



THE EYE SHIELD

Issue 67

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CONTENTS

[Message From Me.](#)

[Remember This?:](#) Combat Chess.

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

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

[Classic Quest:](#) Chris, James, Alex and Tim.

[Dragon Claw:](#) Chapter One.

[Remember Him?:](#) Snapper-Jack.

[Knightmare Locations:](#) Orford Castle, Suffolk.

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

[Kids' TV Shows I Grew Up With:](#) Bravestarr.

[The Audio Play's the Thing:](#) The latest festive offerings.

[Night of the Goblins:](#) Chapter One.

[The Best of the Rest 2011.](#)

[Poetry Corner:](#) Alex II.

[Jake's Art Desk:](#) Folly, Cedric and Gumboil.

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MESSAGE FROM ME

Welcome to the sixty-seventh 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 and Louise Brockhouse.

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 received this e-mail shortly before Christmas, and it made me smile a lot:

What a shame I've only just discovered TES, too late to become a regular contributor! I've really enjoyed reading through all the back issues - the photos taken at the Nightmare Locations are particularly interesting, and I loved trying the Puzzle Pages. Thanks for putting so much effort into the fanzine over the years! If there are any TES readers who don't hang out on the forum, please check out my Lord Fear tribute video at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=75xaxtf-8A8>. I would love to see other fan videos based on Nightmare, so maybe all you creative people could think about making some!

From Annie (aka **Canadanne** from the forum), Poole, Dorset.

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 2. Level 1/2.

COMBAT CHESS

I'm a great fan of Combat Chess. Back in 1988, when I knew what chess was but had no idea what the pieces were called or how they moved, the intricacies of the game must have gone completely over my head (although I did always remember there had been a Nightmare challenge on a chessboard) but watching the videos as a teenager (when I was quite into chess myself) I derived a great deal of excitement from watching the teams get to grips with Combat Chess, even though I knew they were all going to win in the end. This is particularly true of Stuart's team, whose first task after the Wheel of Fate is to play Combat Chess, and they certainly have a tough time of it. Watching this episode on video back in 1999, I was on the edge of my seat and I went through every mental process with the advisors, even though I knew they had to get through because I'd seen the next episode on video three years previously.

As Paul McIntosh tells us in his review of this challenge, there was actually no way the Bishop could have won, as the greater range of movement with the Knight's move would always allow the dungeoneer (eventually) to get to a position where they could step on one of two "exit squares" (by which I mean the three squares that were one Knight's move away from the door) with the Bishop only able to cover one of them at a time. But this does nothing to detract from the tangible sense of tension that the game often creates, and

I always enjoy watching it, even though I know exactly what's going to happen.

Treguard, too, was an enthusiastic fan of *Combat Chess*, and always leaned over the team and talked them through the whole experience, clearly with great enjoyment. Perhaps Hugo Myatt is (or at least was at the time) an avid chess fan; I certainly wouldn't be surprised to learn that he was, taking into account his attitude towards this challenge. It's a great little tension-building brainteaser that fitted in nicely with the lovely atmosphere of *Knightmare's* early years, and always a pleasure to watch!

ADVENTURE TIME

By Andy Marshall, Ricky Temple & Louise Brockhouse

"This constant freezing is starting to give me a real cramp," Treguard heard one of the advisors mutter as temporal disruption once more passed and time turned once more.

"Well, welcome back to reality, team," Treguard said as he settled himself in his chair once more. "Now, let us see if you can help Amy avoid becoming a tasty morsel for Serpenter's large scaly friend, because it's... *Game ON!*"

As soon as these words had passed Treguard's lips, action once more resumed within the otherworldly realm known as *Knightmare*. Amy felt the phase-shift-induced stasis leave her body, however this also meant that Serpenter's giant lizard was also free to move once more, and it immediately snapped at her.

Amy let out a cry of shock and pain as its sharp teeth just missed her right arm but grazed down it, taking a shred of her t-shirt with them and leaving a shallow gash down her arm. Serpenter laughed with evil glee at this, her

foul sniggering resembling a cross between laughing and a reptilian hiss.

"HEISSSHESSSSSS! Now then, dungeoneer, any lasssst requesssts or pleas for mercy?" she sneered. "Not that they'll do you any good," she added with unhidden sadism laced throughout her voice, "they jussst amussse me. I'll give you a few moments to come up with sssssomething."

The advisors were frantically trying to think of something to do when Amy piped up. "Guys, I've still got the scroll. I don't know about you lot but I think this is definitely a moment of dire need!"

This immediately snapped one of the advisors into action. "Amy, open it up!"

Amy did as she was told and then held it up to the eye shield.

"Z... Y... S... S... A! What on earth does that spell?" one of the advisors said blankly.

"Guys, hurry up and figure this out! We've got to call this person's name, remember!" Amy said, starting to panic.

The advisors also began to panic, trying to make sense of the seemingly nonsensical word in front of them. "Zy...ssa - Zyssa!" one of them suddenly figured out. "It has to be pronounced Zyssa!"

At that moment, Serpenter's patience ran out. "Well, dungeoneer, ssssince you won't plead for mercy, I think it'ssss time for my pet to feed."

The giant lizard started bearing down on Amy again.

"Amy, say ZYSSA!" the lead advisor yelled.

"ZYSSA! HELP!" yelled Amy as loudly as she could, just hoping her friends had interpreted the name right.

There was a brief flash of light... but no one appeared.

Serpenter laughed. "No one issss coming to your aid, dungeoneer."

"Don't be so sure of that, you reptilian witch!" a soft but commanding voice said from somewhere behind Serpenter.

"Who-" Serpenter barely had time to utter a sole syllable and turn around in her saddle before she was knocked from it by some manner of spinning flail-like object. Serpenter's fall caused the saddle to slide forward over the lizard's face, effectively blinding it. The lizard hissed in frustration and thrashed about trying to shake the saddle from its eyes, but to no avail. Eventually it lost its balance and fell back into the moat with a loud crash.

Serpenter pulled herself up from the heap she had landed in, her reptilian eyes flashing dangerously. "Who did that?" she hissed.

"I did!" came the firm response, and for the first time the team saw just who their saviour was.

Amy, curious to see what she looked like also, once more lifted the eye shield up so she could see. It was a young girl in her mid-twenties with hazel brown hair that ended in curls. She had eyes that were a curious brown/green colour. She was dressed in a plain uniform, which anyone familiar with this realm would recognise as denoting her as a Powers That Be Dungeon Ranger. Grasped in her right hand was an oblong metal disc which the team could see was attached to a bracelet she wore on her right wrist by a thick piece of cord, in effect making the weapon function in the manner of a Yo-Yo.

The young girl looked hard at the Opposition's reptile trainer. "Powerssss That Be Wench!" Serpenter hissed at her, baring her fangs as she did so before lunging at the girl.

Simply, almost nonchalantly, the girl flicked her right hand in Serpenter's

direction and the metal disc flew out of it, spun through the air and connected with the serpentine witch's face, knocking her backwards and rendering her unconscious.

"Nice shot!" Amy said, unable to restrain herself.

The young girl looked over at her and smirked. "Now, you've been warned about looking through that shield for too long or too often, Miss Amy," she said, scolding Amy good-naturedly for her curiosity.

Amy blushed and lowered the eye shield. "Sorry. I just wanted to see who it was that saved me. I take it you're Zyssa?"

The girl nodded and curtsied. "Zyssa Silverdale, Dungeon Ranger, at your service."

"My, but you are honoured, team," Treguard laughed, "for Ranger Silverdale is one of the Powers That Be's most celebrated agents and warriors."

"Thank you, Miss Silverdale," Amy said, returning the curtsy. "No need to thank me Amy, it's part of my job to aid dungeoneers. And please, just Zyssa."

Zyssa noticed Amy's right arm. "Seems I didn't get here quite quick enough though," she sighed, and reached into a pouch she carried on her belt. She brought out a large leaf of a plant unknown to Amy and her advisors. "Hold still a moment, Amy dear," she said as she began to rub the leaf over the wounded arm. Amy felt a strange itching sensation in her arm, but she trusted Zyssa and kept still.

"There. Good as new!" Zyssa said after a few moments, and indeed Amy's arm was completely healed, as though the gash left by the lizard's teeth had never existed.

"I take it you're going to level three?" Zyssa asked as she replaced the leaf

in her pouch. Amy nodded, filled with a pressing need to continue on. "Well, so am I. We'll travel there together. Come, let me guide you to the Descender."

Zyssa came over to her and gently placed a protecting arm around Amy and guided her into the tower. Amy now found herself in a chamber made entirely out of grey stone bricks. It was bare, save for the huge iron door in front of her and Zyssa.

"Amy, I hope you have some kind of key," Zyssa said after examining the door. "Because the Descender appears to be locked somehow."

The team remembered what Sinstar had said in the spyglass about the symbol of The Scourge. "Amy, hold the symbol up to the door," the male advisor said.

Amy did as instructed, the symbol began to glow orange and from somewhere seemingly off in the distance there was what sounded like a large lock being opened and then the Descender doors slid open.

"Well done, Amy," Zyssa said and helped guide her into the Descender.

Amy and Zyssa entered the Descender and stood in the centre but nothing happened. Zyssa sighed. "These Techno-Magic machines are so temperamental." Zyssa cleared her throat and then yelled, "DOWN!"

Nothing seemed to happen. Zyssa raised an eyebrow. "Dragon's Blood, MOVE FOR GOODNESS SAKE! Or I'll take a wrench to you!"

That threat seemed to work and there was a clanking and creaking of metal as the Descender rumbled into life. It slowly descended towards level three. As the contraption trundled downwards, Zyssa turned to Amy.

"We're now heading deep into Opposition territory, Amy. When we disembark we will be just on the border of South Winteria. The kingdom of

Winteria is ostensibly split up into separate smaller kingdoms that are governed by members of the royal family as independent principalities. In truth, though, they are all just puppet rulers for Queen Aesandre in Central Winteria, who dictates ALL policies and as a whole, the kingdom is staunchly allied to the Opposition. South Winteria is 'ruled' by the Crown Princess Deanery's Shar. She is something of a wildcard and seems to act with a great deal more independence than any of the other figurehead rulers and the Powers That Be suspect that she may have ambitions and goals of her own. As such, you should regard her as just as big a threat as if she was an Opposition minion. However, even without all that, Amy, you'll have to keep your eyes open and wits about you in Winteria because there are other dangers besides the human ones. The climate is very inhospitable and the local animals can be very vicious," Zyssa finished. "I hope I haven't scared you, Amy."

Amy shook her head. "No not at all, Zyssa."

Zyssa smiled at Amy and gave her a supportive hug. "Be careful, dear heart," Zyssa said softly.

Just then the Descender jolted to a halt.

"Here we go, Amy," Zyssa said.

Amy took a deep breath and the doors began creaking open. As they did, Amy became aware of an odd sound besides that of the doors opening - it sounded like some kind of laughing.

Suddenly Zyssa grabbed her shoulder and pushed her forward. "Amy, run!"

"What's..." Amy began to say.

"Amy, do as she says!" the lead advisor cut her off. "Some kind of creature has got into the Descender."

"It's a stormgeist," Treguard explained. "A creature that the Opposition created by the use of Techno-Magic. Its touch can cause a great deal of damage."

The stormgeist hovered threateningly over Amy and Zyssa. Zyssa unravelled her Yo-Yo flail and swung it up at the creature.

"Amy, for gods' sake, run!" she said.

"What about you?!" Amy asked.

"I'll be fine - just go!" Zyssa said in a commanding tone, as she once again flung her fail upwards towards the stormgeist as it again tried to attack the duo.

Amy bit her bottom lip - she hated to leave Zyssa but she knew that Zyssa had more of a chance against the stormgeist than she did.

"Thank you, Zyssa," she said.

"It's been my pleasure, Amy," Zyssa said with a smile. "Maybe we'll see each other again but for now, go!"

Amy nodded, took to her heels and ran. The stormgeist growled in frustration.

"She's beyond your reach now," Zyssa said, giving the beast a humourless smile. She grasped her fail as the stormgeist - revenge in its eyes - advanced on her...

After a while Amy stopped running and slowed her pace down to a walk once more. She felt awful for having left Zyssa behind and she hoped she would be alright; she had a feeling she would be. Amy walked on and she found herself in a clearing similar to that she had seen in level two. However, in this clearing the trees were beginning to shed their leaves and there was a

hard frost coating the ground. In the middle of the clearing was a large tree stump with a familiar arrangement of items upon it.

"It seems, team, that you are nearing the border of Winteria, and its chilling effects extend even to this small clearing. However, supplies are to be gained here all the same," said Treguard.

PUZZLE PAGE

Lego Nightmare II

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!

- To which dungeoneer is Motley appealing for help in this scene?**
- a) Richard II**
 - b) Ben II**
 - c) January**
 - d) Richard III**



Answer: c)

CLASSIC QUEST

Series 3

Quest: The Shield of Liberty.

dungeoneer: Christopher Reed.

Advisors: James, Alex and Tim.

Home town: Bristol.

Team score: 5½ out of 10.

Perhaps this quest does feel a bit flat after Martin's thrilling run through level three, but I think these four affable Bristolians do a pretty good job of making the last episode-and-a-bit of series 3 suitably entertaining.

Level One: After the giant die has opened up for the last time ever, Chris meets Hordriss on a rocky ledge. Behaving for the first time pretty much as he will during the next couple of series (including his first uses of the pronoun "One" instead of "I") Hordriss quickly dismisses Chris as being too insignificant for one of such great importance to bother about, but changes his mind when Chris apologises for disturbing him and addresses him as "Your Grace" thus appeasing his ruffled dignity. Hordriss charges Chris with retrieving an hourglass for him (foreshadowing the longer drawn out pacts he will go on to make throughout series 4) and gifts the team a SPEED spell as a reward: *"My gift to you is called SPEED."* - *Hordriss*. Watch out, Chris,

he's a dealer!

An obvious piece of filler follows, as Chris is coaxed into placing a sheaf of herbs into what used to be Mildread's cauldron, thus summoning a couple of skull ghosts. (*"I think it might be time to leave."* - **Treguard**.) Brangwen's clue room follows, where the boys remember just enough from their nursery days to score two out of three, earning them the first step - the archer. Chris picks up Hordriss's hourglass from the clue table, as well as - after some discussion - a bone. The advisors then take a very long time to get to grips with the Bricked-Off Window Puzzle, and have to rely on Treguard's help to spell out SHIELD, the object of their quest - well, it's obvious once you know! Later, the SPEED spell is used to outrun Mr Grimwold in a dwarf tunnel.

Chris then arrives in the Vale of Vanburn (not seen for quite some weeks before this) and has to beat a hasty and unexpected retreat through the cave halfway along the path as he is hemmed in by goblins coming at him from both directions. Two of the goblins chase Chris across the Corridor of the Catacombs, where he stops briefly to grab a sprig of energy. Chris then re-emerges at the end of the Vale of Vanburn, where Hordriss is waiting for him. The hourglass is duly handed over (*"One is gratified to discover that in these modern times there are still some young people who know how to honour a bargain."* - **Hordriss**) and Hordriss reveals the second step - the swimmer - before scaring off the two pursuing goblins with a haunted sword.

Chris meets Mrs Grimwold in the wellway room, and Festus is with her as usual. Mrs Grimwold is pleased to see that Chris has brought a bone for Festus, and gives him an item of food along with the third step - the thrower - in return. As Chris climbs into the well, Mrs Grimwold wanders off and starts being attacked by Festus - whether she survived the experience (and so was included as one of the unseen yet often mentioned Grimwold Family during series 6) is up to the individual Nightmare devotee to decide.

Level Two: A quick trip across the Mills of Doom (where Chris demonstrates some impressive leaping skills) leads to Merlin's throne room, where Chris

performs three impressive sporty actions to summon the three steps. Merlin appears and poses his two questions as usual, and with both answered correctly (just about) he rewards them with a FLIGHT spell. However, there is no time to discover what this would have been used for (a similar situation to the one Karen discovered at the Bridged Vale, perhaps) as Chris enters the clue room and the questing season draws to a (not understated) close.

Summary: They seemed pretty sharp most of the time, although probably not sharp enough to win the notoriously tough series 3, but we were never going to know for sure because they were always destined to leave undefeated.

DRAGON CLAW

By Ricky Temple

The huge, sleek body of the Great Wyrms soared high in the night sky, its magnificent scales reflecting the pale light of the moon and stars. The light also reflected off something else, something just behind the dragon... it looked like another dragon but there was something odd about it... it looked almost metallic.

"Ungodly thing," one of the Airwans riding on the real dragon's back said, looking back at the metal beast that was following behind them. "I hate the fact we're messing with techno-magic, Ortin."

His companion, who was piloting, replied, "But if it can give us a bit more security against Opposition incursions and attacks on the Great Wyrms we're sworn to protect, I guess it's the lesser of two evils. Whereabouts are we, Celtor?"

"We're just level with the South Winterian border," Celtor responded.

"Well make sure we don't get too close and stray into its territory - remember this project is meant to be kept secret, and the Crown Princess would fall over herself to be able to report this to her master back in Marblehead," Ortin warned.

Celtor nodded, then looked back over his shoulder at the metal titan behind them. "It's about time to check in with them again, Ortin."

Nodding, Ortin reached down and picked up a spyglass. Within a few moments, the face of one of their fellow Airwans piloting the metal dragon appeared.

"How's it going in there, Jarkore?" he asked.

"So far, so good," Jarkore replied. "This hunk of metal bolts and technomagic is actually holding up pretty well."

"Okay," Ortin replied. "If anything feels like it's going wrong though, you know what to do."

Jarkore nodded. "We do, Ortin, don't worry. Dragon Claw out."

This said, he discontinued the conversation and deactivated the spyglass. He looked out of the window that was the right 'eye' of the metal dragon and smiled, taking in the view.

"I don't know what all the fuss is about - this beauty is flying like a dream," he said confidently to his two co-pilots, his sister Cruzkore (who was studying maps, charts and compasses, trying to make sure they didn't stray into unfriendly territory) and their friend Gramzon, who was helping him to fly the metal dragon otherwise known as Project X-17, or Dragon Claw.

"Don't get too cocky, Jarkore," Cruzkore said. "We're perilously close to the South Winterian border at the moment - go too far to the right and

we'll be in their airspace."

"Yeah," Gramzon said, "and I noticed you didn't bother to mention to Ortin that this thing listed slightly to the right not so long ago... or about those odd noises we heard coming from the back."

"Relax, Gramzon," Jarkore said. "We corrected the list and Cruzkore scoured the whole back section of this machine and found nothing amiss. It's all going well."

However, all was not going well, at least not for Jarkore and his friends. Back in the Dragon Claw's hold, some boxes labelled 'SPARE COMPONENTS' slid open and three figures emerged from within. One of them was wearing a long black cloak and hood; another was dressed in robes that resembled Airwan armour; and the third had on Assassin-like robes and two black gloves. Slowly they made their way through the craft towards where the three crew members were. Once they reached the cockpit, one of them silently opened the door and another produced a small glass phial containing a thick liquid. He uncorked it and then quickly rolled the phial (which was already starting to emit a faint gas) inside and quickly shut the door again.

Jarkore, Cruzkore and Gramzon never knew what hit them - the gas was so fast-acting that they all lapsed into a deep coma almost instantaneously. A few moments later, once the gas had dissipated, the three figures entered the cockpit and removed the comatose crew members. The 'Assassin' produced a knife was about to slit their throats when the 'Airwan' grabbed his arm.

"Our orders were to bring them back alive," he hissed, then he got a length of rope and tied the three up.

The three of them then returned to the cockpit and the 'Assassin' and 'Airwan' took the controls.

"Let's make this look convincing," said the hooded assailant, as he pulled his

hood further down to obscure his face more. The 'Assassin' meanwhile was busy grooming his distinctive goatee, and the 'Airwan' made sure his face was obscured by shadows.

Once they were ready, the hooded assailant reached over and picked up the spyglass and then raised it slightly up before he dropped it again. The jolt was not hard enough to damage the spyglass, nor was it intended to, but it was hard enough to activate the spyglass as if by accident. On the back of the real dragon, Ortin heard the buzz coming from his spyglass.

"That's odd," he muttered.

"What is it?" Celtor asked.

"Jarkore's spyglass," Ortin said, as he fiddled with his own spyglass.

"What about it?"

"It's just activated... but not in the normal way, like he was trying to contact us... more like he dropped it or something." Ortin continued to fiddle with his spyglass.

"Hey," Celtor said suddenly. "That metal beast is veering off course... it's heading into South Winteria!"

Ortin frantically tried to tune his spyglass in until eventually a hazy picture came into focus.

"What the hell!" he said, as he saw the three hijackers in the cockpit.

Just then the hooded figure started speaking, seemingly totally unaware that the spyglass was activated.

"Okay, Wren, set course for the arranged location," he said.

"Right you are, squire," the 'Assassin' said in a somewhat over-the-top, faux-gentlemanly tone of voice. "You sure you remember how to fly this thing, Drago?"

"Well, it's different from my Fire-Drake Lokie, Leytan," he responded, "but I'm sure I'll get the hang of it."

"Good. I'll let Her Ladyship know we'll be arriving on schedule," the figure called Leytan said smugly.

"This was almost too easy," Wren laughed.

"I told you it would be," Drago sneered. "The Airwan are a bunch of idiots... it feels so good to get back at them for expelling me from their ranks."

Just then Leytan looked at the spyglass. "Hey, that thing's activated!" he snarled.

Wren immediately reached over with a gloved hand. He snatched the spyglass up and shattered it on the floor.

Ortin and Celtor looked at each other in shock and horror at what they had just seen and heard, and at the fact that the Dragon Claw was clearly heading into South Winteria and they were powerless to do anything to stop it. Celtor pulled on the reins of his dragon in a vain attempt to intercept the Dragon Claw, but by the time it had turned the Dragon Claw was already well inside the boundaries of South Winteria, and any attempt to stop it now could easily be construed as an attack on South Winteria by the Airwan. The two looked at each other. They turned the dragon round and set off at full speed, back to their base to report what had apparently happened. The Dragon Claw, meanwhile, disappeared into the wastelands of South Winteria.

Within hours of Ortin and Celtor landing and reporting what they had witnessed, the news of the hijacking - apparently committed by the notorious Fire & Ice Gang - was making its way along the highest channels of

both the Airwan and the Powers That Be. Eventually and inevitably it made its way to the Dungeon Master. Treguard quickly summoned his Chief Dungeon Ranger, Calwain.

"This is a very serious, sensitive and potentially dangerous situation, Calwain," Treguard said sombrely. "The Dragon Claw was going to be a key element of our Northern defence strategy. Should it fall into the hands of the Opposition, not only will the Airwan be at risk but Lord Fear could then easily undermine and compromise the entire Northern flank of Powers That Be territory."

Calwain nodded - he full appreciated the serious ramifications of this incident. "It may not be Opposition-based though, Dungeon Master."

Treguard looked at him questioningly.

"Well, all the intelligence that we have regarding that particular band of renegades strongly indicates that they are staunchly anti-Opposition."

"Hmm," Treguard muttered thoughtfully. "You may be right, Calwain. However, that opens up another lesser (but nonetheless dangerous) alternative. This whole thing could be being masterminded and orchestrated by the House of Shar. That Crown Princess most certainly has influence within that group - they're almost her damned emissaries of chaos outside her own borders! She could be planning to make a power play of some kind."

"Possibly she's planning on seceding from the rest of Winteria and forming her own kingdom," Calwain suggested. "We have received intelligence from our spies in that area that suggests she may harbour such ambitions. She certainly seems to act with a great deal more independence than any others of the minor Winterian royalty."

"Well, either way," Treguard said, rising from his chair, "this situation must be resolved and the Dragon Claw recovered. I want our best agents on this matter, Calwain."

Calwain nodded. "I'll contact Rangers Bolt and Silverdale, Dungeon Master."

"No, go to Ranger Bolt's hut yourself and bring him here," Treguard instructed. "If this isn't an Opposition gambit, let's not give them a chance to find out about it by intercepting our transmissions."

Calwain bowed and immediately left the antechamber. He set off on horseback for Greenshades, and the hut of the young man known as the Fastest Draw in the Dungeon, Rio Bolt. Neither Calwain nor Treguard saw the slender female figure standing in the shadows. She had been listening intently and worriedly to their conversation. She was unsure what to do, so she decided it was best to wait until Rio arrived and she could hear more.

In the hut, unaware of the chaos that was once more about to engulf their lives, Rio Bolt and Zyssa Silverdale were asleep in bed together. Rio stirred in his sleep and opened his eyes, unsure what had awoken him. He looked across at Zyssa; she was still sound asleep. Then he heard the urgent knocking at his hut door. He started to get out of bed. This movement resulted in Zyssa stirring and in response she slid an arm over his chest, brushing over the metal implants that covered one third of his body.

"One more time, Rio... please," she murmured, still half-asleep.

Rio rolled his eyes and gently removed her arm from his chest. This awoke Zyssa fully and she sat up.

"What?" she said with a mock frown. "Don't I please you anymore?"

Rio laughed slightly. "Immensely, Zyssa - you please me immensely. But there's someone at the door..." He looked at Zyssa and smirked. "You're not married, are you, and forgot to tell me?" he teased.

Zyssa stuck her tongue out at him. "It's probably some lost hunter or woodsman. Just hurry up and send them on their way and come back to bed."

I get lonely."

Rio laughed. He found some simple clothes, put them on and went to the door; he also took one of his crossbows with him just in case the person at the door wasn't so friendly. He opened the door slightly and his jaw just about hit the floor to see Calwain standing there.

"Sir..." he said in shock.

"Sorry to disturb you at this late hour, Bolt," Calwain said, "but a most urgent situation has arisen. May I come in?"

Rio panicked, realising Calwain would find Zyssa if he did.

"Yes of course, sir, but could you just give me a moment to get decent?" Rio replied.

"Of course," Calwain said.

"Thank you, sir," Rio said. He shut the door and quickly went back to the bedroom.

"See, I told you that wouldn't take too long," Zyssa said with a smile. "Now come back to..."

"Zyssa, it's Calwain!" Rio hissed.

Zyssa's face went white and her eyes widened. "Oh God! He can't find me here!"

"Where's your dress?" Rio asked, as he got dressed in his proper clothes.

"In the front room," Zyssa said as she scrambled out of bed, clutching the sheet to her body.

She tore out of the room. Rio followed her. He saw her dress and grabbed it, then got Zyssa by the arm and hustled her towards a closet.

"No!" Zyssa hissed "I'm not going to hide in a closet like the mistress of a count whose wife just came back unexpectedly!"

Rio didn't respond - he just opened the closet and pushed the protesting Zyssa inside, tossing her dress in after her.

"Rio, I'll..." she started to hiss, but Rio shut the door.

"Just stay there for now," he said quietly. "I'll take Calwain into another room and then you can creep out of the hut. Take your spyglass and then we can make it look like you were just nearby somewhere and I called you on the spyglass."

Zyssa hissed a few unladylike words at him, but agreed. Rio then opened the door and let Calwain in, hoping he hadn't heard anything that had made him suspicious. Fortunately, Calwain was too preoccupied with the reason for his visit.

"Ranger Bolt," he began, "as I said, a serious and possibly dangerous situation has arisen. An experimental weapon known as Dragon Claw has been hijacked and we believe it to be somewhere in South Winteria. The Dungeon Master has requested both you and Ranger Silverdale to come to Dunshelm immediately to be briefed on this situation."

Rio nodded and saluted. "I'll contact Ranger Silverdale right away, sir."

Calwain saluted back. "Good. Get your things together and meet me outside - I have a horse waiting for you."

Rio nodded and waited until Calwain had left before going over and opening the closet. As soon as he did so, he was met with a slap across the face.

"You ever do that to me again, Rio..." Zyssa hissed crossly.

"Well, there wasn't really an option, was there Zyssa?" he said, trying hard not to laugh.

Zyssa tried hard to think of a retort and to stay mad at Rio, but failed to do so. She sighed and kissed him. "No, I guess not." Then a smile crossed her face. "Though I have to say... you thought of it pretty quickly... have you done this before?" she teased.

Rio smirked. "A gentlemen never tells."

Zyssa raised an eyebrow. "Either way, what are we going to do about this situation now? I can't very well just walk out of the hut!"

"Well, isn't your own horse around back?" Rio asked.

Zyssa nodded.

"Well then, once me and Calwain are away, you get your horse and ride to Dunshelm. Take the east road and you should get there just after we do because Calwain will invariably take the direct route of the north road."

Zyssa smiled and nodded, and Rio followed Calwain out of the hut.

The two lovers' deception worked perfectly; Calwain never suspected a thing when only a few minutes after he and Rio arrived at Dunshelm, Zyssa Silverdale also arrived on horseback. She saluted Rio and her superior. Calwain then took them into the antechamber, where Treguard was waiting for them. They bowed and curtsied to him respectively, neither of them really noticing who was on guard duty in the antechamber.

"Thank you both for coming so fast. I assume Calwain has given you a broad outline of the situation?"

They both nodded.

"Good," Treguard continued. "Now for the details. The Dragon Claw is an experimental weapon built with techno-magic by the Airwan with the aid and under the protection of the Powers That Be... with a view to making it a key element in our defence strategy. Dragon Claw, Rangers, is a metal dragon capable of flight."

Rio and Zyssa shared a look of disbelief.

"It was being tested in secret and this evening was in the process of undergoing its final test flight with three crew members onboard... when it was hijacked close to the border with South Winteria."

"Do we know who the hijackers were, Dungeon Master?" Rio asked.

"We think so," Treguard said. "According to the Airwans who were accompanying the Dragon Claw in case of trouble, the hijackers seemed to be members of the renegades known as Fire & Ice."

Rio and Zyssa's breath caught in their throats; they'd already crossed paths with that group some months back and in the following time had even come into direct opposition with one of their members on another mission, so they knew firsthand what formidable opponents they were.

"But Fire & Ice are a mercenary group, Dungeon Master," Zyssa said. "If it was them then they must be working for someone."

"Quite correct, Ranger Silverdale," Treguard agreed. "We don't as yet know who that someone is... but it might be Crown Princess Deanery's Shar, as the Dragon Claw was hijacked near South Winteria and - according to the two eyewitnesses - was heading into its territory when they last saw it. Now, no trace of it or its crew can be found."

"However," Calwain interjected, "while Fire & Ice are our prime suspects, it

has to be noted that there are some slight discrepancies between the descriptions given by the eyewitnesses and the known descriptions of the members in question - the two gang leaders Leytan and Vyrrian Wren, and the renegade Airwan Drago Lestrade."

"Be that as it may, Rangers, at the moment our only lead is the identification of those three criminals," Treguard said gruffly.

"Your mission, Rangers," Calwain explained, "is to find the Dragon Claw and its crew - if they're still alive - and retrieve them before they fall into enemy hands."

"You are also fully authorised to arrest Fire & Ice if need be," Treguard said.

Rio and Zyssa nodded.

"If I may just make a request, sirs," Rio said.

"Yes, Ranger Bolt?" Treguard said.

"With all due respect, myself and Ranger Silverdale have dealt with Fire & Ice on a number of occasions now... and they're no easy opponents. I'd like to request some additional help on this assignment."

"You have someone in mind, Ranger Bolt?" Treguard asked.

"Yes, Dungeon Master - Powers That Be agent Ariel Martinez. Her help in the past - in both the attempted infiltration of the Hall of Folly and the Ring of the Balrog affair - was invaluable and she is a very skilled fighter."

Treguard nodded. "Very well. Calwain will contact her to arrange where she will meet you."

Rio and Zyssa saluted and were about to leave when Treguard stopped them.

"There is something else, Rangers... but it is strictly for your ears only." He turned round in his chair. "Stiletta, would you please leave us for a moment?"

"Certainly, Dungeon Master," the famous Warrior Thief said, coming out from the shadows.

Stiletta began to walk out of the antechamber. Rio and Zyssa shot each other worried looks; they hadn't realised Stiletta was in the chamber. They had never reported to Treguard or Calwain, but they had strong suspicions - after one mission in particular - that she was in collusion with Fire & Ice... or at the very least, she was associated with Drago Lestrade. As Stiletta left the antechamber, Zyssa caught her eye and gave her a very hard and meaningful stare.

Don't you dare! her eyes seemed to say. Stiletta just stared back, shrugged slightly and left. Zyssa made up her mind what she was going to do after the briefing.

"Rangers," Treguard continued, snapping their attention back to the matter in hand, "we need to discuss the matter of your familiarity to our enemies. It has become very obvious during the preceding months that the Opposition is taking a greater and greater interest in you two, due no doubt to your great success rate. While this is commendable, it does mean that your ability to operate on missions freely is severely limited, as any number of bounty hunters may decide to take a shot at you."

Rio and Zyssa had to agree that this was so.

"However, I and Calwain may have hit on a solution to this problem... as long as you are agreeable, Rangers, as there is a certain amount of risk involved..."

A little while later, after thinking over Treguard and Calwain's idea, Rio and Zyssa gave their consent and were dismissed.

"Well, let's head back to the hut and get our stuff and then head for the Winterian border," Rio said to Zyssa.

Zyssa, however, had something else on her mind. "You go and get the horses ready, Rio... I'll join you in a moment."

She set off down the corridor. She carefully scanned every shadowy nook and cranny. She suddenly became aware of what sounded like the faint humming of a spyglass being used, and then it suddenly faded. Just as she rounded a corner, Stiletta emerged from a side corridor and nearly walked into her.

"I say, watch where you're going, clumsy!" Stiletta said, before realising who it was. "Oh, hello Zyssa - is your top secret, hush-hush briefing with Treguard finished, then?"

"Yes, it is," Zyssa said matter-of-factly.

"Oh, jolly good. So am I allowed to resume my post now, then?"

"I expect so."

"Okay, well good luck with your new mission, Zyssa. I'll probably see you when you get back," Stiletta said, and made to go back to the antechamber.

As she passed, Zyssa grabbed her arm. "Stiletta," she said.

"Yes, Zyssa?"

Zyssa looked her directly in the eye. "I know what you've just been doing."

Stiletta's eyes narrowed.

"Do you remember what I said that time in Winteria? Well, let me just reiterate. If you cause any harm to befall Rio... I promise you, I'll see to it

that both you and your 'friend' Drago swing from the gallows."

"I don't think I like what you're insinuating, Ranger Silverdale," Stiletta said harshly.

"Don't play the innocent with me," Zyssa shot back. "Both me and Rio know full well you have loyalties elsewhere."

"Yes, to the Guild of Thieves," Stiletta said with a smirk. "So what?"

"Both of us know full well what we're talking about, Stiletta... you do know what the penalty for high treason is, don't you?"

Stiletta scowled. "Are you accusing me?"

"If the knife belt fits," Zyssa shot back.

Stiletta shoved Zyssa away from her. Incensed at this, Zyssa got right back in front of her. Stiletta tried to walk around her but Zyssa refused to let her past. Stiletta grabbed her and tried to pull her out of the way. Zyssa grabbed hold of Stiletta and tried to pin her against the nearest wall. Struggling for leverage and balance, the two lost their footing and fell into a heap on the floor, but continued to struggle with each other. Just then, Calwain came round the corner.

"What on Earth is going on here?" he said.

Zyssa and Stiletta got up.

"We just collided with each other, sir," Zyssa said.

"And tempers flared a little," Stiletta said sheepishly.

Calwain rolled his eyes. "Really, you two should both know better than that. We all know how tense it gets around here but we don't go taking it out on

each other."

"Yes, sir," they both responded humbly.

Calwain looked at both of them. "Ranger Silverdale, consider yourself on a verbal warning."

"Yes, sir," Zyssa said.

"Stiletta, I'm relieving you of duty for the next week and a half. I think you need to cool off - your temper is flaring a bit too much lately."

"Yes, sir," Stiletta said.

Zyssa looked at her out of the corner of her eye - she was sure Stiletta was smirking and she had a good idea what she was thinking.

"Ranger Silverdale, you have somewhere to be, do you not?" Calwain asked.

"Yes, sir," Zyssa said, saluting before she walked off.

She didn't say anything to Rio about the altercation with Stiletta as they rode back to his hut, to gather their equipment and the belongings they would require for this mission and to make the required preparations.

"What do you think, Rio?" Zyssa asked.

"About what, Zyssa?"

"Do you think it was Fire & Ice who hijacked the Dragon Claw?"

Rio shrugged. "I don't know - it depends."

"On what?"

"On who's the mastermind behind it all. After all, whatever else they may be, I just can't see Fire & Ice being willing aides for the Opposition... for Crown Princess Deanery's Shar, definitely, but not Lord Fear."

Zyssa nodded. "And I suppose they're a good group to try and frame if someone wanted to hijack the Dragon Claw, but not come under suspicion themselves."

Rio nodded. "But let's not jump to any conclusions, Zyssa - let's get our hands on Fire & Ice first and go from there."

Zyssa nodded. "Agreed - that would be the best... wait!" she said, cocking her head.

"What is it?" Rio asked.

"I'm sure I just heard someone moving about outside."

Rio listened; there was a snapping of a twig as someone or something stepped on it.

"Rio, the window!" Zyssa suddenly yelled.

Rio's head snapped round just in time to see a dark figure duck away from the windowpane. Rio quickly moved to grab his crossbows, which were lying on the table in the middle of the room. Almost as soon as his fingers clasped around the hilts, the window behind them shattered and a barrage of arrows shot into the hut. Zyssa screamed as both she and Rio were hit; Rio in the back by three arrows and her in the upper torso by two. Rio pitched forward and slumped over the table. He tried once to push himself up with his hands, before crashing to the floor, where he lay motionless. Zyssa - blood trickling from her mouth - pulled the two arrows out of her body and stumbled over to him. She knelt down beside him and pulled the arrows out.

"Rio... I..." she tried to say, before she also collapsed and lay lifeless beside

him.

A few seconds later, the door to the hut flew open and three figures - two men and a woman - ran into the hut. The two men ran over to the broken window and looked out, trying to see if they could see the archers anywhere; one of them was dressed in a long black cloak, while the other had on Assassin-like robes and two thick leather gloves. The woman (whose clothes resembled those of a Green Warden) ran straight over to Zyssa's body and desperately tried to find a pulse.

"Zyssa!" she yelled in despair.

"Are they?" the man in the cloak asked.

"I can't find a pulse... I can't find a pulse! Zyssa! Oh gods, no, Zyssa!" the woman said frantically.

Just then they heard the sound of horses approaching at a gallop. The gloved man ran to the door and looked out.

"It's the Greenshades militia, squire - if they catch us here they'll think we did this, and they'll lynch us for sure!"

"Get out of here, Wren!" the man yelled, and his companion took off running towards the woods. "Come on, Gloriana, we've got to go!"

"No!" the woman yelled frantically, still desperately trying to revive Zyssa. "I've got to help her!"

"There's nothing you can do for her now!" he said, and tried to pull her away.

"No! Leave me with her!"

"WE'VE GOT TO GET OUT OF HERE! WE'RE ALREADY IN THE FRAME

FOR ONE CRIME AND IF THEY FIND US HERE THEY'LL LYNCH US!"

He hauled her to her feet and dragged her out of the house.

"ZYSSA, ZYSSA!" she yelled in despair.

The two figures disappeared into the woods just as the militia arrived in the clearing.

"Quick - some of you men search the area!" the commander barked, as he and his men dismounted from their horses. "The rest inside with me!"

The group of four militia members ran into the hut through the open door, and found the bodies of Zyssa and Rio. The commander checked both for pulses, then sadly shook his head and stood up.

"We're too late," he said sadly.

He and his men removed their hats as a sign of respect.

"Well, at least they died on duty together," his lieutenant said.

The commander nodded. "They'd have wanted it this way."

They all walked out of the hut with the intention to contact the local Powers That Be authorities and inform them of the deaths.

Meanwhile in the hut, the bodies of Rio and Zyssa lay side by side, a pool of blood forming below them. Zyssa's face was pressed into Rio's shoulder, her left arm still limply holding him to her... they were still locked in this, their last loving embrace.

REMEMBER HIM?

Series 8. Level 2/3.

SNAPPER-JACK

When I first read Paul McIntosh's review of this character back in issue 7, I was quite surprised how much hatred for the man with the butterfly net it exuded. Yet it seems that this is the popular opinion of Snapper-Jack - a ridiculous and pointless character who should never have been allowed on the show. I suppose he is ridiculous in many ways - the voice, the net, the sock-puppet snapdragon - but perhaps he would have been reviled slightly less if he had actually bagged (or netted) himself a victim - thus eliminating the notion that he was not a genuine threat - which he was practically on the verge of doing a couple of times, as some teams just managed to sneak through with a marginal two out of three.

Despite the fact that I've never been a fan of the whole "my arm was bitten off and grew back as a snapdragon" aspect of the character, I really didn't mind Snapper-Jack when I first watched series 8, and I still think he's no more or less awful than many other aspects of the series. I do like the way he introduced riddles back into the programme, asking the teams three at a time in very much the same way as the wall monsters had done, right back at the very beginning. (You could argue that the Brollachan did this in series 7, of course, but I don't think it counts because he didn't know the answers himself.) Some of Jack's riddles contain interesting subject matter and are quite cleverly phrased ("Give me a coin you can keep animals in") so although I'm not exactly a fan of the character, I do think there are some positive aspects to him.

Whatever Snapper-Jack's shortcomings, we mustn't blame Bill Cashmore, who doubtless did as much as he could in the role. It's a shame that playing this character didn't really allow him to improvise proper conversations with the dungeoneers, as Bill proved himself very adept at this whilst playing Honesty Bartram, which he sadly got to do much less than playing Snapper-

Jack. This, then, is a very strange character, but one whose role in the quest did remind me of the early days (bringing a slight smile to my lips) and who, in a series literally overflowing with interesting ideas pulled off very badly, doesn't particularly stand out to me as being very bad!

KNIGHTMARE LOCATIONS

Orford Castle, Orford, Suffolk

Location: Orford, Suffolk.

AKA: Circular level three chamber.

Series featured in: 4, 5 & 6.

This picture was taken by me, Jake Collins, in July 2003.

Orford Castle was the first Nightmare Location ever featured in The Eye Shield, but the magnificent keep that can be seen in Issue 29 was never actually featured on the show - as I discovered later, I mistook it for the keep at Hedingham Castle, Essex. This room from Orford Castle, however, was featured on Nightmare a great deal - with its original colouring in series 6, and with a purple tinge (surprise, surprise!) in series 4 and 5. It is the room where all the series 4 pacts were redeemed, where Mogdred killed Helen, where Dickon defied Malice, where Ben gave Hordriss a bone, and where Sofia met Elita and Skarkill.



TOP 35 KIDS' TV VILLAINS (Part Five)

By Ricky Temple

15. Dr Jelly (Sharky & George):

Dr Jelly was the evil mad scientist octopus foe of the sea's greatest crime fighting duo, Sharky and George. Along with General Claw and the Three

Thugs, he was their most persistent villain. Every bit the stereotypical mad scientist, Dr Jelly was a raving megalomaniac who proclaimed himself Master of the World Under the Sea and was determined to prove his superiority by using his scientific weapons and creations to conquer the city of Seacago.

However, as well as being a scientific and criminal genius, he was also a complete bungler, due in no small part to his arrogance and over-inflated sense of superiority, which made him regard Sharky and George with disdain and as no real threat to him. The end result was that they always found a way to sabotage his schemes and Dr Jelly would have to flee, swearing revenge.

14. Sly Rax (MASK):

The sleazy and slicker-than-oil Sly Rax was one of Miles Mayhem's three original VENOM agents, along with Vanessa Warfield and Cliff Dagger. They were a constant threat to Matt Trakker and his fellow MASK operatives, and also to the Peaceful Nations Alliance (PNA). Armed with his stiletto mask and piranha motorcycle/sidecar-cum-submarine battle vehicle, he was Mayhem's right hand man.

Sly Rax - in a rare turn of events for most villainous henchmen of '80s kids' TV - was actually depicted as having brains in his head and as posing a real threat to the heroes throughout MASK's first two seasons. In fact, Sly Rax would normally end up being undone not because of his own mistakes but by the clumsy and ill thought-out actions of his frequent accomplice in crime, Cliff Dagger. He also had a battling relationship with fellow intelligent VENOM agent Vanessa Warfield, and this rivalry normally brought about the pair's downfall whenever they worked together.

Sly Rax was a mainstay character during the first two seasons of MASK, before being relegated to six cameo appearances in the third 'racing' series, in which he manned the 'Pit-Stop Catapult'. His in-show role as the sleazy biker villain was filled (less successfully, in my opinion) by Lester "the Lizard" Sludge.

13. Shadow Weaver (She-Ra Princess of Power):

Etheria's Mistress of the Dark Arts was one of Hordak's most dangerous minions. It was Shadow Weaver (voiced by Linda Gary) who cast the mind-controlling spell on Princess Adora that kept her a servant of the Horde until He-Man broke the spell and she became She-Ra for the first time.

Shadow Weaver was once a practitioner of good magic and a friend of the Great Rebellion's main magic wielder Castaspella, but she became impatient and hungered for more power, so she turned to evil and to the Horde. As powerful as her magic is, Shadow Weaver is powerless to attack either of the Great Rebellion's two main strongholds - Whispering Woods and Bright Moon Castle - and as a result, most of her schemes revolve around trying to find some way to render these places no longer a threat to her and to the Horde's power.

12. Captain Slaughter (Pound Puppies):

A dog kidnapper and skinner as well as a sea captain, the towering behemoth Captain Slaughter was hired on a number of occasions to capture the Pound Puppies by the show's main villain, Katrina Stoneheart. We only ever saw Slaughter's eyes, as the rest of his face was hidden by his sea captain hat and balaclava. It is indicated via a series of flashbacks that Captain Slaughter has been a persistent foe of the Pound Puppies for a number of years, and was responsible for destroying their safe haven of Wagga-Wagga and kidnapping a great many of their number in this attack. He is depicted as being very sadistic and enjoying his work.

His right hand has been replaced by a metallic claw; he lost his real one when he fell onto some train tracks while chasing the main Pound Puppy character Cooler, and his hand was crushed under a train. He has harboured a deep hatred of Cooler ever since. This demonic sea captain was voiced by none other than Peter "Optimus Prime" Cullen.

11. Vicious (Cowboy BeBop):

This cold-hearted, sadistic, katana-wielding crime boss was the main villain of cult classic anime series Cowboy BeBop. Vicious was once the partner of

the show's main protagonist, the Bounty Hunter (Cowboy) Spike Spiegel, back when they were both enforcers working for the Criminal Syndicate. However, they became sworn enemies after Spike fell for a woman whom Vicious also loved, and she in turn fell in love with Spike. It was Vicious's wrath that caused Spike to fake his death and go into hiding before starting his life anew as a Bounty Hunter. Vicious only appears five times during the whole series, but his presence is felt throughout.

Vicious is ruthless and uncaring in pursuit of his goals, murdering superiors and subordinates, friends and enemies, without a second thought, and even instigating gang warfare in order to get what he wants, which is control of the Syndicate and the death of Spike at his hands. He eventually gets control of the Syndicate, and possibly kills Spike as well (the ending is left somewhat ambiguous) but all at the cost of his own life, as Spike kills him at the very end of the series, finally being able to outdraw Vicious's deadly blade.

KIDS' TV SHOWS I GREW UP WITH

Focus on: Bravestarr.

Original Broadcast Run: September 1987 - February 1988.

UK TV Channel: BBC1.

This was the final cartoon produced by Filmation, the company most famous (I think it's fair to say) for producing He-Man and She-Ra. I think I'm right in saying that Bravestarr was the only Filmation cartoon apart from those two that ever made it on to terrestrial television in the UK. It combined the dustbowl terrain of the Wild West with the technological advances of the far future, to create the unique surrounds of the planet New Texas. As it was an abundant source of kerium, the rarest and most valuable element in the universe, New Texas quickly grew into an extensive mining community,

which was constantly being menaced by the underlings of the demonic Stampede, a very evil sorcerer who resembled a large cow skeleton with some metallic parts.

Stampede's first and most important recruit was Tex Hex, the main (i.e. most heavily featured) villain of the show, upon whom he bestowed many powers of sorcery. Sandstorm was a red reptilian creature with many sand-based powers (and there was a great deal of sand on New Texas for him to manipulate) including the ability to blow sleep sand. Skuzz was a prairie person (the prairie people were New Texas's gopher-like indigenous species) who had turned bad and fallen in with Tex Hex, while Thunderstick was a robot with a lot of short circuits and a powerful blaster for an arm. Cactus Head was a strange little flying robot (with a cactus for a head!) that had powers of matter transmutation, while Vipra was a sort of snake woman who could put people to sleep with her "Venomiser". Obviously with all these villains terrorising the planet, the residents of New Texas called for help - they requested an army of galactic marshals, but they received only one. However, as the tagline tells us, one was enough!

In true Thundercats style, Marshal Bravestarr had been rescued as a child from his exploding home planet by his mentor and teacher, Shaman, a typically wise, old, white-haired Native American figure. (Shaman and Stampede had a lot of existing beef, but we won't get into that now.) Bravestarr was raised and trained at a galactic marshals' station. Having completed his training, he was posted to New Texas to deal with the outlaw problem there, assisted by Shaman (with whom he was reunited soon after arriving on the planet) as well as his two deputies, Thirty-Thirty (a robotic horse who was worryingly devoted to his enormous handheld cannon, which he named Sara-Jane) and Fuzz, a good-hearted prairie person (and therefore much more typical of their race than his cousin Skuzz), not forgetting (although I wouldn't mind if I did forget her, personally) Judge JB, a galactic judge posted to New Texas at the same time as Bravestarr, and his occasional love interest.

The voice actors were Pat Fraley (Marshal Bravestarr, Thunderstick, Cactus

Head), Ed Gilbert (Thirty-Thirty, Shaman, Sandstorm), Charlie Adler (Tex Hex, Fuzz), Alan "Skeletor" Oppenheimer (Stampede, Skuzz) and Susan Blu (Judge JB, Vipra), as well as Lou Scheimer and his daughter Erica, both alumni of He-Man and She-Ra.

Bravestarr and Shaman possessed many North American Indian (Native American, if you prefer) qualities. But Bravestarr also had something of the cowboy about him, thanks to his galactic marshal's uniform; the character therefore combined aspects of both "Cowboys" and "Indians", perhaps attempting to present both in a positive (and united) light, unlike in all the old Wild West movies.

But why was Marshal Bravestarr worth a hundred ordinary lawmen? Undoubtedly it had something to do with his unerring sense of justice, his honesty, his incredible bravery and other such noble attributes, but mainly it was because he had four magic powers! These were all based on the abilities of North American animals that Indians on our planet would undoubtedly have come across in everyday life - so if you've been wondering for the past twenty years why it isn't Speed of the Cheetah, now you know!

Eyes of the Hawk gave Bravestarr increased powers of sight, allowing him to see over great distances or gain an aerial view of the surrounding area. (There is quite a cute story about five-year-old me asking my mum if pigs can see well, as I had misheard this power as Eyes of the Hog, and was yet to see it used on-screen.) Ears of the Wolf increased the range and intensity of Bravestarr's hearing, while Speed of the Puma allowed him to run at great speed for extended periods of time. Strength of the Bear was the power he used by far the most, probably because it was by far the most useful, as it could be used for moving heavy things, bashing up villains, crushing weapons and other metal, making holes in rocks, or even exhaling with the force of a gale!

Common practice would be for Bravestarr to use Strength of the Bear and one other power in an episode, more often Speed of the Puma than either of the other two. Sometimes he would use three - Strength of the Bear, Speed

of the Puma and either Eyes of the Hawk or Ears of the Wolf. (My own memory tells me that he tended to use Ears of the Wolf more than Eyes of the Hawk, but the episodes I have on video, amounting to just over one third of the whole series, suggest he used Eyes of the Hawk more.) Very, very occasionally - if you were really lucky - you could see him use all four powers in one episode, and that was really exciting! I've said this before and I'll say it again - Bravestarr's powers are cool!

Unlike He-Man, *The Mysterious Cities of Gold* and several other cartoons from this era, this is actually one I enjoy less now than I did back then. I remembered absolutely loving Bravestarr and not being able to watch enough of it when I was young, but when I bought some episodes on video in 2003, I found that I did not enjoy the show nearly as much as I was thinking and hoping I would. Don't get me wrong - I do still enjoy watching the show and I have bought a few more videos since my first purchase, but I feel it lacks the depth and characterisation, as well as the storytelling and exciting sense of adventure, present in He-Man and *The Mysterious Cities of Gold*. There's no doubt in my mind - the four animal powers are what kept me watching back then and they're what I most enjoy about the cartoon now, but I guess there's no reason to think of that as a bad thing!

THE AUDIO PLAY'S THE THING

Two new audio sketches set in the Harry Potter dominated world of Hordriss the Confuser and Sidriss the Confused are now available - one carefully written by Martin and painstakingly edited by Andy, the other created entirely by Rosey and me mucking about in front of a microphone!

THE FURTHER ADVENTURES OF HORDY POTTER

(Released December 2010):

Sketch outline by **Jake Collins**. Dialogue improvised by the cast.

Featuring **Jake Collins** as Hordriss the Confuser and **Rosey Collins** as Sidriss the Confused.

Hordriss and Sidriss discuss (and steal) ideas for a new Harry Potter book, and contemplate their ever-growing wealth. You can download this sketch here: <http://www.mediafire.com/?sucluglfht547gk>

SIDRISS THE CONFUSED AND THE PHILOSOPHER'S SOJOURN
(Released January 2011):

Written by **Martin Odoni**, based on a (sort of) original idea by **Jake Collins**. Edited by **Andy Marshall**.

Featuring **Helen Becconsall** as Gretel and Mildread, **Jake Collins** as Hordriss the Confuser and Ridolfo, **Rosey Collins** as Sidriss the Confused, **Adam Hall** as Sir Hugh de Wittless, and **Ricky Temple** as Motley.

Sidriss is hoping to take a break from copy-editing her father's work and hopes to find someone suitable to fill in for her while she is away. She attempts to interview five candidates for the post. The experience proves harrowing to say the least. You can download this audio sketch (along with all the others so far) at <http://dunshelplayers.wordpress.com/>

NIGHT OF THE GOBLINS

By Ricky Temple & Louise Brockhouse

"And whenever that Bittersweet Wind blows, then that thick, murky and eerie Kobolt fog comes rolling in off Mount Despairos, and when that thick, murky and eerie fog rolls in on that Bittersweet Wind...."

Grandpa Waldorf let his words hang in the air of the hut as his three grandchildren - Ezmarier and Galawain Cullen, who were eleven and ten years old respectively, and their two-year-old baby sister Jillie Cullen - listened

intently to his tale. Ezmarier, Galawain and Jillie lived (along with their mother, Agnes, and their grandfather) in the tiny village of Cathlethwaite. Their father was a Powers That Be soldier and as such was often away from home for long periods of time. Cathlethwaite was a small village on the very outskirts of the lands of Dunshelm, almost on the border where control passed from Powers That Be to Opposition. Marking the border was the imposing Mount Despair, and on the other side of Despair lay the accursed Protectorate of Kobolt.

The three children now sat huddled in their beds as Grandpa Waldorf told them of a fearful event that happened in the village whenever the winds that buffeted Mount Despair changed direction. The wind would then become what was known as the Bittersweet Wind, due to its peculiar scent, and with it came the thick fog that permanently engulfed Kobolt. It was an event that cast a dark shadow over all of Cathlethwaite and filled every member of its populous with dread.

"Then that be Goblin Night and all the foul denizens of that evil land of Kobolt can roam the surrounding area at will. And us decent folk must bar our doors and windows for you see, my children, nothing good comes out of Kobolt - for it is the land of Goblins, Hobgoblins and those foul sub-humans, the Goblin Masters and Mistresses."

Ezmarier, Galawain and Jillie shivered.

"But of all the Kobolt horrors..." Grandpa Waldorf continued, "none are viler, more sinister, more bone-chillingly horrific than the evil pair of Skarkill, Lord Fear's own sadistic Goblin Master, and his sister, the sinister and malevolent Techno-Sorceress Sinstar. For it is they who like nothing better than to terrorise this little village of ours. Skarkill, with his two vicious charges, the Goblin brothers Grippa and Rhark, and Sinstar with her twisted techno-magic. They love nothing better than to find a young child - though they'll settle for adults - and torment them to the brink of madness... or even death."

"Grandpa Waldorf..." Ezmarier said in a quiet voice.

"Yes, Ezmarier?"

"When's the next Goblin Night?" Ezmarier enquired.

"Hmm... I'd wager very soon, little one," Grandpa Waldorf said grimly. "Been a while since the last time that wretched Bittersweet Wind blew, and brought all its misery down upon us."

"Was that when young Ulfras disappeared?" Galawain asked. "The boy that the old song is based on?"

Grandpa Waldorf shook his head. "No, my lad... that were many years ago, long before your time. I was just in the early dawn of my manhood when that poor child was taken."

Grandpa Waldorf sighed sadly. "Poor young'un never had a chance, lost out in that fog, with the wind howling and the Goblin Master and his sister out a-hunting. But it's good to see you know of the song. That was composed by the local minstrel as a warning to all children - like yourselves - of the dangers of being out on Goblin Night."

"How does the song go again?" Jillie asked, her voice betraying more nervousness than those of her older siblings.

Grandpa Waldorf cleared his throat and began to recite the lyrics of the song that every child in Cathlethwaite had heard and sung many a time:

*Hear the call of a father, searching for his son,
For his son is wandering in the Fog
While the Goblin Master is a-hunting
And the Techno-Sorceress is a-prowling.
He is wandering lost and so far from home
In the Bittersweet Goblin Night Wind.*

*Oh my child, come home, oh please come home, my son,
Pleads his mother.
But no one ever comes home through this Wind.
No one comes home through this Fog.
He is lost to the yowling Goblins of Skarkill
And the Darkness of Sinstar.
Lost forever in the evil
Of that Bittersweet Goblin Night Wind.*

"So remember, my children," he said once he had finished his recital, "if ever you are out playing, and you feel that wind start to change direction, and you smell a sickly bittersweet scent in the air... you turn and you run, and you don't stop running until you are safe and sound in this hut. Understand?"

The three children nodded that they did.

"Good... now, off to sleep with the three of you."

He tucked them in, before giving each of them a kiss on the forehead and leaving the room. Soon the three children were fast asleep.

However, as the Cullens slept, far away on the other side of Mount Despair, in the land of Kobolt, another pair of siblings were not sleeping. The Goblin Master, Skarkill, and his equally evil sister, Sinstar the Techno-Sorceress, were both busy with their own pursuits. Skarkill was polishing his favourite set of manacles with a dirt-stained rag, while Sinstar sat on the floor, cross-legged and with her eyes closed. There were two lighted black candles at either side of her. She was lost in a meditation trance.

Skarkill finished his "polishing" and held the manacles up to examine them. He smiled a sadistic smile. "There!" he proclaimed. "Got me Irons all nice and grubby for the next victim - must always make sure me Irons look good for me prey."

He looked over at his sister, who was still lost in her meditation. "Huh... bet she'll be like that for hours, no fun to be had while she's medi... medatay... medi... er, away with the fairies like she is now."

He sighed grumpily and went over to the far wall, to hang his manacles from a rusty old hook protruding from it. In doing so, he had his back to his sister and as such he missed her suddenly give a very visible shiver, before a smile appeared on her lips. On any other girl it would have been a sweet looking smile, but on the lips of Sinstar - though it was still in some ways a sweet looking smile - a defiant evil glee pervaded through the sweetness. Slowly her eyes opened; suddenly she threw back her head and laughed. This caused her brother to jump with fright and drop his 'Irons' on the floor.

"Bloomin' Nora, Sinstar... you trying to give me a heart attack or something?" he raged at his little sister.

Sinstar nonchalantly turned her head and regarded her brother with a disarming smile. "If I wished to give you a heart attack, my dear brother, I could do so merely by reciting the right words and clicking my fingers."

Skarkill scowled at her. "Not funny, Sis!" he said.

Sinstar chuckled. "Well, I know what will cheer you up," she said, as she got up from the floor and went over to a corner of the room where a table was set up. Upon it were all manner of potions, draughts and other assorted magical paraphernalia.

"Oh?" Skarkill said suspiciously.

"Yes... our favourite event is about to take place," she responded.

Skarkill looked blank for a few moments, then her meaning dawned on him and the sadistic smirk from earlier reappeared on his face.

"You sure, Sis?" he asked eagerly.

"Positive," Sinstar responded. "I saw it in the vision that my meditation allowed me to experience... and I can already feel the direction of the wind changing."

"Hehehehehehehehehe... LOVELY!" Skarkill sneered. "Been too long since the last Goblin Night. I've got me some new 'toys' I'd like to break in on any poor sod we catch."

Sinstar smirked as well. "I too have been working on one or two... little projects and experiments that should provide some interesting reactions from any... 'test subjects' that we can find to volunteer to be my guinea pigs," she said ominously

"One thing's for sure, brother dear," she continued. "When we're through, Cathlethwaite will never forget THIS Goblin Night! Or, to put it in your more simplistic manner of speaking, brother, it will be... LOVELY!"

Skarkill grinned at this.

"Now we must make preparations for its coming," Sinstar said, busying herself with her assorted paraphernalia of the black arts, both old and techno-sorcery related.

"How long we got?" Skarkill asked.

"Not long, brother dear - a day maybe, or two at most," Sinstar explained. "And we must be ready for the hunt when the time comes."

The two siblings shared an evil smile.

THE BEST OF THE REST 2011

For the final time, let's catch up with some of my other favourite TV shows. These are the ones that were still "current" in March 2008 (when this article was last featured) so let's see what their ultimate fates are, or look likely to be.

South Park (1997 - 2011[?])

This old favourite of mine is contracted for fourteen new episodes this year (its fifteenth season). South Park seasons air in two halves - seven episodes in March/April and seven episodes in October/November. Happily, the UK broadcast date is now only a few days after the US. Theoretically, there is always the possibility that more seasons will be commissioned, but I don't really see how Comedy Central can order more episodes after the big spat they had with Trey Parker and Matt Stone (South Park's creators) over censorship and freedom of speech in the wake of the whole Mohammed thing. Also, I don't think it would be a bad thing for South Park to end now - it's still funny and pleasingly satirical, but it's very tired in my opinion, and the later seasons are far inferior to the earlier ones.

Raven (2002 - 2010)

After thirteen series (ten regular ones and three so-called "spin-offs") it seems that Raven has finally hung up his magic staff for good. And after watching Series 8, 9 and 10, I don't think this is altogether a bad thing. These three series were filmed at an outdoor activity centre in Aviemore, which lacked the plethora of castle ruins present at the location of the first seven regular series (Castle Toward) and therefore were totally devoid of the lovely medieval fantasy atmosphere that had made the show so good in the past. The final three series looked like nothing more than modern adventure holidays, and the editing and choice of challenges were both highly suspect.

Along with the scriptwriters' horrible tendency to give James McKenzie (as the titular host) nothing but really badly scripted lines to say (using ridiculously convoluted sentences and unnecessarily long words, often in

completely the wrong context, which also prevented him from using his pleasing improvisation skills) this ensured that the show came to an end as a sad mockery of its former self. On the plus side, however, the final Ultimate Warrior - Sarjed - was probably the best all-round warrior ever in my opinion, and I still consider the first three series of this show (in reverse numerical order) to be the best three series of any show produced by the BBC this century!

Heroes (2006 - 2010)

After a very short and boring second season (which suffered in quality as well as length as a result of the Writers' Strike, apparently) Heroes reached a low ebb during its ridiculous third season, which saw the superpowered characters losing, gaining and swapping abilities like there was no tomorrow, all thanks to a convoluted plot involving some kind of secret serum, which didn't really make any sense. The fourth and final season, however, was much better in my opinion, although it wasn't as good as the first. Special praise goes out to Jack Coleman as Noah Bennet, who managed to make all four seasons of the show significantly better than they would undoubtedly have been without him.

POETRY CORNER

Alex may not have trusted his advisors nearly as much as any good dungeoneer should, but this team still made it to level three... go figure!

**When Alex met a big green friend
He made a deal to bring an end
To this toad's problem oh so great,
Then Lord Fear planned a deadly fate.
For one big troll his axe did sway,
But SHADOW magic saved the day.**

Within locked chest a spell was found,
Which brought back Fidjit safe and sound.
Then Smirky flew to level two
Where Hordriss, trapped, was feeling blue.
A magic Anode was the key,
And Greystagg gave one grudgingly.
Romahna's aid meant spears were beat,
Head-on the grayling did retreat.
With Hordriss free, the level's done,
So down to three, the final one!
Grimaldine rowed through yucky mess,
Then Alex got into a stress
As cards were turned and wits were tried,
And soon he'd fallen down and died!

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.





