Jeckle said? 'I have a boat to catch tonight'," she repeated the demented jester's taunting words to Rio.

"The port master's house has got to be the one!"

"They must be planning to get the ring and then escape by boat!" Rio agreed with Zyssa.

Ariel quickly called for two of the militiamen to surrender their horses to Rio and Zyssa, and then quickly remounted hers. The three set off at pace, followed by the remaining militiamen, for the port master's house. "Just what ring is this you were talking about, Rio?"

"The Ring of the Balrog... a ring of incredible power!" Rio answered. "That's what this whole mess has been about. Four years ago, it seems I foiled her initial attempt to lay her hands on it... but we never did find the ring. Turns out her henchman at the time had hidden it in one of these figurines before I arrested him. She's spent the last four years tracking down every one of these figurines before unleashing her pet monster to kill and destroy until they find it."

"Well let's just hope we don't arrive too late to catch them," Ariel said grimly.

The rest of the ride passed in complete silence, save for the thundering of the horses' hooves. They abandoned their horses a few streets away from the port master's house and slowly crept towards it, using the back alleyways as cover. Zyssa noticed that Rio had unsheathed both his crossbows and had them primed to fire, while Ariel was armed with a nasty looking weapon that looked like a cross between a whip and a morning star. Zyssa herself had been given two shortswords by Ariel, and the militiamen were armed with either swords or bows and arrows.

"Hide!" hissed Rio, and all of them pressed into the shadows.

"What is it?" Ariel asked.

Rio indicated the house they were heading for. The door was caved in like all

the others, but outside both Olmec and Norman Easter stood as if on guard.

"Madame Cruithne and the Fiend must be inside," Zyssa said.

"Mmm," Rio agreed.

"Well, we'll wait 'til they come out," Ariel said. "Less chance of them being able to turn this into a siege situation if they're all out in the open."

"Did your men take the port master into protective custody?" Rio asked.

"Yes, he's safe... At least this time there won't be any senseless murder."

The group settled down as best they could, to wait. They didn't have long to wait as no more than ten minutes later Madame Cruithne and the hulking silhouette that could only be the Cossgrove Fiend appeared from within the house. Cruithne had something in her hand and looked very pleased with herself. The group of conspirators stood and talked for a little while, seemingly waiting for someone.

"Heckle-Jeckle!" Rio suddenly hissed urgently, realising who it was they were waiting for. "They're waiting for Heckle-Jeckle to arrive after killing me and Zyssa! Ariel, we have to move now... the longer they wait, the more likely Cruithne or Easter are to twig that something is wrong when their demented jester friend fails to arrive, and they might just flee in separate directions, then we could lose some if not all of them!"

Ariel didn't need telling twice. She immediately gave the signal and sprang from her hiding place. "In the name of the Dungeon Master and on the authority of the Powers That Be, I am placing all of you under arrest!" she yelled out loudly.

Cruithne and her henchmen were taken aback momentarily by this, not seeming to comprehend what was happening, but the sight of Ariel, Zyssa, Rio and the militiamen approaching snapped Madame Cruithne out of her

surprise.

"KILL THEM!" she shrieked, and then quickly turned and ran back inside the house.

The Fiend, obeying his mistress, blindly let out a bloodcurdling roar and lunged forward towards the oncoming forces of law, order and justice, his deadly arms outstretched to grab his first victim.

"Don't let him get hold of you!" Rio yelled out in warning. "His grip is fatal."

Hearing Rio's warning, all the militiamen as well as Ariel and Zyssa scattered. The Fiend grabbed only air and lost his balance, falling to the floor. Rio noticed that both Olmec and Norman Easter had moved. He looked around wildly, trying to spot them, but the enraged roar of the Fiend drew his attention first. He turned and saw it advancing on one militiaman who had his back to a wall. Thinking quickly, Rio picked up a stone and hurled it at the Fiend, who yowled angrily as the stone struck it. It swung round and glared at Rio; again Rio was certain he saw recognition in the beast's eyes. He sheathed his crossbows and glared right back at it.

"Come on, you bastard!" Rio seethed loudly. "Let's finish what we started all those years ago! I know you remember me and I damn sure remember you! You remember *Almier* also? Or how about the *Greylal* family? What about *Kristina Greylal*? Because I do... I remember them every time I close my eyes and I remember what you DID TO THEM!"

He lunged at the Fiend in a blind rage. "We end this once and for all tonight - either I send you to Hell... or I'll be going to meet them!"

The Fiend, unused to people attacking it head-on, was too shocked to react and Rio was able to smash it about the head and neck a few times with his metal hand, before the monstrosity roared with pain and rage and swatted Rio away with one of its powerful arms. Rio landed in a heap and saw the Fiend bearing down on him. He rolled out of the way and again all the Fiend

found was the dirty ground. Rio registered that they were both perilously close to where the land ended and the ground dropped off into a steep drop down to the sea below.

"RIO, CATCH!" Zyssa yelled.

Rio looked in the direction of her yell and saw that Zyssa had got her hands on one of the flaming torches used to offer some light in the streets at night. He sprang up as she pitched it to him, and caught it. He turned just in time to see the Fiend once more rise to its feet, now totally consumed by its rage; it let out another bloodcurdling roar and charged at Rio. Rio swung the flaming torch round and, holding it like a sword, he plunged it into the Fiend's face.

There was an ungodly and sickening sound of flesh burning mixed with the Fiend screaming in intense pain... but Rio was unmoved by this, remembering the carnage the Fiend had left behind for him to find that night so long ago. He drove the flames into the beast's face yet again. Another animalistic scream of pain emitted from the beast. It staggered back and turned to try and retreat. However, blinded by the flames it could not see where it was going and it blundered right off the edge of the port walls. It screamed as it plunged downwards into the water, becoming entangled in ropes and netting that the fishermen had left out to dry during the night after a day's fishing. There was a loud splash and the beast - weighed down by its heavy robes and ensnared in the nets and ropes - immediately sank below the water. Rio rushed to the side and looked over; he could make out where the Fiend was as it thrashed about below the water and tried to resurface... but this soon stopped and the water was calm and silent.

"Kirsten... Almier... I'm sorry... I hope now you can all rest in peace," Rio said quietly, before quickly turning his attention back to the job in hand. The Fiend may be dead, but Norman Easter and Olmec were still around somewhere, and Madame Cruithne was holed up in the house.

"Everyone keep a sharp eye out!" Ariel called, regrouping the troops.

"There are still two others out here somewhere and one of them is holed up in the house."

All eyes scanned the surrounding area, looking in every shadowy crevice, trying to see the two murderous henchmen.

"One down, three to go," Zyssa quietly said to herself.

Suddenly a figure darted out of one of the alleyways and tried to make a break for freedom. It barged through two of the militiamen, knocked them to the ground and continued running. Ariel unfurled her whip and lashed it in the direction of the fleeing figure. There was a howl of pain as the prongs on the morning star tip smashed into the legs of the fleeing figure and he crashed to the ground, wounded. Quickly some of the militiamen were on him. He tried to keep going by crawling, but after a brief struggle he was restrained and hauled to his feet... it was Norman Easter.

"Two down, two to go," Zyssa said softly, updating her sombre count.

"LOOK OUT, RANGER SILVERDALE!" one of the militiamen suddenly yelled.

Zyssa just had time to move before the dart (which would have struck her in the neck had she not moved) embedded itself in the frame of a window. She could tell from the foul odour that whatever substance was coating the dart was most likely poisonous. She looked in the direction it had come from and saw the unmistakable figure of Olmec, scrambling across one of the rooftops opposite.

"He's on the roofs!" she yelled out.

Rio ran into the middle of the street to get a better look. He saw Olmec, and the murderous pigmy saw him. Olmec grinned at him and quickly raised his blowpipe. But Olmec was not quick enough, because as soon as Rio had seen the blowpipe beginning to be raised, he had quickly gone for the draw.

Before Olmec had even got the pipe to his mouth, one of Rio's crossbows was drawn. Olmec just got the pipe to his lips as Rio pulled the trigger. Three tenths of a second had passed. A small fireball shot out of the crossbow, towards Olmec. The pigmy didn't even have time to scream before the fireball struck him in the face and killed him instantly. His lifeless body clattered down off the roof and fell to the street below.

"Three down, one to go," Zyssa softly intoned.

Ariel came over to them. "Now that just leaves Madame Cruithne," she said sombrely.

"But how do we deal with her? She could have hidden anywhere in that house," Zyssa pointed out.

"There's only one option," Rio said simply. "A small group goes in to flush her out."

Ariel and Zyssa nodded. Ariel then turned and gave instructions to her men, three of whom were to take Easter to the local jail along with the body of Olmec. "The rest of you wait out here on guard. Myself and Rangers Bolt and Silverdale are going to enter the house and attempt to drive the suspect back outside into your waiting arms, so be alert." This said, she turned back to Rio and Zyssa. The three readied themselves... and entered the house.

For what seemed like hours, but was more likely only a few minutes, they moved through the house, seeing no sign of Madame Cruithne, but then Ariel caught sight of movement out of the corner of her eye.

"RIO, MOVE!" she yelled, and pushed Rio out of the way of the incoming projectile - a heavy chair that had suddenly been propelled across the room.

However, Ariel was not able to get out of the way. The chair smashed into her right arm and she was knocked to the ground, clutching her arm which was clearly broken. Madame Cruithne, standing on the stairs, prepared once

more to use her own powers of telekinesis - which the Ring of the Balrog had increased - to send another heavy object hurtling towards Rio and Ariel. However, Zyssa could see Cruithne and she hurled one of her shortswords in the villainess's direction. The sword missed and embedded itself in the banister just in front of Cruithne, but it was enough to send her scampering up to the top floor of the building.

"You okay, Ariel?" Rio asked his fallen comrade.

"I'm fine - just get after her!" Ariel said firmly.

Rio nodded and he and Zyssa took off up the stairs after Cruithne. They got to the top of the stairs and immediately Rio pushed Zyssa backwards as a large jet of flame shot over their heads.

"You can't beat me while I possess the Ring of the Balrog!" the voice of Madame Cruithne called out. "Its powers are too much for you two feeble nothings!"

"Maybe!" Rio yelled back, now sure he knew where Cruithne was standing. "Or maybe, Madame Francesca Alessandra Cruithne... just maybe you are a minnow pretending she's a whale!"

Rio sprang up and fired one of his fireballs in the direction of Madame Cruithne. She shrieked as it hit her in the shoulder. Rio and Zyssa used this opportunity to spring up the stairs and race towards Madame Cruithne. However, the wounded mystic darted into a side room and locked the door. Zyssa and Rio hammered on the door.

"It's over, Cruithne!" Rio yelled "There's no way out... all your henchmen are either dead or in jail by now!"

"Just come out and end this madness before any more blood is spilt," Zyssa added.

Meanwhile, in the room, Madame Cruithne was looking around for a means of escape. Her eyes alighted on a window on the opposite side of the room that led down to one of the alleyways. She could climb down there and make good her escape.

Rio and Zyssa were by now trying to break the door down. Madame Cruithne slid the window open and looked out... yes, she could easily climb down. She flung her cloak over her shoulder and began to climb out of the window. Rio slammed his body into the door one last time and it burst open with an almighty bang. Rio and Zyssa just had time to see Madame Cruithne halfway out of the window, before the vibrations caused by the door opening so violently caused the window to slam back down. There was a brief scream as Madame Cruithne lost her balance and fell, but then silence. Rio raced to the window, followed by Zyssa. He looked out but could see no sign of a body on the ground.

"Damn it, the witch has escaped!" he said in frustration, and turned to run back downstairs to see if he could still catch her. But Zyssa grabbed his arm and pointed at something.

"Rio... look!" she said.

Rio followed the direction in which her finger was pointing. Sticking out from under the window was a piece of fabric. "Madame Cruithne's cloak," Rio said, shrugging his shoulders... and then just what Zyssa was implying hit him.

"Oh... no!" he said. He went over to the window and looked out again. He still couldn't see anything so he leant backwards and then put his metal fist through the windowpane, shattering it. He then leant out of the broken window and looked down. One look at the lifeless body swaying in the air, the cloak wrapped tightly around the neck and the head lolling to one side, told him all he needed to know. He shook his head and leant back in.

"Neck broken," he said matter-of-factly.

"Her cloak got caught when the window slammed shut, she lost her grip and..." Zyssa didn't finish.

"In a sick way it's almost appropriate," Rio stated. "After all, she was destined to die by the rope for her role in all these murders."

He walked out of the room. Zyssa watched him go, then turned and looked at the window from which Madame Cruithne had been hanged. "All four accounted for," she said with a slight shrug, before following Rio out.

As Rio exited the house, helping the injured Ariel, he glanced over to one side and saw some of the militiamen hauling a soggy, lifeless black mass all tangled in ropes and netting out of the water... the Fiend. That horror was finally over. Rio, Zyssa, Ariel and the militiamen celebrated their victory and the end of Madame Cruithne's murderous gang. Hugs, handshakes and pats on the back were exchanged before Rio and Zyssa took their leave of Ariel and her men to go back to their inn and recover from the ordeal.

Rio helped Zyssa to climb the stairs to their room, as the adrenaline she had been working on was now totally depleted and the wounds to her leg caused her to cry out in agony. He helped her on to the bed and pushed her dress up to see her mauled upper leg and thigh. She didn't blush or make any flirty remarks... he smiled softly and bent down and kissed her, before going to their travel bag and bringing out some ointment - the same soothing ointment that Zyssa had used on his leg on the road to Glameldal, just two days ago, though at the moment it seemed like a lifetime.

He gently began rubbing it into her wounds. Neither said anything. The only sound was the occasional whimper from Zyssa as the ointment stung her a little, but soon the pain faded as the ointment did its work. Rio then kissed her again before leaving the room, whispering to her that he would be back. He was gone for what, to her, seemed a year, but was really five minutes. When he returned he had with him a bowl of warm water. Zyssa didn't know where he'd got it from, and didn't ask.

He placed the bowl on the table beside the bed and then he helped Zyssa out of her dress. Using a soft cloth, he washed her entire body clean of the dirt, the grime and the filth. He washed away the fear, the pain and degradation and he also washed away the sick, unnerving, dark and frightening memories of the twisted, inhuman monstrosities they had faced, and also the equally disturbing memories of what they had had to do and become in order to defeat them and survive.

Once Rio had washed her from head to toe, Zyssa took the cloth from him, undressed him and performed the same cleansing process on him. After they were both cleansed, he brought her close to him and they held each other as close as it was possible to hold someone... their love knot formed and all too soon for both of them, that beautiful scream once more rang out. Then, lying safe in each other's arms, a dreamless, restful sleep came.

The morning sun was only just rising as Rio and Zyssa made ready to depart Glameldal.

"What's this - leaving without saying goodbye?" Rio and Zyssa turned round to see Ariel Martinez, her right arm in a sling, smiling at them.

"Well, we just thought you and the rest of the town would like to get back to normal as soon as possible, and us hanging around wouldn't be any help with that," Rio said, smiling back.

Ariel nodded her head understandingly.

"By the way," Rio said, "has Lieutenant-Inquisitor Sir Charles Finley left yet?"

"Oh yes," Ariel laughed. "He left late last night... very ashen faced, I can tell you."

"Wonder how he's going to explain this one to his superiors," Rio laughed. "Wasting the local sheriff's time... won't do much for his promotion chances,

that's for sure."

Ariel also laughed. She came over and hugged Rio and then Zyssa. As she did so, her eyes misted over. She stepped back and looked at her friends, her smile gone. She turned to Rio first.

"Rio... beware of a man who was created from the residue of defeat, disaster and death, for he will seek to destroy you... and also be knowledgeable that the warrior who was born of the union of ice and sea has taken an interest in you and stalks your path, if not in person then in spirit. Also be wary of she who is a friend and yet not a friend, for she will unwittingly lead you into great danger."

This cryptic and ominous warning given, she turned to Zyssa. "Zyssa... you must beware of a man who lays claims to two titles and seeks yet more, for he will desire you and will destroy if he cannot possess. Be knowledgeable that your path is also stalked, though your stalker is much nearer to you than Rio's. There is also a third shadow around you... you must beware, for she who was the daughter of the green now is daughter of the black."

This said, she laid her hands on both of their shoulders. "Both of you... something is coming... it comes through the vast emptiness... it comes through all realms. I can hear its wing beats - they are distant but drawing closer... and also the sound of the wailing and tears of those it has already encountered... for all that it sees, it destroys."

Ariel closed her eyes tight for a few moments and then opened them once more. She looked at them, her eyes once more clear.

"I'm sorry..." she said. "Sometimes I get these visions - please don't ignore them and please be careful!"

Rio smiled. "We will be, Ariel, and thank you for the warnings - we'll be on our guard."

Zyssa was unsure how to take her individual warnings; two of them had hit a little too close to home, but at the same time she was grateful to Ariel. She shrugged off her misgivings, smiled and hugged Ariel again.

"Goodbye, Ariel... I hope we'll meet again sometime," she said. "Under much better circumstances."

Ariel laughed. "Yes, me too, Zyssa... but for now, farewell and fair chance, my friend."

Zyssa smiled. "Farewell and fair chance to you too, Ariel," she replied, before mounting her horse.

Rio bowed to Ariel before mounting his horse. The two Rangers headed off back to Dunshelm to give their report on the mission to Treguard and Calwain. Ariel watched them go until she couldn't make them out anymore. She then turned and walked back through town to her office to make out her own report on the investigation.

Glameldal slowly awakened to a new day, and village life began to return to its normal, quiet, sleepy self.

THE END

**But Rio and Zyssa will Return in Issue 67 of The Eye Shield,
in their next thrilling adventure...**

DRAGONCLAW
By Ricky Temple

REMEMBER HER?

Series 4. Level 2.

GUNDRADA THE SWORD MISTRESS

Gundrada has often been criticised for being entirely one-dimensional and overly goofy, and while I don't exactly disagree with this viewpoint, I've always quite enjoyed her as a character nonetheless. I think the fact that all of Gundrada's appearances are strikingly (some would say disappointingly) similar is more to do with her total confinement on level two in series 4 than it is to do with Samantha Perkins' skills as an actress. As Rosey pointed out to me quite recently, Samantha actually does a very good job of striking up amusing conversations with dungeoneers as she accompanies them through the level, and I'd say she does pretty much everything she can with the limited material she is given to work with.

As every TES reader should know, I have a tremendous fondness for series 4, despite the undeniable fact that it is slow, repetitive and a bit of a coast most of the time. Taking these mitigating circumstances into account, I think Gundrada adds quite a lot to the show, notwithstanding the limited parameters in which she is forced to work. Yes, there is literally nothing more to her than swinging her sword around and guiding the dungeoneer around level two in a suitably goofy manner, but I think Samantha Perkins made the most of this situation, confining as it must have been. Gundrada and Alistair, for example, make a great double-act (I always enjoy the "maidens shouldn't fight with swords" exchange in particular) while her attempts to coax a bit of liveliness and gumption out of Simon always bring a smile to my lips.

Perhaps some attempt was made at times to vary Gundrada's appearances (putting her in the stocks instead of the pillory, for example) but the content of every single one is pretty much the same, however you cut it. This is true of series 4 as a whole, of course, as it really does suffer from being a transition series - in terms of production, style and underlying plot - but nevertheless, I've always found plenty to enjoy in this series, including Gundrada, and I hope that - one day - someone else will admit to enjoying

her too!

KNIGHTMARE LOCATIONS

Corfe Castle, Wareham, Dorset

Location: Corfe Castle Village, near Wareham, Dorset.

AKA: An entrance to level two.

Series featured in: 6.

This picture was taken by me, Jake Collins, in August 2010.

Corfe Castle was used twice during series 6 as a level two start point. Smirkenorff landed Sumayya and Sofia here.



Next Issue: Orford Castle, Suffolk.

TOP 35 KIDS' TV VILLAINS (Part Four)

By Ricky Temple

20. Baron Silas Greenback (Danger Mouse):

The toad criminal mastermind and arch-nemesis of the "world's greatest secret agent" Danger Mouse, Baron Silas Greenback - aided by his henchman (or hench-crow) Stiletto - was the perennial threat to world safety in the world of Danger Mouse. A criminal genius, Greenback was always coming up with new, elaborate and fiendish plots to either conquer the world or extort its governments, or to bring about the destruction of Danger Mouse. However, the crafty secret agent often played on the Baron's sizeable ego to foil his schemes and come out on top.

19. Zartan (G.I. Joe):

One of G.I. Joe's most devious foes, this mercenary terrorist - who frequently worked for Cobra Commander - caused the Joes a lot of trouble during the original Sunbow cartoon series. A master of sabotage, subterfuge and kidnapping, Zartan possessed the ability to transform his own physical features using a combination of holographic techniques and genetic enhancements, as well as normal disguise techniques, and this - combined with his ability to perfectly mimic another people's voices - made him a very difficult foe to track down and foil.

Zartan was also the leader of a biker gang called The Dreadknoks, which included his brother and sister, Zandar and Zarana. However, by and large this group lacked its leader's brains and finesse, which meant they were used solely as brute force. Zartan was severely lacking in courage when it came to a fair fight; he was in fact the most cowardly of all the major COBRA agents. Zartan much preferred to fight from a position of superior strength or with an unfair advantage. If he lost this or the odds were evened up, he was prone to immediately turn tail and run.

18. Thunderstick (Bravestarr):

Thunderstick was one of Tex Hex's main henchmen in the Kerium Bunch. A cybernetic gunslinger, he often provided the firepower in Tex Hex's schemes to drive the settlers off New Texas at the behest of the demonic Stampede. Unlike the majority of Hex's henchmen, who were anthropomorphic animals or mutants, Thunderstick, it appeared, was purely robotic, with his left hand being a blaster.

However, it appeared that some of his wires were crossed as Thunderstick was constantly breaking into static and repeating himself when he was talking, and his vision was always breaking up. Also, his intelligence was not very high and he frequently ended up falling into his own traps or being outwitted by Marshal Bravestarr and his deputies.

17. Trap-Jaw (He-Man and the Masters of the Universe):

One of Skeletor's original Evil Warriors, Trap-Jaw was one of the first villains that He-Man faced (in the pilot episode, Diamond Ray of Disappearance) and also one of the last villains he faced (in his last appearance, in the She-Ra episode Attack on the Hive).

Trap-Jaw was described as being a "wizard of weaponry" and was frequently developing new weapons for himself and the other Evil Warriors. Trap Jaw had a bunch of cybernetic features on his body, the two biggest being that his whole right arm had been replaced with a cybernetic implant that allowed him to attach an unlimited number of weapons and gadgets, and that his lower jaw was a fearsome metal trap that could bite through both metal and rock.

16. The Bogeyman (The Real Ghostbusters):

One of only three ghosts/supernatural creatures to (or at least to attempt to) terrorise the Real Ghostbusters. He was also the entity who was responsible for Egon Spengler first taking an interest in the supernatural.

He fed on the fear and terror of the children he frightened. He made two appearances during the run of the show. In his first appearance he was haunting the wardrobe of two children, who called in the Ghostbusters.

Egon, remembering the Bogeyman scaring him as a child, took the job personally. However, due to him not being a ghost (in the conventional sense) the Ghostbusters' proton packs were ineffective against him, so they were forced to settle for trapping him in his own dimension instead.

This worked for a good while, until Egon found himself hanging off a tall building. This situation provoked such terror in Egon that it enabled the Bogeyman to feed off it and become strong enough to escape. He kidnapped the junior Ghostbusters to draw the Real Ghostbusters into a confrontation. However, this time the Ghostbusters had worked out how to alter their proton packs so that they worked on him, and the Bogeyman found himself zapped, trapped and deposited in the containment unit.

KIDS' TV SHOWS I GREW UP WITH

Focus on: Hey Arnold!

Original Broadcast Run: September 1996 - December 2002.

UK TV Channel: ITV1.

In my opinion, Hey Arnold! is, in every conceivable sense of the word, the best cartoon that has ever been shown on CITV. Rosey was the one who first got interested in this show, and I came to realise how good it was after I'd watched a few episodes that she'd recorded on video. I was going through mid to late secondary school when the show was broadcast, so I was undoubtedly a little older than its target audience, although there's so much about Hey Arnold! that appeals to older viewers that it has a fairly dedicated online community even now, very much like Nightmare!

I found the trials of school life increasingly difficult to cope with as I went through my SATs, GCSEs and then A-levels, but Hey Arnold! was always a source of great joy and comfort to me, very much as Nightmare had been

earlier in my school career! But why did I like the show so much? I'm not sure I can put it into words, really. Great characters (one in particular) combined with witty writing, engaging locations and scenarios, and suitably amusing/poignant/thought-provoking subject matter (depending on the nature of the episode) is probably the best way I can find to describe it. Hey Arnold! was created by Craig Bartlett, brother-in-law of Matt Groening, who of course created The Simpsons! (Craig is married to the real-life Lisa.)

Like many similar cartoons, Hey Arnold! chronicled the adventures of the titular character and his friends and family ("the gang" kinda thing) but this one is done so much better and has so much more to it than any other, in my opinion. I can think of two major advantages it has over shows like Rugrats and The Simpsons, both to do with the voice acting side of things. Firstly, the cast would all gather together in one studio at the same time to record the dialogue for each episode (which is not as common a practice as you might expect with American cartoons) thus facilitating more convincing interplay between the characters. Secondly, all the kids in the show were voiced by real kids, which always sounds better than having adults do it, convincing as their efforts may be.

So, the titular character - Arnold (we never found out his surname, although the fans think they know what it is) was a small kid with a giant heart, and (at least initially) a giant capacity for daydreaming. He had yellow hair, a tiny blue hat and a football shaped head - or, to us, a rugby ball shaped head! He spent his time helping out everyone in the neighbourhood with their various emotional, practical and financial problems (something he did more and more as the series progressed) as well as playing baseball, going to the cinema and generally hanging out with his friends (something he did less and less as the series progressed). He lived in an old boarding house in a rundown neighbourhood of an unspecified American city (later revealed to be named Hillwood) with his paternal grandparents and a horde of boarders, all of whom were exceptionally weird in different ways.

I remember wondering when I first watched the show, as I'm sure many viewers did, why Arnold didn't seem to have any parents. We later found out

- in a very touching episode entitled Parents' Day - that Arnold's mum and dad were philanthropic adventurers of international repute who had gone missing in Central America some years earlier. Despite the fact that Arnold's feelings about his parents (or lack of parents, perhaps) were very rarely referred to on the show, the climax of the whole series was supposed to chronicle Arnold's quest to find his missing relatives, although we never actually got to see this, for reasons that I will mention later.

In theory, Arnold was the main character of the show - that's why his name is in the title! However, as it turned out, he was one of two main characters, and the second one is that particular character I mentioned earlier who made the show worth watching. Helga Pataki was secretly in love with Arnold. She went to great lengths to hide the fact by being mean to him, and to everybody else; consequently she was widely feared and not well liked. Beneath her hostile exterior, though, Helga was as virtuous and soft-hearted as Arnold, but her home environment was both neglectful and destructive, causing the less desirable aspects of her personality to come to the fore. But through her secret love for Arnold, and the things it made her do, we got to know the real Helga - the one that no one else saw, and the one that quickly became by far the strongest and most compelling character in the show.

Watching the show's first season, you might be forgiven for thinking that Helga is nothing more than an obsessive stalker, but towards the end of that season there is a Christmas special (imaginatively entitled Arnold's Christmas) in which Helga does something rather wonderful for one of the boarders (from Arnold's boarding house) who has a special reason to feel sad at Christmastime. This great and selfless act does not directly benefit either herself or Arnold, but she does it purely because she thinks he's great, and I think that's rather wonderful. As the show goes on, Helga comes into the limelight more and more, and we get to understand her and sympathise with her to a greater and greater degree. This culminates in a season four episode entitled Helga on the Couch (which is probably my favourite episode) in which Helga has a revealing chat with a psychologist and Arnold hardly appears at all!

Of course, some of Helga's best scenes do feature her acting like an obsessive stalker, a frame of mind she always slips into when Arnold turns his romantic attentions towards another girl, be it the dazzling older girl Ruth, the sweetly delightful farm girl Lila, or the man-eating beach bunny Summer. Does Arnold ever turn his romantic attentions towards Helga herself, I hear you ask. Well, it's not a simple question to answer. During the course of the series, Arnold comes to realise first that Helga is not the unpleasant brat she seems at first to be, then that she is actually rather selfless and moralistic, and then (arguably) that there is a connection between the two of them - certainly the fact that Arnold has a lengthy dream in season five that features a pleasant version of Helga as his own idea of his ideal girlfriend is very telling! Of course, Helga does actually confess her secret to Arnold in the end, but we'll come back to that in a bit...

I don't think it would be fair to say that Helga usurped Arnold as the main character of the show, but she certainly became as main as him, and I think she is definitely the strongest, most fleshed-out character in this cartoon or indeed in any cartoon! I am certain that the voice we hear by far the most during the show's whole run is that of the brilliant Francesca Marie Smith as Helga, and this is certainly no bad thing! Perhaps Arnold does have more lines than Helga, but thanks to the fact that he had four different voice actors over the years, Franny must have racked up way more screen time (or voiceover time) than anyone else!

Arnold's first voice was provided by Toran Caudell, and he brought by far the most to the character in my opinion. He has a very interesting and very appealing voice, and I think Arnold's character lost a lot of its suaveness and inscrutability when Toran was replaced, which was a shame. Phillip Van Dyke, Spencer Klein and Alex Linz all did perfectly well, but they never managed to recapture that original Arnold-ness, sadly. Also, the fact that Arnold's actor was changed so many times during the series creates a very strange effect if you watch the whole thing through, which I did recently - Arnold clearly and indisputably breaks his voice on three separate occasions! It doesn't just get deeper and then higher again - it actually breaks three times! Poor

old Arnold, there must be something very strange going on with his voicebox!

I want to mention briefly the other kids in Arnold's class, who all had several character-based episodes of their own. The young voice actors did some excellent work bringing these characters to life, and making them important parts of the show, which really was mostly about Arnold and Helga! Gerald Johanssen (Jamil W Smith) was Arnold's best friend, and had a lot of trouble with his abusive big brother Jamie O and his annoying little sister Timberley. Phoebe Heyerdahl (Anndi L McAfee) was Helga's best friend and stooge, who put herself under a lot of pressure academically and was clearly just as much in need of a psychologist as Helga was!

Harold Berman (Justin Shenkarow) was big, dumb and awkward, and also very insecure, so there was some good characterisation from him. Sid (Sam Gifaldi) got into lots of fixes by constantly jumping in at the deep end. Stinky Petersen (whose family members were all named Stinky too) was a seemingly simple yokel with hidden depths... and apparently he was secretly a vampire! Rhonda Lloyd (Olivia Hack) was your classic spoiled rich girl (her father called her "Princess", as did Helga, but not for the same reason) who of course wasn't as bad as she seemed, although her hidden depths were very hidden! Nadine (Lauren Robinson) loved bugs but disapproved of her best friend Rhonda's superficial and snobby ways. Eugene (Christopher J Castile, Jarret Lennon, Blake Ewing) was the worst jinx in the world, and spent most of his time in hospital. And Curly (Adam Wylie) was wonderfully, delightfully crazy and somewhat psychopathic, and he developed an obsessive crush on Rhonda that even Helga would have disapproved of!

These kids were supposed to be nine (they never turned ten, despite the fact that they were in the Fourth Grade [Year Five to us] for so long) but actually they consistently acted like they were in their early to mid teens, chiefly thanks to the show going off in a very different direction after its early, more innocent episodes. (In some episodes, Harold was thirteen and had been held back a few years, but in others, he was nine as well. There is a rather knowing reference to this inconsistency in a season four episode entitled Weighing Harold, when Harold decides to go on a weight-loss cruise

for boys aged between eight and fourteen.) The kids' constant acting above their age culminated in the theatrically released movie of 2002 (entitled *Hey Arnold: The Movie*) where Arnold and Gerald don Men in Black costumes and Batman-style utility belts to save the entire neighbourhood from being redeveloped into a giant mall.

After five seasons and one hundred episodes, the show was supposed to come to an end with a movie. Originally this was going to be *Arnold Saves the Neighbourhood* (as described above) but it was then decided that this story was too thin and character-lite to be released theatrically, so it would form the final three episodes of season five while a new movie would be made concentrating on Arnold's search for his parents in Central America. However, there was a cock-up. Due to delays with the so-called *Jungle Movie*, *Arnold Saves the Neighbourhood* did end up being released theatrically after all, and it didn't go down too well because it had been made as three separate episodes, and was lacking in characterisation as well as a true sense of epic-ness. As a result, the *Jungle Movie* was cancelled and the story never got finished! The fans are still hoping that Nickelodeon (the company that owns all rights to the show) may change its mind someday, but I'm not holding my breath!

The most annoying thing, of course, is that we'll never get to see what happens with Arnold and Helga! As I mentioned earlier, Helga does get round to confessing her secret to Arnold towards the end of the movie (after he foils her elaborate attempt to help him from afar as the mysterious Deep Voice) and she gives him an enormous sloppy kiss, but we never get to see Arnold's reaction to this new development, as that was supposed to be a big part of the *Jungle Movie*. After his initial surprise, Arnold was supposed to come to terms with his own feelings and surprise Helga with a kiss of his own - and we know this from the lips (or keyboard) of Craig Bartlett himself!

On the one hand, it is quite annoying that we'll never get to see the resolution of this great love story, but on the other hand, Craig apparently had plans to move Arnold down to Central America to live with his newfound parents (which makes no sense, trust me!) and thus keep him away from

Helga for a few years while she had her own spin-off, entitled *The Patakis*, in which her tumultuous relationship with her family (blowhard dad Big Bob, vague and clearly alcoholic mum Miriam, and "perfect" older sister Olga) would be explored further. Much as I like Helga and her family, I'm glad Nick didn't let Craig do that - far better to fill in the gaps in the Arnold and Helga Chronicles oneself, if you ask me!

THE AUDIO PLAY'S THE THING

If you haven't done so already (or even if you have) you really should pop over to <http://dunshelplayers.wordpress.com/> in the very near future and listen to the latest audio play, which is...

WHEN FIVE TRIBES GO TO WAR (Released August-October 2010):

Written and edited by **Martin Odoni**.

Featuring **Helen Becconsall** as Malice, **Jake Collins** as Hordriss the Confuser and Gumboil, **Rosey Collins** as Morghanna and Mistress Goody, **Adam Hall** as Sir Hugh de Wittless, **Martin Harder** as Mogdred, **Andy Marshall** as Pickle, **Martin Odoni** as Aedric/Lord Fear, Fatilla the Hun and the Wedding Announcer, **Russell "Ruzl" Odoni** as Treguard, **Matt Richings** as Merlin, and **Ricky Temple** as Skarkill.

Perhaps (over the past twenty years) you've sometimes found yourself wondering just how the huge change in the structure of the Opposition that took place between *Knightmare's* fourth and fifth series, and the complete handover of power that went with it, came about. *5 Tribes* offers explanations for this and for much, much more - just what did happen to Mogdred, Morghanna and Malice in the end, how and why did Pickle become Treguard's assistant, and what exactly were the circumstances surrounding that famous altercation between Hordriss and Sir Hugh that resulted in the errant knight finding himself compelled to rescue anyone he should happen

to meet? As you listen to the story unfold over four parts, you'll learn Martin's take on all this and more.

I have been enjoying the experience of listening to *5Tribes* thanks to the pleasing performances of the actors, as well as Martin's editing skills. Having the play released in four parts was rather a good addition to the listening experience - there was always a cliff-edge to teeter on before the next part reared its head. I was also struck by how seamlessly the whole thing slotted together, and I don't think the lack of a recording studio (i.e. we all recorded our lines at home with Martin's special microphones, unlike with the previous full-length audio drama, *Famous For Retreating*) had any detrimental effect on the play whatsoever. Let's see if Martin agrees with me, shall we?

THE EYE SHIELD: When developing *5Tribes*, were there any continuity problems with *FFR* that you had to sort out?

MARTIN ODONI: There were one or two minor question marks meshing Aedric's story from *FFR* with the expansion of it in *5Tribes*. One thing I'd like to tinker with in *FFR* 'after-the-fact' - but must resist the temptation to do so - is to remove the bit where Treguard says that he didn't know how Merlin really died. His complete ignorance of Aedric seems a little hard to credit in hindsight, and *5Tribes* doesn't really help in that regard.

Also, Lord Fear's reference to building the Dreadnort in his 'quarters' is perhaps slightly contradicted by *5Tribes*, although it's not much of a stretch to assume that by 'quarters', Fear meant a secret hideout. I felt I had to set those scenes away from Merlin's presence, because if Aedric had been dabbling in techno-sorcery right under his master's nose, it becomes a bit doubtful that it would take so long for him to get caught.

This play features a lot of cast members. How easy was it to get a full cast together (not literally together, of course!) this time, and how long did it take to gather in all the recordings?

It was kind of the reverse of previous experiences, in that more people kept adding themselves to the cast, and so we went from the usual niggle of

everyone having to double-up to almost not having enough parts to go around.

As usual, there were a few drop-outs that caused the numbers to swing back the other way, and one or two parts had to be reassigned because of difficulties the performers had with portraying the voices. (This is why I wound up doing three voices when I was originally only meant to play Aedric.) But numbers never dropped to a bad level. Many of the recordings were in within a few weeks. Some of the recordings arrived very late in the process, literally just days before the date of release.

Merlin fans (like me) might not like to think of Merlin as a totally useless, dodderly old fool at times when they are not listening to (and enjoying) your plays. What do you think of Merlin on the original Nightmare - any good points?

I'm afraid that the dominant characteristic of the Nightmare portrayal of Merlin is, by a wide margin, his amnesia. It's therefore difficult to view him as anything other than a dodderly old fool. When you're an impressionable, credulous pre-teen struck half-dumb with terror at the cartoon horrors unfolding on-screen, he can be a reassuring presence, an oasis of goodness and safety in a desert of darkness and devilry. On the other hand, when you're grown up and you can plainly see that everything happening before your eyes is in an environment of garishly-painted hand-drawings, and moving at the pace of a lame carthorse, you cease being too scared to notice that he's really just a long-exhausted TV stereotype - the wizened-yet-absent-minded old grandfather.

But yes, he did have his strengths, if you had the patience to keep your eye out for them. Many of his words of wisdom were real pearls, e.g. "Never be afraid to ask for help... it can be found in the most unexpected places," "Something worth having is worth earning," etc. And, early on at least, he was more morally attentive than any other character, which was an interesting disposition in such a hostile environment as the Dungeon. These are positive aspects that do come across in *5 Tribes* far more than in *FFR*, especially in the wedding scene, and the early 'conference' with Treguard and Hordriss.

According to *5Tribes*, Hordriss and Goody were having a spat during Dickon's quest. Had Hordriss put Goody under a spell to do some sweeping for him while he and Dickon were making their pact?

Oh, well the explanation for this is obvious! Why, I'm surprised (though not at all irritated, of course - *twitch-twitch*) that you bothered to ask! Naturally enough, Goody initially felt very guilty at being so rude to an honest gentlemen, so she offered to meet him to smooth things over. As a peace offering, Goody offered to sweep up for him, and Hordriss accepted the offer to show there were no hard feelings. This was when Dickon walked in. But after he left, and with the job half-done, she got frustrated and walked out, grumbling that Hordriss was an ugly, beardy-wierdy slave-driver. And of course Hordriss became angrier than ever with her, and so the feud resumed. I mean, come on, isn't that all obvious? And no, my eyelid isn't fluttering on an involuntary reflex.

Rough translation: Oops. My excuse for the cock-up is... ummmmmm, nope sorry, can't think of an excuse.

How do you feel about the finished play?

You can really find your ears turning word-deaf when mixing and editing these plays. Hearing the same words, music and sounds over and over as you desperately, intricately, try to get every single scrap of noise into the optimum spot gradually makes you sick. So naturally, by the time I'd finished mixing this *****two-hour-long***** marathon, I was exhausted with hearing it. Most of it ceased to mean anything to me as I was listening - the voice recordings were no longer words in my ears, they'd degenerated into mere sounds!

But the day after I published Part 4 was so unseasonably warm and bright that I decided I might as well go for a long stroll in the park. (Believe it or not, Salford *does* have parks - in fact, with MediaCity's birth on the horizon, the local council is presently trying to convince everyone that the city is sixty per cent greenbelt, which is closer to the truth than you might think.) And, in spite of feeling sick of the sound of it, I copied the play onto my

MP3 player so I could finally hear the whole thing back in full while I walked.

And I was blown away by it.

Not to brag, but I genuinely was astonished at, and very proud of, how good it was. I was expecting to hear lots of muffled lines, grinding distortion, ill-selected effects and amateurish performances from start-to-finish - I'd been listening to every line so closely for months that I was noticing every tiniest bad nuance in them, no matter how subtle, and because I was hearing them out of order, I could no longer put them into a coherent context, keeping me from seeing any merit. But now that everything was slotted into place, I was amazed to find the whole two-hour block atmospheric, exciting, and on the whole, tremendously well played by the cast. Every few minutes I caught myself thinking, "*I mixed this?!? I wrote this script?!? Wow! There's hope for me yet!*"

It's probably overlong by about fifteen minutes, but even so, *5 Tribes* is *easily* better than *FFR* in my view. *FFR* was about the right length, but everything else about it was slightly wide of the mark. There were mitigating reasons for that, but that doesn't make it less true. It wasn't in stereo, the performances were a bit raw and unpractised, the effects were limited, some of the dialogue sorely needed redrafting to make it less technical and less 'smartass-y', and there were several weak plot contrivances in the script that I wouldn't dream of resorting to today. Lord Fear's maturator machine, for instance, is such a *deus ex MacGuffin* that if Russell T. Davies had thought it up for an episode of *Dr Who*, I'd be the first to lambaste him for it.

By contrast, despite being three-quarters of an hour longer, the script for *5 Tribes* is in fact far tighter. There were originally two other scenes that I cut from it (NOTE: this is why there are 44 scenes in the script but it ends on Scene 46) and vast swathes of too-witty-to-be-real blah were deleted, between the second and third drafts in particular - imagine how long the play would have been if I hadn't removed all that! Also, the plot is more coherent, and less dependent on implausibility or 'writer's-short-cuts'.

And the performances, at the risk of brown-nosing, were very fine. They were more confident, more settled and largely less hurried than what the original team did back in 2005. There were some faults - Ricky's and Martin H's lines came through a bit muffled, and Matt fluffed a few words here and there, but everybody got the attitude and intonation of their characters *exactly* where they needed to be. Martin H was absolutely Mogdred from start to finish, blustering and proud, threatening and mocking. Ruzl is now so settled into his Russell Crowe version of Treguard that he could have done it in his sleep. Helen was superb as Malice, especially in the final part - she's already an experienced stage actress, set to turn professional in the near future, and you can certainly see why. Rosey followed up her fine cameos in *Bolt to the Head* and *Yes, Dungeon Master* with great aplomb, once again showing what a rare, versatile gem she is as a voice actress, playing two extensive, very contrasting roles and mastering both of them in no time at all. Jake was even more like Gumboil than Gumboil ever was, while also subtly modifying his portrayal of Hordriss from the one in *YDM* to make him seem similarly pompous, but far less smarmy. Ricky, after a nervous first take, nailed Skarkill's voice supremely on redoing his lines (and his and Jake's voices complemented each other beautifully during Scene 2). And Matt took his performances as Merlin from the old RPG and fashioned them into something a bit less dream-like, also adding a very slight sing-song quality to his delivery. His Merlin remains every bit as mysterious as it was in the RPG, but he has given him more substance.

It perhaps missed the elegant Scottish tones that Alec Downs, Clare Speedie or Susan McPherson might have brought to the table if they'd been available again, and it must be said that it would have been very interesting to hear Eleanor Booth-Davey or Emma Venvell, with their husky Oxford-English-Rose voices, playing the sorceresses (as they were originally cast to do back in 2007). But I can't fault at all what we got in their place.

All in all, yes, this has far exceeded my expectations. Given that we had to resort to making it without the benefit of a studio, I was long anticipating a struggle just to get it up to the level of *FFR*. That we've managed, in my

opinion, to make it into something substantially better is a huge credit to all who took part. Proud of you all, guys, love the lot of ya!
(I could be wrong, readers, but I think he likes it!)

What are your immediate plans (if any) for making more audio plays?

There may be another comic vignette at Christmas, although the team will need to put their heads together fairly soon to suggest what it should be. Beyond that, there are a few basic ideas in place for larger projects in the longer term. But whether any of them will actually get made is now in some doubt.

THE FORBIDDEN FEAR

Chapter 6: The End of the Beginning

By Chris Lunn

Treguard strode from the room, anxious to be off. Remembering the Sword and Shield, he turned to Pickle.

"Give me those, elf, if you want us to get back to the castle in one piece." Pickle reverently handed them to Treguard.

"Come quickly, time's a-wasting," said Treguard.

Pickle and Treguard made their way back to the surface of the Forbidden Level. Navigating entirely by the light from the tip of the sword, they emerged in the room of doors. Finding the entrance quickly, Pickle turned to Treguard.

"Master, it's this one, but I know not how to open it from this side."

"A little magic, I think, may be useful," Treguard explained. "Spellcasting: U-N-L-O-C-K!"

The door creaked open, revealing the two guards Pickle had met earlier.

"We are not your enemies, they are in the Dungeon!" Treguard shouted, holding the Shield aloft.

Hurrying past him, the guards descended into the bowels of the castle.

Treguard pointed a finger and the door swung shut and locked itself.

"That should keep them busy for a while," he grunted.

Treguard and Pickle dashed across the walkway, arriving at the point at which Pickle had entered.

"No escaping that way," Pickle observed sadly.

An arrow shot through the sky, narrowly missing them both.

"The guards in the tower have spotted us, Master!" Pickle exclaimed.

Silencing Pickle with a look, Treguard held the Sword high above his head and began to swing it in an arc.

"Portal, Justice demands and you will answer, show yourself now!" Treguard intoned commandingly.

A glimmer appeared in front of them and the portal rose to its full magnificence.

"Password!" said the stone gargoyle at its summit.

"Whatever I want it to be!" Treguard replied.

Realising what he was dealing with, the gargoyle simply replied, "Fair enough," and flew away. Pickle and Treguard dived into the portal just as it began to shrink back into the void. An arrow landed belatedly at the spot where they had both been standing.

Emerging in level three, Treguard immediately spied the rusted frightknight.

"I see you met Hordriss, old friend."

"Yes, Master."

"Did you find Merlin?"

"Yes and no. I saw him in a spyglass trying to reason with Aesandre and then she... she..."

"Go on," said Treguard.

"He's dead, Master. She managed to use her magic to force him into a bottomless pit."

Treguard closed his eyes and bowed his head.

"Noble Merlin, your sacrifice will not be in vain, for this day we will triumph!"

Rising, he turned.

"Stay here while I pay Icy-Knickers a visit, Pickle."

He turned and strode into the portal to her frozen land.

"Oh Master, I do hope you know what you are doing," exclaimed Pickle, wringing his hands.

"AESANDRE!" Treguard's voice echoed off the ice-ridden walls.

"Treguard, what a surprise, that elf of yours freed you after all!" she cooed.

"That is not important, but what you did to Merlin, My Lady, is."

"That silly old man, what concern is it of yours?" she snapped.

"He was a great friend, and a keeper of all that was good."

"He was nothing more than a hindrance to my plans, as are you!"

With that the sorceress descended on Treguard, spewing ice out of her hands. Treguard pulled up a deflective shield.

"By all the powers of good in the Dungeon, you will be bound forever to this realm, never to move beyond it or touch those outside it! Should you break this magic, you will be sent to the Forbidden Level forever!" Treguard thundered, raising both hands and bringing them together with a clap.

He turned away and made for the portal.

"Treguard, you coward, come back and fight!"

"Another time," he replied, throwing a look over his shoulder. "There are many more pressing matters I need to attend to."

His last words hung in the frosty air as he disappeared from sight. Returning to her cold throne, Aesandre muttered:

"Another time, yes, Lord Treguard, and that will be your last!"

He re-entered the clearing and found Pickle hiding in a tree.

"Come on, Pickle, we haven't got time for hide and seek. The phase shift approaches and Lord Fear still controls the castle."

Closing his eyes, he intoned the spell needed to take them back to the castle.

"Spellcasting: H-O-M-E-W-A-R-D."

Both Pickle and Treguard vanished as silently as they had come.

Both man and elf tumbled out of the void onto the stone floor of the castle yard. Rising quickly, they hurried from the room.

"Now is the time to strike, Pickle. They are frozen while the phase shift

takes place; I just need the correct spell."

Entering the spell room, he grabbed a book from the top shelf.

"Here it is. To fix the hole in the rift, I need to cast RESEAL." Looking further in the book he grunted, annoyed. "However, the breach will not heal entirely and can be re-broken if all the quest objects are brought to any sealed within."

"Oh well, it's better than nothing."

"One last task, my friend, and this will all be over."

"Yes, Master," said Pickle.

They dashed from the room, heading for the quest room.

Entering the quest room, they found Lord Fear and Skarkill almost completely frozen by the shift. Almost immediately, both Dungeon Master and elf felt its effects upon them.

"Spellcasting: R-E-S-E-A-L," stuttered Treguard, as he started to slow and freeze.

"No-o-o-o-o-o!" uttered Fear, as he and Skarkill disappeared.

At that moment the phase shift finished, and the link between our world and theirs was complete.

"Ooh, nasty," grimaced Treguard darkly. "Right, before any humans arrive, we need to send these objects to some very safe places. Spellcasting: D-I-S-M-I-S-S!"

The objects disappeared.

"Where have they gone, Master?" queried Pickle.

"They are safe, Pickle. Do not worry for even if somehow Lord Fear finds them, the fourth will remain here in the safest place possible."

"Thank goodness that's over," said Pickle.

"Thank you for all you have done, young elf, your bravery will never be forgotten by any who inhabit the Dungeon, good and bad."

"Thank you, Master, for giving me the strength to do it."

"Now sleep, my friend, for on the morrow lies the start of our dungeoneers' new quests."

The following day, Treguard entered the quest room. He noticed with some irritation that the fire was lower than usual.

"Dragon's breath, but someone's let the fire burn low and if it should burn out, you wouldn't believe what would crawl in here and make itself comfortable! Pickle, where are you, you pesky elf?"

The Adventure continues...

ROSS "RAVEN'S EYE" THOMPSON IMPROVIEW

With Jake "Eyeshield" Collins

JAKE COLLINS: So, Ross, as a third generation Knightmare fan - the first generation being the ones who watched it first on CITV and the second on the Sci-Fi Channel - tell us about when you first discovered Knightmare on Challenge.

ROSS THOMPSON: Well I just remember watching Challenge one day, because I was watching Challenge quite a lot back then because there were some good shows on it, and I saw Knightmare and I was drawn in, and... I think it was a Series 5 episode, it probably was, and then... I dunno, I just remember watching it regularly at half-seven each night, every day, and looking forward to it. I can't remember it that well, but...

So it really drew you in, just as it did with so many of us back when it was first on telly. What sort of hooks do you think it has that appeal to young medieval fantasy enthusiasts?

Well it's just got everything you need to be a fantasy and kind of medieval-ish... it's got all the typical characters there, it's got the adventure and the excitement, and it's kind of got the mix with a gameshow as well, so...

Yes, what a winning formula that comes together to make, doesn't it?

Yeah.

Tell us about some of your favourite characters.

Favourite characters, right... there's so many! I'll start with Merlin - Merlin I think always was portrayed very well, and is always how I imagine Merlin if I hear that name said...

Me too!

He's kind of... dodderly and forgetful, but very wise and clever at the same time, very powerful, and he was funny as well, he's just very well portrayed... Motley I also enjoy, long-running character and he's funny sometimes, interacts well with other characters... Folly I also enjoyed, early appearances with him... Lord Fear's also very good, scary but comedic at the same time.

Yes, he pulls that off very well, doesn't he?

Yeah.

And it's easy to become fond of the characters who are around for longer as you get to know them, so that's why a lot of my favourite characters are longer-running ones as well. I didn't used to think I particularly liked Hordriss or Sylvester Hands, but they're in it so much...

Yeah, I like them too.

Well, characters are all very well, but what would the show be without good teams?

Mmm, they add a lot to it, don't they?

Teams who are good to watch, teams who are good at the game... what are some of your favourites?

Julie's team from Series 7 is one of my favourites, because they're genuinely having fun, they communicate well, their guiding was good, they were generally a good team.

I think they achieve the ultimate balance between being a very good team and getting into the quest and having a good time and obviously enjoying themselves a lot.

Yeah, I would agree with that.

And I think teams like Dickon's team err a bit too much on the side of being very good but not too interesting.

Mmm... I did like Dickon's team because they were good, but... they were all right, they weren't boring, but... you did see them having fun sometimes...

They're a bit flat some of the time, aren't they?

Yeah, I see what you mean.

Any other faves, do they tend to be the longer quests? They do with me.

Yeah, they're the ones that kind of stand out, and usually the better teams are the ones that last longer anyway, so...

Yes. So if you could nominate a second favourite team after Julie's, which one?

Oooh, I really don't know... I quite like Julian's team, the way they were kind of... that scene with the Medusa's one of my favourites.

They're fun, aren't they? They have some good scenes.

Yeah.

Okay, they're your second favourite, then, we'll accept that.

Well, I'm not sure, but...

Yes, it's set in stone now.

Okay, fine.

But of course, equally, we have some very, very bad teams, which can provide some great fun Nightmare moments. Any of those you'd like to tell us about?

How about Akash?

Yes, that's the classic, isn't it?

Yes. It's enjoyable to watch, though, because they're so... unsure about what to do a lot of the time, and... take the poison because they think it'll protect them, but they didn't read the Adventurers' Code properly, obviously.

Yes, and I think perhaps the opposite of that is Douglas's team in Series 3, who are equally as bad but they're not very interesting. What you can say in Akash's favour is...

That they're interesting *because...*

So they're fun to watch.

I know what you mean.

Having watched all the series on Challenge, not necessarily in the right order and without week-long gaps between the episodes, what are your favourites and least favourites?

Okay, my favourite is either 2 or 3, I can't decide which, because 3 has many improvements on 2, like it's got dwarf tunnels, it's... the kind of graphics are better, the way you're kind of going through rooms and stuff, and... it's hard to explain, but you've got some good new rooms... the thing 2 has over 3 is lots of different characters that're all cut out of Series 3, which is a shame, so because of that I can't decide which I prefer.

Yes, I see exactly where you're coming from there. I used to think I liked Series 2 a lot more than Series 3, but doing commentaries for 3, you can see it really does maintain a good balance between old-style magic and new ideas.

Series 3 was very tough as well... I like Series 7 as well, lots of people don't like it much because it's one of the later series, and I do see... there are lots of things in Series 7 that annoy me like the new helmet and the spells... I just like the second half of the series a lot because it's very exciting.

Of course it's at that point where they'd brought in the wider plots, and the Powers That Be and the Opposition, and that culminates in Bulstrode the troll, you like that element being added to the show?

Yeah... well, yeah, it doesn't eclipse the quest itself. My least favourite has

got to be Series 8... too many changes with not enough time, really... not enough time to add all the stuff, and... there are some good ideas there, it's just a shame they didn't have longer, but... it's a bit of a mish-mash and there're unnecessary changes, like life force and...

It's a jumbled mess, isn't it? Too much change all at once.

Yeah, I think they probably set out all their ideas for the series before they found out they'd only have ten episodes, and so... they didn't want to cut anything out, so they tried to cram it all in, but they should've made some of those cuts, hard though it is to cut your own ideas, but...

You're absolutely right! With the time they had available, they couldn't get it all in and still make a quality series, as was proven! Much as I do think that 2 and 3 are the best in terms of quality, I've always had a huge fondness for Series 4 because it was the first one I recorded, but a lot of people don't like it because it's so different. Which perspective do you sympathise with more?

Well, I'm slap-bang in the middle, I can see how Series 4 is very repetitive in a way - they do try to bring some new things in later on in the series and stuff - and you don't get that so much in Series 5-8, the repetition... and it's immediately after Series 3 and it's taken all outside, which... I don't like all these forests and stuff. You've got the Forest of Dunn in level one and Dunkley Wood in level two, it's a bit much... but I have a fondness for a lot of Series 4, you've still got Merlin there, you've got Mogdred... well, I don't mind Lord Fear coming in, but I like Mogdred too. You've got kind of an atmospheric level three, you've... I dunno, it's just got a nice feel to it, Series 4 in a way.

Yeah, I like the feel to it too. People say - and it's quite true - it's a transition period between the old and new styles, but it has its own identity too, and I like it.

Mmm... but I think there were some changes... changes too many in Series 4.

The eye shield, for instance. Do you think that's generally a good thing or a bad thing?

I'm probably gonna say bad, because I just don't like the way that they're cheated out of guiding the dungeoneer out of the room, it's... it speeds things up I suppose, getting them out, but you see the footage of them being guided by the eye shield, and it doesn't make sense, they say they're being guided by the eye shield, but we've originally been told by Treguard that it will show you where they're going, so it doesn't fit, does it?

Yeah, exactly, it doesn't really make sense and it does make the whole quest more of a coast, less for the team to do, so on the whole I don't think it is a good idea, but I'm so used to it that I don't mind it.

Yeah, I've got used to it too, after seeing it in five series, so... I've seen it a lot, I am used to it and I don't mind it so much, but sometimes you think, God, this is a long sequence!

Yes. That's talking about Knightmare in the past, but of course there have been a couple of attempts to resurrect the show since it finished in 1994, most notably the Knightmare VR pilot. What are your thoughts on that?

Mostly I think VR stands for Very Rubbish!

Yes, me too!

Well, maybe that's exaggerating a tad, but it just spoils... it destroys Knightmare's unique selling point, not having a real dungeoneer in there... everything a hundred per cent controlled by Tim Child and his team... it's not a real person - the advisor is saying scripted lines basically, because the dungeoneer is being controlled... it's kind of scripted... it's just like watching someone playing a computer game.

Exactly, that's the crucial difference, isn't it? There's a big difference between watching someone playing a computer game, and watching someone taking part in this role-play fantasy.

Exactly. And I don't mind the CGI being used to make better rooms, because the rooms in it look really impressive and I don't mind it, but they need to put a real person in them, because that's what makes it exciting, and the characters need to be real too, because otherwise they can't interact very

well.

Yeah. That's why Knightmare itself, I think, is the ultimate format for putting someone in a computer game. You've got your real people and you've got your CG rooms. It doesn't matter that VR starts coming into that, as long as you've still got the real person.

Yeah.

Knightmare's far-reaching popularity and appeal is evident in its foreign versions, from France and Spain, and there was even talk of an American one that never came off...

That would've been interesting because we'd have been able to understand what they were saying.

What do you think of the French and Spanish versions compared to the original?

Well, the original is way better than the French, and the French is way better than the Spanish.

Yeah.

The way the French one - and the Spanish one too, I think, although it's hard to tell what's going on - they're both one team confined to one episode. It destroys the tension in a way, and I think they're just too easy, and that also destroys the tension.

Not having the cliff-hangers like you have in Knightmare - "I know you'll come back next week and see if they win" - that takes a lot away, I think.

Yeah. The French one I don't think is a bad adaptation, you've got the Dungeon Master who's fairly sane, and you've got a dungeon with characters in it and there are obstacles, and it retains a lot of the original idea of the show, but the quests are short and they just keep going when they lose...

Yeah, I think it's a fair enough adaptation of the format, but our version is the ultimate version. The Spanish one, on the other hand,

makes absolutely no sense to me whenever I watch it on YouTube.

Yeah, the Treguard reminds me of Santa... it could be to do with, that version doesn't have subtitles...

Yeah, that's probably something to do with it.

But I don't think we would understand it with subtitles.

They seem to wander in and out of the Great Hall, I don't know what's going on.

Yeah.

What similarities and differences do you think there are between Knightmare and Raven?

Right, well, the similarity is the kind of medieval feel... you've got a bearded host and you've got young kids being inserted into this kind of medieval environment, but on the whole it's fairly different because you've got... the teams are kind of... the warriors are outside as opposed to the dungeoneers and advisors kind of inside this dungeon, and they're kind of competing against each other - except the spin-offs, I suppose - and Knightmare's more team vs. Dungeon as opposed to warriors vs. warriors.

I think Raven appealed to the same thing in me as Knightmare did, all those years ago. You can see, can't you, that they might evoke the same kind of medieval fantasy feelings?

I think that's why I like both of them, but I can understand why people can like one but not the other, because they are very different, and some people think Knightmare's a bit slow and boring, but I definitely don't think that.

Yeah, they're very different in format, and they're separated by several years of TV developments, but I've always thought there's that certain something that does link them, and I think it's the same thing in both of us that they both appeal to.

Yeah.

Another parallel that I draw between Knightmare and Raven is, it starts

off with the impartial host in his medieval fantasy land, and turns into the battle between good and evil.

Yeah... I think... well, Nightmare does this better, I'd say, because it doesn't particularly eclipse the quest. I still probably prefer the team going in and taking on the Dungeon, but it doesn't really make much difference. In Raven, it... it could be worse, but it's just the way they're saying, oh, Nevar's the enemy going into the Last Stand and he's gonna defeat you, when he's not, he's really helping you pick a winner. It doesn't fit in with the whole format of the show... it does with spin-offs because it's a quest against evil, but when you're picking a winner, building an army to face him, it's just ridiculous and it doesn't really fit in.

I'm so glad you've said that, and I do agree with you, Nightmare does pull it off better, because it never becomes the focus of the show, this battle, but I think in Raven it does, and it should be the warriors.

Yeah.

Thank you, Ross, for sharing with us your thoughts about Nightmare.

My pleasure.

POETRY CORNER

Just like the second team of series 6, the second team of series 7 (led by dungeoneer Nicola) spent a long time blundering around level two in losing status, yet they made a convincing enough stab at taking on the Nightmare challenge!

**From Oldham came brave lasses four,
And one a smiling hippo wore!
Sly Hands was pleased with bag of gold,
Romahna, though, was brusque and cold!**

A stone from Sidriss then was earned,
As Nicola her wand returned.
With light in hand, and passage lit,
The girls were scared more than a bit
As Raptor filled their hearts with fear,
But Smirky's fireball burned his rear!
To level two, via valley green,
The wizards' duel was duly seen.
It seemed that Hordriss came off worse,
So Nick agreed to end his curse.
With stick in hand, she found a glass,
So this team did the spikes surpass.
From Rothberry they bought a drink
Which brought back Hordriss from the brink.
A key was given in return,
But then, alas, the team did learn
That Nightsight was the only way
For them to live another day.
The team's mistake was shown up stark
As Nicky perished in the dark.

JAKE'S ART DESK

I drew these pictures during lunchtimes at secondary school when I was inside and bored. Yes, I should have taken the opportunity to catch up on some homework, but this was much more fun! These pictures aren't really any good, of course - I've always been rubbish at drawing! But they kept me amused and I'm rather fond of them. They were all done during the academic year 1996/1997, when I was in Year 9.



MERLIN.

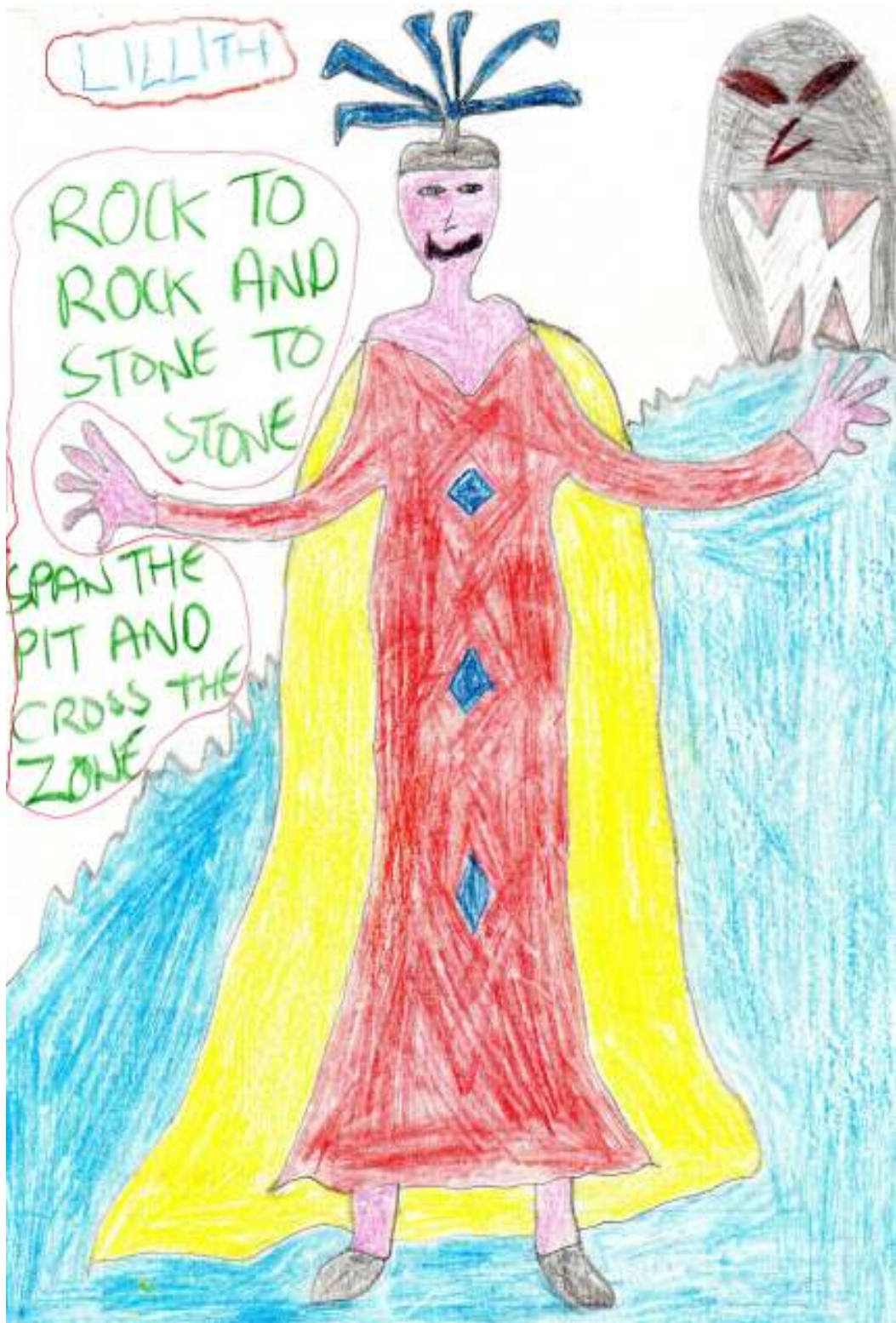


JOHN WOODNUTT

MOGDRED.



By
Sasha Collins
18th October
1996.
12.55pm -
01.20pm.
In Room 11
Sir John
Lewis School
HARPLESS



LILLITH

ROCK TO
ROCK AND
STONE TO
STONE

SPAN THE
PIT AND
CROSS THE
ZONE