

THE ADVENTURE PROBE
1992 CHRISTMAS SUPPLEMENT



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CONTENTS



Cover picture by Barbara Bassingthwaighte.....	Front
Christmas Specials by Steve Clay.....	Page 4
Progress by Barbara Bassingthwaighte.....	Page 5
Ask Grue by The Grue!	Page 6
Happy Christmas by Barbara Bassingthwaighte.....	Page 7
Top 5 Adventurous T.V. Programmes by Jonathan Scott.....	Page 8
Gilbert the Dragon by Barbara Bassingthwaighte.....	Page 10
Hour Price Music by Gareth Pitchford.....	Page 11
The Balrog and the Grue by Mary Scott-Parker.....	Page 12
Pratchett's World by Steve Clay.....	Page 14
Puzzles by Dot Vaughan, Barbara Bassingthwaighte, & others.....	Page 16
Quiz by Lol Oakes	Page 19
Stocking Crossword by Barbara Bassingthwaighte.....	Page 20
Wordspiral by Barbara Bassingthwaighte	Page 22
What Next? by June Rowe	Page 23
Word Search by Barbara Bassingthwaighte	Page 24
Word Search by Doreen Bardon	Page 25
How many adventures? by Keith Burnard	Page 26
Roal's Tale	Page 28



This supplement is free to readers who have subscribed in advance for the December 1992 issue of Adventure Probe.



CHRISTMAS SPECIALS

by Steve Clay



Get Rich Quick: With our pack of imitation teeth. How? I hear you cry. Pop one of these under your pillow every night and due to contractual obligation the tooth fairy must exchange the tooth for a piece of silver. 1 groat per doz.

Stocking fillers: Following the recent investigations into the practice of Dr. 'Stumpy' Slasher we can offer you a variety of amputated legs at rock bottom prices. Ideal for kitting out that ghoulish dungeon. 2 groats each. Matching pairs available. Ideal for cannibal barbecues. Write for price of our special limb meat pack.

Genuine dragon tooth pendant: Each tooth, gathered from the lair of a sleeping dragon, is supplied on genuine leather-effect thong. Each purchase supplied with certificate of authenticity. 1 silver piece.

Certificates of authenticity: Give those dodgy gifts the genuine feel with these parchment-like certificates. One of our most popular lines. 1 groat per pad.

Sacks 'n' shirts: Following the recent merger between the Thieves' Guild and the Federation of Accountants, we offer you extra strong sacks stencilled with the word SWAG at 1 groat per doz. Also available are striped T-shirts. One size fits all. Ideal for freelance burglar just starting out.

Spice up your buffet: Exclusive to us. Russian roulette vol-au-vents. One in six is filled with the deadly poison "URGH!!".

Catering packs available. 1 silver piece per doz.

Books: Now in stock, a huge selection of popular reading matter including:
Evil Dex's Guide to Disembowelling.

The Good Cavern Guide.

I was a Teenage Wereduck. (unbelievable story!)

Coming out of the Closet. (A bogey-man's tale)

Please write for full list of books available.

Inflatables: A variety of inflatables are available. Whether you want to wave a banana at the arena or you prefer more discreet entertainment, we have what you want. For strict confidentiality write to our 'Inflatable Friend' Dept.

Progress by Barbara Bassingthwaighte

You know that jolly fat man in his red suit?
His long white beard and shiny black boots,
With that old reindeer who's nose was so red,
With the elves who made toys (or so it is said).

It's all changed!



Santa's programmed in his reindeer,
Computerized his sleigh,
Automated his workshop,
To make toys for Christmas day.

Santa's diet has made him thin,
Rudolph's retired and loves his gin.
The elves are redundant and live on the dole,
And that's how it is now at the North Pole.





ASK GRUE!



Dear Grue,

Ere grue, wossis adventurin lark then? I woz given this ere lump of Technicackle Wizardry them posh geezers call a computer, and no sooner than i plugged it in, THUMP!! I woz on the floor!

Flippin mother had pushed me off me chair and woz deeply engrossed in some 'game' called Lords of Time! Huh!, i say 'game' in wotsits, coz it woz just a load of words on the screen! Not a flippin alien in sight! wossa use of that i ask yer?

Three channel sound and wonderful graphics my Amstrads got, and all i see on the screen are words! Not even 3-D words, just normal ones! Disgusted i am, wots more i'm hungry too! Flippin mother spends all the day tapping one-fingered at the keyboard when she should be cookin my tea! I hopes you print this ere, so's mother (who reads this sort of thing) can get the hint and get me on my computer occasionally to blast a few green aliens. (That's if my joystick still works!)

Your's n all that

Spotty 13 year old

PS. I'm writin to you since you seem to be the only sane one in this mag thing!



Dear Adrian,

Hmm? Lots of words on the screen ... Got it! Your mother is probably a secret hacker, trying to break into some secret defense network, she sounds like some kind of dangerous commie pervert to me. You should be careful, she might be trying to start World War Three!

What you should do is turn her in to MI5 or the FBI or some other agency who would be interested in apprehending this threat to global peace and harmony. That would definitely get her off the computer for quite a while, unfortunately you would not get your tea for a while either but we can't have it all can we?

PS. Couldn't you find something other than green aliens to blast at on your computer? ... I'm married to one i'll have you know!!

HAPPY CHRISTMAS

by Barbara Bassingthwaite

Here is Christmas time at last
Another year has quickly passed
Plenty of presents around the tree
Perfect gifts for you and me
Young children sitting on Santa's knee

Carol singers on the village green
Happy children in a dream
Robin redbreast in the snow
Icicles hanging all aglow
Snowmen built by children at play
Trees decorated for Christmas day
Mince pies, puddings, turkey too
Always busy, lots to do
Seasonal Greetings from Probe to you.



Top Five Adventurous T.V. Programmes

by Jonathan Scott

And here is our host, Cassie Kiss 'Em, to countdown to our fave top filii - oops, Cass is too busy presenting "America's Top Ten" on Miami Beach to do this once-in-a-lifetime show, but what the hey! Instead, we have Millie M. O'Phnaer, world-famous Thespian, who will do very nicely

At number 5 is The Under Years.

One cliché in the labour of our love is having to look under objects, especially other people's beds! Not a very wise thing to do. You never know what you may find - ancient socks and the like. Still, despite the sensitive subject matter, this prog is an enjoyable romp into what you really find under beds!

At number 4 is The Undid.

Okay, it's not actually a T.V. prog. but a cult horror movie, showing the frustrations of an adventurer playing a "sneaky" game with neither UNDO nor RAMSAVE - for instance, he has typed SHOOT UPHOLSTERER, only to discover that, later in the game when he has acquired a little money, he needs to ask the bloke to fix an armchair (an essential part of the game). So he has to reload a SAVED position and go through the 100-location maze which redefines itself every five minutes (annoying, especially when you're in it - you definitely are IN IT!).

At number 3 is The Crustal Maze.

Yep, you guessed it, a maze with the description "You are in the Crustal Maze. Walls of Hovis stretch in all directions.". A pain, isn't it? Not quite all you have to do is EAT WALLS and, as well as getting a little of that essential dietary fibre, you have made an A-MAZE-ING ESCAPE. If it was possible to do this in other adventures, it would make most adventurer's day by chopping out one of the undeniable chores of adventuring ... Mazes!

At number 2 is Have I Got Grues For You.

A homage to Infocom's classic adventures. You couldn't even peep into an underground cave system without running into one of these blighters. But then, where would we be without our furry, vicious pals and It's done wonders for the Ormskirk Tourist Industry - hasn't it, Borphee?

At number 1 is ... drumroll, followed by accidental breaking of drumsticks and frustrating cry (a reminder that you should never use a chicken's leg as a musical implement). Yep, it's Faulty Towers, the classic sitcom.

No, not that T.V. programme but, in actual fact (eh? All facts are actual), a DIY series dealing with the intricacies of repairing your own tower with its locked door (unlocked at present), spiral staircase (who forgot the wood?), room at the top (which conveniently is on the ground floor!) and whatnot. Indeed, the whole shebang is catered for in the programme's 23 foolproof, easy-to-follow editions. Its presenter Ze Towarzat Jakbiltd (pronounced, 'The Tower that Jack Built') glides through each edition in a truly graceful fashion. Indeed the most adventurous T.V. Programme. One problem, though, only a total idiot would go about repairing their own tower. They'd be better off hiring UPP, UPP & AVAY LTD who do the best all-round fix-it for under 50 groats in the whole of Tharg! After all, the owner might fall down the staircase and break their hake; which is, by the way, an upmarket alternative to red herrings, carried widely by yuppies, or perhaps that should by guppies!

* * * * *

If these programmes aren't adventurous enough for you, try balancing a wok on the roof, and you'll have, before your very eyes, Satellite T.V. There must be something adventurous in there!



Gilbert the Dragon

by Barbara Bassingthwaite

I am a brave dragon, Gilbert is my name,
I often feature in an adventure game.
It was a cold wet winter's day
When Barbara Gibb came my way.

All dragons and orcs know her name,
She's ruthless in an adventure game.
She stares at first, then prods and kicks,
And gets up to all sorts of tricks.



So when Barbara Gibb you see,
Climb up into the nearest tree.
Then quiet as a mouse you stay,
Until she decides to go away.

So dragons, dwarves and giants, look out,
There is no peace when she's about.
She will not quit until the end,
Which send us creatures round the bend.

Hi Barbara! - Gilbert.

HOURLY PRICE MUSIC

presents

Two brand new releases from "Middle Earth Music"

THORIN - CLASSIC GOLD (Vol.1)

includes such memorable hits as "SINGING ABOUT GOLD", "SILENCE IS GOLDEN", "UNCHAINED MELODY (the Elven King's Dungeon mix)", "IF YOU GO DOWN TO THE WOODS TODAY (You're sure of the bulbous eyes)". "WHAT'S BEHIND THAT (ROUND) GREEN DOOR", "WALKING IN A WINTER WILDERLAND", and "MISTY (The Mountains mix)".

and

THORIN SINGS THE BEATLES

Thorin and his band, Orc's Manoeuvres In The Dark, perform some of the great songs by Lennon and McCartney.

includes "THE LONG AND WINDING PASSAGE", "ALL YOU NEED IS LOVE (a curious map, a ring and a troll called Bert)", "CARRY THAT WEIGHT (The Fat Hobbit mix)", "THE END (you have scored 107%)", "GET BACK (I can't see any 'back' here)", "HELP! (you're doing fine)", "I SHOULD HAVE KNOWN BETTER (than to attack the nasty goblin with the lunch Elrond gave me)", "MAXWELL'S SILVER (small and curious)", "HAMMER WAIT (time passes)", "YOU NEVER GIVE ME YOUR MONEY (only some stupid map)", "I'LL BE BACK (in the goblin's dungeon)", "(eat Gandalf) YOU CAN'T DO THAT", "SHE CAME IN THROUGH THE DUNGEON WINDOW", and "YOU WON'T SEE ME (I'm wearing the valuable golden ring)".

A must for all music lovers everywhere.

Coming soon THORIN SINGS DES O'CONNER,

THORIN SINGS QUEEN

and the eagerly awaited THORIN SINGS QUIETLY.

(written by Gareth Pitchford)



The Balrog and the Grue

"Will you walk a little faster?"

said the Balrog to the Grue

"I spy a plump Adventurer

he'll do nicely for my stew."

“Not so fast” the Grue replied

with an evil, toothy smile.

'This one's mine I saw him first,

I've followed him a mile."

The Balroq said “Oh after you

that's just find and dandy,

But his sword is sharp, his lamp is bright

and he's got his spell book handy."

Said Grue "Just let his light go out,

And then I'll make a grab.

I'll roast him slowly on a spit

I'm partial to kebab."

The Balrog said “Oh, are you sure?”

They make a lovely stew.

With spiders, newts and vegetables

It warms you through and through."

“Or what about a Cavern Pie?”

All spicy, hot and peppered

Adventurer topped with fluffy mash,

Well they make a change from Shepherd!"

"Adventurer soup" the Grue then sighed
 "Like mother used to make."
His eyes grew misty at the thought
 Of the goodies she would bake.
The Balrog sharply nudged the Grue.
 "You'll have to be much quicker.
His sword is down, his spell book's shut
 And his lamp's begun to flicker."
The gruesome twosome crept up close.
 Our Hero never guessed it.
Then suddenly he spied a knob,
 Reached out his hand and pressed it.
The ground behind him opened up.
 With two intakes of breath
The Grue and Balrog disappeared
 And fell to certain death.
The Adventurer pressed the knob again,
 Heard just a tiny buzz.
With a puzzled look he turned around
 "Now I wonder what that one does!"

Mary Scott-Parker





PRATCHETT'S WORLD

by Steve Clay



Anyone out there who has yet to discover Terry Pratchett's Discworld series is a very lucky person indeed. You have the whole experience to come. Discworld veterans will know the joy of a new Pratchett release. The funniest fantasy series ever kicked off with *The Colour of Magic* - older readers may remember the adventure from Pirahna - which followed the trials and tribulations of the wizard Rincewind and the tourist Twoflower and their travels around Ankh-Morpork and subsequent burning down of said city.

The first novel introduced a number of characters that would pop up again and again through the series. Rincewind, whose ability with languages was bettered only by his ability to avoid death. The librarian, a pleasant enough fellow who was accidentally turned into an orang-utan and refused to be turned back. And the luggage. The luggage is constructed from sapient pearwood an unusual material that follows its owner everywhere! This comes in useful when, in the second book *The Light Fantastic*, the group, including Cohen the barbarian, a man past his prime and struck down by plies, are trapped only to be saved by the homing instincts of the luggage.

The Discworld is a large flat disc carried through space on the back of four elephants which ride on the back of the giant space turtle Great A'Tuin. Magic is the rule of the day and the wizards play a major part in everything. As does Death, who talks in block capitals. Pratchett has taken all the cliches of fantasy and turned them on their head. Wizards are renowned smokers so on the Discworld they cough and wheeze whenever called to exert themselves. Cohen is the famous barbarian, but through being so brave and fearless he has reached old age and is suffering old age problems.

It is the character interaction that puts the Discworld series above the rest. The depth of the various beings is superb. There is also slapstick, as in "GUARDS, GUARDS!" when the city watch are trying to shoot down the dragon that is terrorizing the city. One of the watch decides that shooting the dragon is a million to one shot. There follows a collection of gags ending with the brave archer standing on one leg with an eye closed trying to hit the low-flying lizard.

Since the release of *Colour of Magic* there have been numerous imitators of Pratchett's style but none have come close. There have been some poor attempts at pastiche¹. There have been many comparisons of Pratchett and Douglas Adams. My own opinion is that while Adams was first, Pratchett is funnier.

Another touch of brilliance are the footnotes used to convey more detail. These add that little bit extra and give depth to the Discworld.

[1] PASTICHE - a collection of meat and veg, wrapped in pastry. Esme Weatherwax!

There are other non-Discworld novels by Terry Pratchett including the Trickers series for young readers. Trickers recently appeared on T.V. and there is a follow-up planned. The whole series is available on video (£7.99) and well worth the asking price.

The novels of Terry Pratchett are as follows:-

COLOUR OF MAGIC: The first instalment of the travels of Rincewind and Twoflower.

THE LIGHT FANTASTIC: Dragons that exist only if you believe in them. Aging barbarians. It's all here in the concluding episode of the Colour of Magic.

EQUAL RITES: A dying wizard bestows his staff on the seventh son of a seventh son. Except it wasn't a son. Womens lib. meets the Unseen University. Introduces Granny Weatherwax.

MORT: When Death takes on an apprentice all kinds of trouble is let loose. Mort brings emotion to the job and that's the last thing it needed.

SOURCERY: The seventh son of a seventh son is a wizard, the seventh son of a wizard is supposed to be impossible. The impossible crops up nine times out of ten and the Discworld gets itself a sourcerer!

WYRD SISTERS: Pratchett digs into the Shakespeare, throws in a vegetarian witch, some actors and a ghost and all hell breaks out.

PYRAMIDS: A trainee assassin returns home after his father's death to discover all kinds of skulduggery amongst the religious leaders. Includes guest appearances from various strange gods!

GUARDS, GUARDS!: When a large dragon begins to fry the inhabitants of Ankh-Morpork it is left to the city watch to deal with it.

MOVING PICTURES: Possibly the best Discworld novel to date. Follows the birth of the movies on the Disc and the heroics of Gaspo the wonder dog and his immaculate friend Liddle. Also included are Victor and Ginger the first stars of Holy Wood!

REAPER MAN: Death is given his notice and decides to spend some time just living. Problem is there is a queue forming in the other world.

The above are available in paperback and hardback.

The following two are available only in hardback:- WITCHES ABROAD: Not read

SMALL GODS: Exploring the strength of a religion based on fear. Includes a god who has lost most of his power and can just about control the mind of a tortoise.

Non-Discworld novels:- GOOD OMENS: The battle between good and evil. Co-written with Neil Gaiman. Look out for the bit with Trivia machine in the transport cafe!

TRICKERS/DIGGERS/WINGS: The trilogy featuring the gnomes. Meant for younger readers but great fun for everyone.

STRATA/THE DARK SIDE OF THE SUN: Two early Pratchett novels. Strata gives a few pointers to the Discworld and its secrets!

If you have not read any of the above, I would suggest you start at the beginning and work through. That way you take in more information of the Discworld's traits and the development of the various characters. By the way, the Discworld is recyclable. You can reread them as often as you like. The jokes, like a good wine, get better.



PUZZLES

Quote

G**ted; ***thful; Cl***et; Br***e; R***l; ***lly; In***ent; Hes***te; T***ng; Stuf**;
D**ble; C***er; Abs***ute; V***l; Car**; Pro**; De***e; **eal; C**ave.

The following groups of letters have to be inserted in the above to form proper words.
The inserts, when read in order, will form a quotation from Johnson, in a letter to Boswell.

ARE ARE BE EBE FY ID IDL IF ITA ITA LE NOT NOT OU RY RYI SOL SOL YOU

Horse Feathers

Can you figure out what these lines are saying?

11 was a race horse;

12 was 12.

1111 race at 524;

12112 at 221.

But 13 ran at 921.

So that's the 14 me!



Fruity Problem

Mary gave away 1/3rd of her oranges and then sold 2/3rds of the remainder. She then had a dozen left. How many did she start with?

Top Mar-ks!

Use the following clues to complete the 'MAR' words:

This mar is stone: mar***

So is this, but rather more precious: mar*****

This mar appears on the breakfast menu: mar*****

This mar makes a big bang: mar***

This mar is a vegetable: mar***

This mar dies for a Cause: mar***

You'll get wet feet in this mar!: mar**

One letter completes this Persian poet: *mar

If you have this mar you call it gout: **mar*****

Take a partner for this mar: mar*****



Number Trouble - sent in by Dot Vaughan

How does $3 + 4 + 9 + 12 + 22 + 24 = 1666$

(Clue: Italian capital letters)

Cash Quiz

Stella, Maria and Julia have only five- and tenpenny pieces in their money boxes. Stella's amount is now double Julia's. When all had 15p less than they have now, Stella's amount was one and a half times Maria's. When all had 25p less, Julia had half what Maria had. How much has Julia now?

Relativity

Three men named Preston, Brown and Steele each have two daughters. From the following statements, say which daughters are named Preston, Brown and Steele:

Carol is glad Anne is not her sister.

Mr. Brown likes Mr. Preston but does not like Molra's father.

Jane says Mr. Steele is more handsome than her own father, but less handsome than Anne's.

Mr. Preston thinks Jane a better dancer than either of his two children.

Molra's father borrowed Rachel's father's lawn-mower because he had lent his own to Carol's father.

Five to Six

By adding a letter to the front of the solution to the clue on the left, you have the solution to the clue on the right.

1. End of the day (5) - Chess piece (6)
2. Pointed missile (5) - Vegetable (6)
3. Lubricated (5) - Stained (6)
4. Snake (5) - Run in stockings (6)
5. To fish (5) - Confused mass (6)
6. Girl's name (5) - Spite (6)
7. Door-keeper (5) - Fast flowing oil well (6)
8. Crest (5) - Card game (6)
9. Moved gradually (5) - Jammed (6)
10. Terrible (5) - Legal (6)



Age-old Problem

Mum is 60 and the ages of her three children add up to 48. In how many years will the children's joint ages and Mum's age be the same?

.....

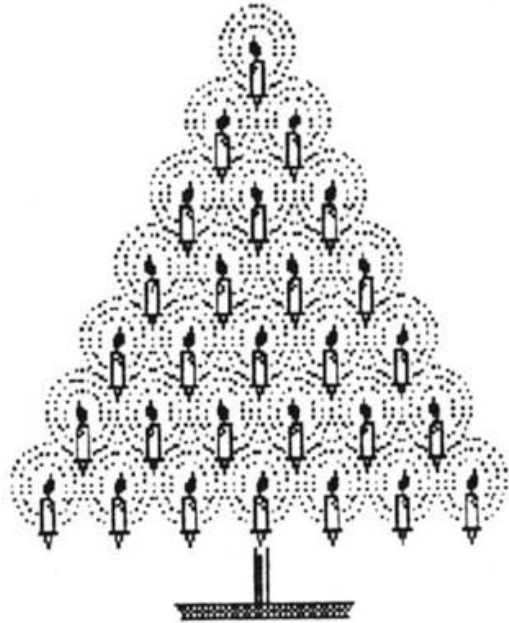
Missing Middles

What four-letter word will fit into the middle of all the letters below to make proper words?

W****er, Sy****e, F****e, C****e, B****er

What am I? by Barbara Bassingthwaite

My first is in BACON but not in PIG
My second is in CYCLE but not in BIKE
My third is in TRUTH but not in TRUST
My fourth is in BIRD but not in SING
My fifth is in VIXEN but not in FOX
My sixth is in FRESH but not in FRUIT
My seventh is in NUT but not in BOLT
My eighth is in CREAM but not in BEAT
My ninth is in BLACK but not in BLUE
My tenth is in CAKES but not in CAFE
My eleventh is in ICE but not in FROZEN
My twelfth is in BANG but not in BOOM
My thirteenth is in BRUNCH but not in LUNCH
My fourteenth is in SOCK but not in SLIPPER
My fifteenth is in TALL but not in SHORT
My whole is a book by Charles Dickens



My first is in SNOWBALL but not in SNOW
My second is in TURKEY but not in CHICKEN
My third is in BALL but not in BELL
My fourth is in GIN but not in WHISKY
My fifth is in DAY but not in NIGHT
My sixth is in TOY but not in TOP
My whole is a drink and I don't mean tea!



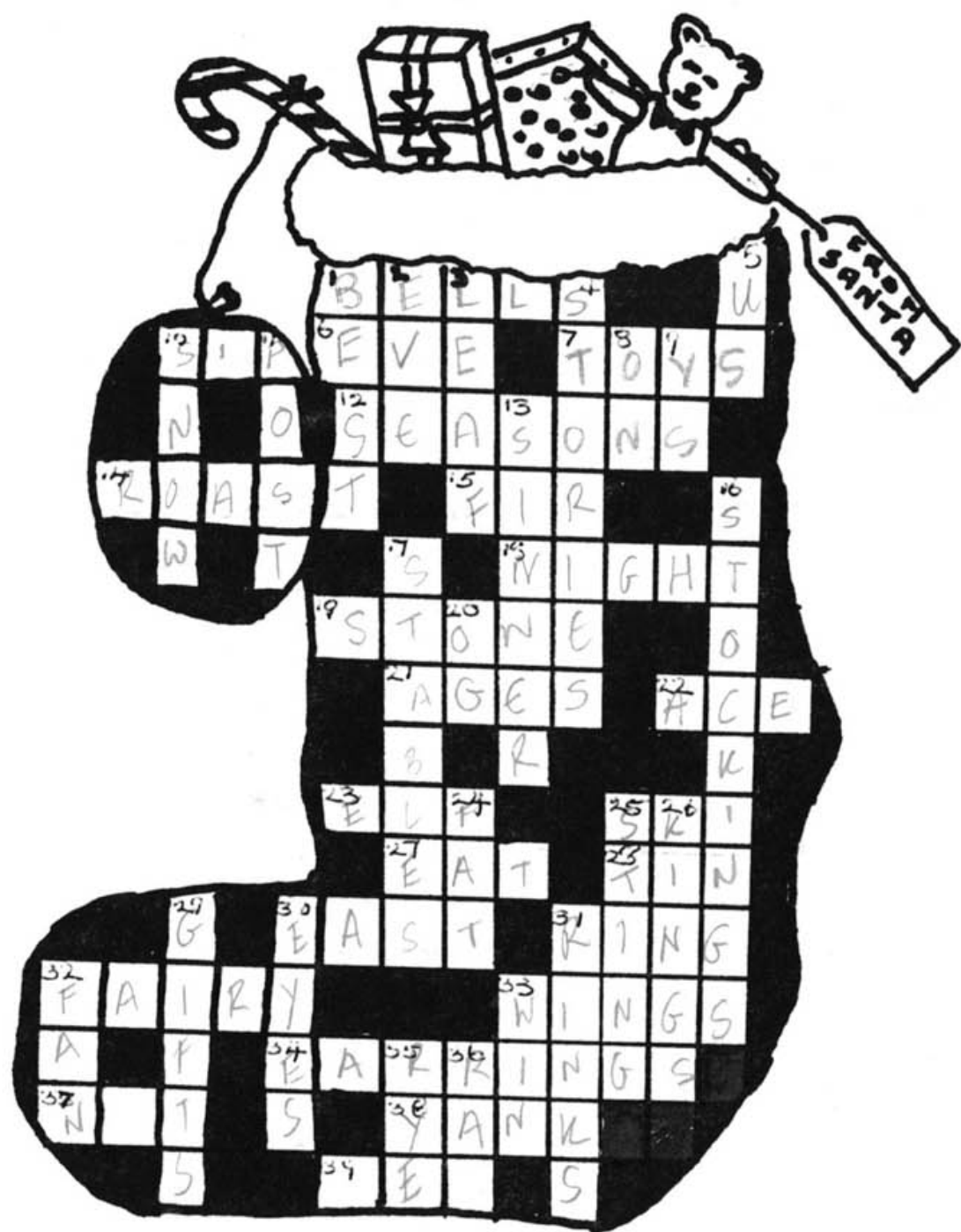
QUIZ compiled by Lol Oakes

What do the initial letters stand for -

e.g. 26 = L. of the A. = Lettes of the Alphabet

- | | |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1) 3 = B. M. (S.H.T.R.) | 31) 5 = D. In a Z. C. |
| 2) 7 = C. of the R. | 32) 1805 = B. of T. |
| 3) 49 = S. S. | 33) 22 = T. L. D. |
| 4) 147 = M. B. at S. | 34) 192 = D. E. |
| 5) 1 = W. on a U. | 35) 28 = D. In F. (E. In L. Y.) |
| 6) 144 = S.I. In a S. F. | 36) 25 = Y. In a S. W. |
| 7) 9 = P. In the S. S. | 37) 273 = M. C. (A. Z.) |
| 8) 32 = D. F. (A. W. W. F.) | 38) 7 = D. S. |
| 9) 1666 = G. F. of L. | 39) 18 = H. on a G. C. |
| 10) 13 = B. D. | 40) 21 = K. of the D. |
| 11) 7 = W. of the W. | 41) 100 = P. In a P. |
| 12) 3 = M. In a B. (J. K. J.) | 42) 8 = P. In a G. |
| 13) 3 = C. In a F. | 43) 8 = S. on an O. |
| 14) 10 = D. S. | 44) 6 = P. on a S. T. |
| 15) 64 = S. R. of E. | 45) 5280 = F. In a M. |
| 16) 12 = D. of C. | 46) 4 = S. In a D. of C. |
| 17) 180 = M. S. at D. | 47) 2468 = W. D. W.A. |
| 18) 54 = C. In a P. (I. J.) | 48) 10 = Y. In a D. |
| 19) 64 = S. on a C. B. | 49) 3 = M. (A. D.) |
| 20) 39 = S. (J. B.) | 50) 4 = H. of the A. |
| 21) 7 = L. G. S. In the B. S. | 51) 25 = C. D. (J. C. B.) |
| 22) 60 = T. S. | 52) 84 = K. on a G. P. |
| 23) 29028 = H. of E. In F. | 53) 200 = P. for P. G. In M. |
| 24) 15 = N. of P. In a R. U. T. | 54) 100 = T. E. |
| 25) 5 = C. of the W. | 55) 24 = B. In a B. P. |
| 26) 57 = H. V. | 56) 10 = G. B. S. on a W. |
| 27) 88 = T. F. L. | 57) 15 = M. on a D. M. C. |
| 28) 1912 = S. of the T. | |
| 29) 1760 = Y. In a M. | |
| 30) 13 = N. of P. In a R. L. T. | |





CRYPTIC CLUE:

The missing offspring is called Mary.

CHRISTMAS STOCKING CROSSWORD

compiled by Barbara Bassingthwaight

ACROSS:

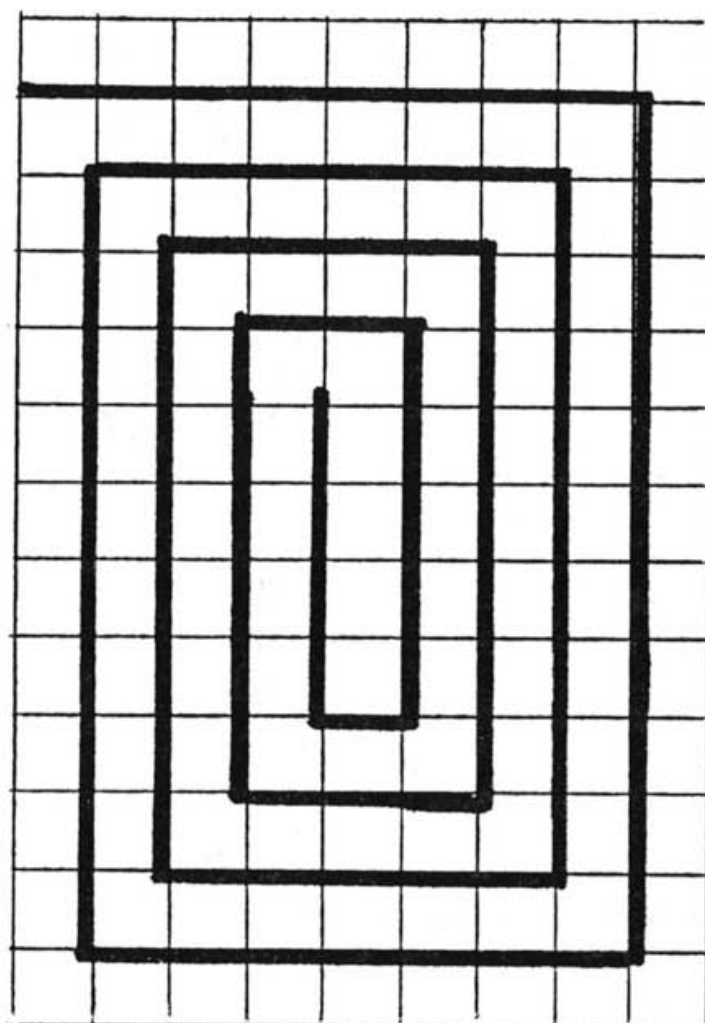
- ✓ 1. Pull the ropes and hear them ring (5)
- ✓ 6. Adam's mate (3)
- ✓ 7. Santa's gifts to children usually (4)
- ✓ 10. To slowly drink (3)
- ✓ 12. Spring, winter, etc. (7)
- ✓ 14. Cook the turkey (5)
- ✓ 15. Evergreen tree (3)
- ✓ 18. It's dark (5)
- ✓ 19. 14lbs. equals (5)
- ✓ 21. Wait a long, long time (4)
- ✓ 22. A pack of cards has four of them (3)
- ✓ 23. He throws axes in adventures (3)
- ✓ 25. Slide on the snow (3)
- ✓ 27. Consume food (3)
- ✓ 28. It could be full of sweets (3)
- ✓ 30. Compass direction (4)
- ✓ 31. Hand jewellery (4)
- ✓ 32. Tinkerbell was one (5)
- ✓ 33. Tinkerbell has a pair of them (5)
- ✓ 34. Pirates have one, ladies have two (8)
- ✓ 37. This is a cracker (3)
- ✓ 38. Slang for Americans (5)
- ✓ 39. Rudolph's doctor (3)

DOWN:

- ✓ 1. ---- bitter (4)
- ✓ 2. Christmas --- (3)
- ✓ 3. This falls in autumn (4)
- ✓ 4. Tales (7)
- ✓ 5. Not we but -- (2)
- ✓ 8. Not over, under, or in, but -- (2)
- ✓ 9. The initials of a Speccy magazine (2)
- ✓ 10. Cold, soft and white (4)
- ✓ 11. Letter, mall, etc. (4)
- ✓ 13. Repent, I say, repent (7)
- ✓ 16. Children hang them up on Christmas Eve (9)
- ✓ 17. Jesus was born in one (6)
- ✓ 20. Go backwards (2)
- ✓ 24. Plump, like Santa (3)
- ✓ 25. Nettles and bees do this (5)
- ✓ 26. Three people who came to see baby Jesus (5)
- ✓ 29. Presents (5)
- ✓ 30. They contain pupils (4)
- ✓ 31. Ice skating arenas (5)
- ✓ 32. Cools you when hot (3)
- ✓ 33. Beat everyone in a race (3)
- ✓ 35. Grain (3)
- ✓ 36. SID maybe (3)



Christmas Wordspiral compiled by Barbara Bassingthwaighe



Place your answers clockwise around the puzzle, using the last letter of your answer as the first letter of your next answer.

CLUES

1. Children build them in winter (7)
2. You have to crack them (4)
3. They are hung up on Christmas Eve (9)
4. Another name for Father Christmas (13)
5. A member of the choir (6)
- ~~6. One had a red nose (8)~~
7. Father Christmas lands here at night (8)
8. Father Christmas uses one to travel (6)
9. Part of a pig, usually roasted (3)
10. You kiss under this (9)
11. Santa comes on Christmas * * * (3)
12. One of Santa's helpers (3)
13. Jack makes it very cold (5)
14. Could decorate the Christmas tree (6)
15. Brightens up the Christmas tree (6)
16. Look nice at the top of the Christmas trees (5)
17. Spring, summer, etc., (6)
18. Not day, but (5)
19. Roast it on Christmas day (6)
20. Long cake covered in chocolate (7)
21. A present from a wiseman (4)
22. One of Santa's reindeer (6)
23. English winter birds (6)
24. A Christmas carol had 3 (6)

WHAT NEXT??? by June Rowe

Five computer owners with peculiar (spell-checked) names had to replace certain bits of their equipment. Can you sort out who owned which computer and how much each one spent on which new piece?

	Amiga	Acorn	Spectrum	Amstrad	Atari	£25	£15	£20	£35	£10	Powerpack	Keyboard	Joystick	Mouse	Interface
Vicar Jackson	X	X	O	X	X	X	X	X	X	O	O	X	X	X	X
Juniper Royal	O	X	X	X	X	O	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	O
Barbarian Gible	X	X	X	X	O	X	X	O	X	X	X	O	X	X	X
Lairy Horrified	X	X	X	O	X	X	X	O	X	X	X	X	X	O	X
Nib Rumbustious	X	O	X	X	X	X	O	X	X	X	X	X	O	X	X
Powerpack	X	X	O	X	X	X	X	X	X	O					
Keyboard	X	X	X	X	O	X	X	O	X	X					
Joystick	X	O	X	X	X	X	O	X	X	X					
Mouse	X	X	X	O	X	X	X	X	O	X					
Interface	O	X	X	X	X	O	X	X	X	X					
£25	O	X	X	X	X										
£15	X	O	X	X	X										
£20	X	X	X	X	O										
£35	X	X	X	O	X										
£10	X	X	O	X	X										



NAME	COMPUTER	COST	ITEM
B G	ATARI	£20	KEYBOA
J R	AMIGA	£25	INTERFACE
V J	SPECTRU	£10	POWERP
L H	AMSTR	£35	MOUSE
N R	ACORN	£15	JOYSTICK

1. The person with the longest name owns the Atari.
2. The Joystick cost £15.
3. Juniper Royal's computer doesn't need a new poserpack.
4. Lairy Horrified's new mouse didn't cost £20.
5. The interface was bought for the Amiga.
6. A powerpack replacement wasn't necessary for the Acorn or Amstrad.
7. Vicar Jackpot had to spend £10 on a new part.
8. Nib Rombustious has an Acorn.
9. It wasn't the Amstrad that cost its owner £15.
10. £25 was the cost of the interface.
11. The keyboard was bought for the Atari.

Christmas Word Search compiled by Barbara Bassingthwaite



- | | | |
|------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| BRANDY | HOLLY | SLEIGH |
| CAKE | ICE | SNOWMAN |
| CAROLS | PUDDING | SNOW |
| CHRISTMAS | REDNOSE | STAR |
| COMPUTER | REINDEER | TOY |
| CRACKERS | ROAST | TREE |
| DECORATIONS | ROBIN | TURKEY |
| FROST | SANTA | WINE |
| GIN | | |



WORD SEARCH (Objects Found) - Compiled by Doreen Bardon



- | | | | |
|-------------------|---------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------|
| BIRD | HOOK | WAND | DAGGER |
| DOG | BUCKET | TRIDENT | BOTTLE |
| NOTE | RUCKSACK | OIL | FOOD |
| TIN | FLINT | MEDALLION | MATCH |
| SHIP | STONE | BAG | PICK |
| MAP | SPELLS | RING | ORB |
| LAMP | CLOAK | NET | CAULDRON |
| ROPE | EGG | RUG | HELMET |
| KEYS | BOOTS | GAS | GLOVES |
| CHEST | CHAIR | SWORD | UNIFORM |
| SCROLL | BELT | KNIFE | BOW |
| ARROW | TALISMAN | GUN | CANDLE |
| HAMMER | SPOON | SHIELD | MIRROR |
| CHAIN | LOG | NAIL | MAGNIFYING GLASS |
| TORCH | POT | COAT | RED HERRING |



Starting at the top left hand corner, take all unused letters, and find the secret object.

See how many adventure games you can find in this story.

Classic Adventure by Keith Burnard

While on a holiday to remember, I wandered into the Africa gardens. By the black fountain I came across the enchanted cottage. Behind the green door was the wizard of Akyrz. He spoke to me and said "This is a red alert. I'm living on borrowed time, you must help me. Go to the temple of terror and find Laskar's crystals. If you pass the test I will ZZZZ for ever. I warn you this is a fairly difficult mission, but you should be up to the challenge, just use your loaf. Good luck!"

Wearing my favourite white feather cloak and with my rucksack on my back, off I trotted. I boarded the ship of doom and was soon in trouble. After the ship wreck in the Bermuda triangle, I swam to the desert island. Hoping I wasn't marooned, I wandered through the swamp and up the mountain of Ket. Here I met ten little Indians in search of angels. They told me to look for the time traveller. They seemed to me to be very dodgy geezers.

Wandering into the forest at worlds end, I came to the castle of riddles. On entering the red door in the dark tower, I met the time traveller. "Answer the riddle and I will help you. What was Humphrey Bogart to have said in the bar?"

Answer On giving the right answer he told me "This is top secret but say boggit when you want to return to the Wiz-biz and a life boat will appear." Although this sounded like a lot of ballyhoo I remembered the word.

Leaving the forest I met the Thompson twins. After a long chat I wondered if they were a double agent. Ha! Ha! I then found myself walking into the lost temple. I first met the black knight, but as he was under the curse of Calutha, he let me escape. I next encountered some mutant spiders, their venom was fatal, but by turning myself into Jack the ripper I hit out and cut them up.

My next stalker was the wolfman, but once again I was too clever and turned into a werewolf simulator and killed him. Next I came to a statue, and there in the eye of Bain I found one of the crystals. Searching the treasure of the Santa Maria, I ignored the cup, the jade stone, the golden locket and the golden sword of Bhakhor, until I found the second crystal.

Remembering the words of the time traveller I said "boggit" and to my surprise a life boat arrived. I climbed in and away it sailed through the lost twilight to the enchanted cottage. The wizard with there, looking for his staff of power. I handed over the crystals to the thankful wizard, who hid them in case the taxman cometh - the miser.

The quest was over. This seemed like a never ending story and at the end of the day I wondered if it was all in my imagination, a nightmare, a case of total reality delusion.





ROAL'S TALE



"written for Ann"

In the west a great black cloud appeared from out of nowhere and began to fill the sky above Ska Dhor. As the 'cloud' grew and the sky darkened, an enormous shadow covered the land around the base of Ska Dhor causing all manner of creatures to scurry to the safety of their lairs, their hearts pounding in their ears as they ran. If they had but chanced to look up and gaze at the 'cloud' they would have seen that it was formed by a mass of birds, black of plumage and sharp of talon, who wheeled and soared in the air as though waiting for some signal to guide their next move. Suddenly that signal was given and the vast armada of Korats, for that was what they were, surged forward as one and headed in the direction of Torag Klnh.

Meanwhile on the edge of a small babbling brook a halfling by the name of Roal was busy doing battle with a large brown trout and quite oblivious of the approaching birds, until darkness befell him as the 'cloud' passed overhead. Glancing up he noticed the dark sheen of their plumage and the sharpness of their talons and casting his rod to one side he quickly scampered up the bank . . . with a flick of its tail, the brown trout dove to the bottom of the sparkling brook and settled beneath a large rock.

Just then two of the 'outriders' of the flock spotted the halfling clambering away from the brook and with a quickness that belied their size, swooped down towards the unsuspecting Roal. With his eyes fixed on the nearby safety of a large hollow tree-stump Roal had no reason to look over his shoulder but if he had, what he would have seen would have surely spurred him to greater efforts for there, just behind him, were two large Korats, their beaks gaping wide and their talons fully extended. With his breath burning a hole in his chest and little short legs pumping for all they were worth, Roal drew ever nearer to the small hole in the hollow-stump and then just as it seemed that all his efforts were worthwhile the first of the 'outriders' struck!! The first Roal knew of it was when he felt the hot breath on the back of his neck and then a smell of decay reached his nostrils, only to be replaced by the scent of warm blood . . . his own . . . as the razor-sharp talons of the Korat seared into his shoulder.

In the taverns and alehouses of the kingdom of Tousel tales had often been told, albeit in hushed tones and whispered phrases, of the cunning and guile of the Korats and of their undoubted talents as 'bringers of death', but there had always been the odd one or two story-tellers willing to embellish their monologues with accounts of the Korat's one great weakness . . . their inability to control the 'blood-lust' when it came upon them. It was this weakness that was to save the life of Roal the halfling as he scurried towards the hollow tree-stump, for as the first 'outrider' delivered its telling blow the second Korat smelt the fresh, warm blood . . . and in its urgency to obtain its share, cannoned into the first bird causing it to relax its grip on Roal. In that instant, that spells the difference between life and death, Roal made one last frantic effort to reach the safety of the hole and with a twist of his body flung himself desperately forward. With a blood-curdling screech the two 'outriders' struck out at Roal, only to rip the boot from his left leg as he hurtled head first through the gaping hole and then buffeting the air with their mighty wings soared into the sky to retake their place on the edges of the dark 'cloud'.

In the warm, moist safety of the hollow tree-stump a small halfling quivered in a dark corner and sobbed uncontrollably. . .

... As his eyes grew accustomed to the darkness and the searing pain in his chest began to recede, Roal glanced around and tried to take stock of his present situation. The air in the hollow tree-stump was heavy with a 'darkness' that spoke of decay and misuse, whilst the ground upon which he now sat was covered with a thick blanket of soft, moist leaves in the region of his right foot and with panic lodging itself firmly in his throat, he shifted position slightly in order to ascertain just what was causing it. As the fear of the unknown pulsed wildly in his temples he kicked out, scattering the leaves nearest to his foot and revealing a small furry creature not unlike a squirrel but with the soft amber eyes of the pine-rats of the great Northern Forest.

"That was a close call young halfling" croaked the creature, "for a moment there I thought the Korats had you." Then, with a shake of his head, it approached Roal, with a bravado far in excess of its diminutive size, and perched itself on his upper left thigh. For a few moments Roal gazed at the small furry creature as it preened its whiskers, removing the odd remnant of leaf and generally straightening out the crinkled ends and then the urgency of the situation struck home "I must get to my people," cried Roal, "They are in great danger from the Korats but even my sturdy little legs are incapable of out-running them." Tears of frustration welled up in the corners of his eyes and he racked his brain in an effort to figure out the impossible. "Their strong wings will carry them to Torag Minh long before my short little legs and without my warning all my people will be taken unawares by the arrival of the Korats. The ground will run with rivers of blood and the 'death-cries' of the Korats will echo long and loud through the land of Torag Minh." Thumping the ground in despair, Roal began to sob uncontrollably . . . his little body shaking with every convulsion.

"There is a way" whispered the creature, "because the Korats will not fly the direct route, instead they will skirt the realm of the Grundars and fly to the far east, for even the Korats have their fears and Grundars are the one thing they fear most in all the land. The reasons are hidden in the mists of time, but it is said that the Grundars once slew more than 1000 of their number, when they stumbled across a flock of Korats who had just gorged themselves on a herd of unsuspecting Nugs. The satiated Korats were roosting when a war-band of Grundars came across them and the slaughter was incredible to behold. Only one Korat lived to tell the tale and the rest were put to the sword. Even to this day the Grundar still wear the talons and beaks of the slaughtered Korats hanging from their war-belts. They are much prized possessions and are handed down from one generation to another. The Korats have never forgotten the incident and to this day they never over-fly the realm of the Grundars."

Roal's heart skipped a beat; he would take the direct route and cross the realm of the Grundars . . . that was the answer, but would he succeed. The Grundars were renowned hunters, the tales of their tracking abilities were legend in the taverns of Tousel and it was said that they could detect the scent of their prey from more than 500 paces away. He would have to be swift, but more importantly, would have to be silent. "Thank you!" yelled Roal. "The fate of my people depends upon my speed, so I must leave now. However without your advice there would have been no purpose in my leaving this place." With that he tentatively peered out of the hole in the hollow stump and seeing that all was as it should be, emerged once more into the bright light of day.



Making his way across to where his left boot lay crumpled and torn, Roal picked it up and peered at the talon marks in its heel. A shiver of fear ran down his spine as he recalled just how close the cold hand of death had been to his heart and as he pulled on the boot an inner urgency overtook him and he knew that he MUST complete his task . . . his people depended upon him. With a quick wave in the direction of the hollow stump and the creature it contained, Roal turned in the direction of the realm of the Grundar and set off at a fast trot. Behind him a small voice cried "Good luck halfling and I hope you get there in time . . . because I know what it is like to be the last of your race!" In less than the length of one stride Roal crossed the divide between bright sunlight and cold green darkness to find himself in the chilly confines of the great forest that marked the outer boundary of the realm of the Grundars. For just a moment his short little legs seemed to take on a will of their own and threatened to bring Roal to a sudden halt, but with the taste of fear still sour in his throat the small halfling clenched his fists and plunged onwards into the waiting unknown. Meanwhile, in a small hollow tree-stump a tiny surreal tentatively rubbed the 'ourat' it now clutched in its paw and trusted in the ancient powers contained in this legendary sacred object to guard his new-found friend from danger. Perhaps one day they would meet again and Roal would relate to him the tale of his journey to his people . . . but then again, perhaps not!

Brushing aside the overhanging branches that threatened to bar his progress Roal sped on through the dark green forest, his eyes darting this way and that in an attempt to ensure that nothing was following him. Now and then a dark shadow fluttered into his vision but a small change of direction and a quickening of pace soon caused him to breathe a little easier. Roal glanced upwards but the overhead canopy was too dense to allow more than just a hint of sunlight through and what did descend towards the forest floor quickly darkened in hue, casting a strange green tinge over all that it touched. "How far had he come?" he wondered, "How far is there to go?" Such thoughts as these flitted through his head like small dark butterflies, each one adding its own pinch of doubt to the worries that were already clogging Roal's mind. "Where were the Korats now? Had they outflanked the realm of Grundars or was there a chance that their intense loathing of all that was 'Grundar' still burnt brightly enough to ensure that they gave the forest as wide a berth as possible?" With that Roal paused for a moment, his breath rasping warmly in his chest and took stock of his situation. "It is no good just blundering blindly on, I have to make sure that I am going in the right direction or else I could end up running in circles until either my legs give way or my heart bursts with exertion and then who will save my people?" panted Roal, quickly glancing around for some sign to guide him in the direction of his destiny.

As a child Roal had often spent time in the company of Kacj, an old and wizened halfling who dwelt on the outskirts of the village, listening to his tales and learning of the ways of his people. It was Kacj that had taught him how to fish for the brown trout and Kacj that had shown him how to bait traps to catch the small blue creatures that lived in dark burrows in the meadowlands . . . strange little creatures with long ears and even longer back legs, but most of all Kacj had taught him how to survive and to adapt to whatever his situation was; how to use every means at his disposal to ensure that he always found his way home again . . . It was this knowledge that was to serve him well now. Peering at a tall tree Roal noticed that one side was thick with a covering of moss and at the back of his mind nagged the words . . . "The north side of the trees always protect themselves from the cold winds of winter with a layer of moss". Hopefully Kacj would be right and now was the time to put this knowledge to the test. So armed with this information Roal quickly took stock of his bearings and then, taking one deep breath, struck out in the direction he hoped would lead him to his village . . .



With his sturdy little legs striding out for all they were worth and his arms pumping away by his sides Roal sped through the forest, occasionally leaping over fallen branches and side-stepping around the large rocks that littered the path. It was one of these that was to prove his downfall, for as he stepped around the next one to cross his path his foot slipped on some rotting leaves and he pitched forward onto his face. Some seconds passed whilst Roal gathered his wits and then looking up he was terrified to see the talons of a Korat dangling only inches from his nose

With visions of death and excruciating pain seering through his mind Roal clenched his eyes tightly shut and buried his face in the soft, moist leaves that littered the forest floor. For a few moments all was still and quiet and then to his great horror a scratching sensation was felt on the back of his head followed some seconds later by a sharp 'nudge' on the seat of his pants! Instantly his mind was filled with the terrible tales of how the Korats disposed of their intended victims and of the macabre way in which they severed the legs of their prey from the upper part of their bodies in order that they were unable to flee to safety. Roal felt sure that this was about to happen to him and that the 'nudge' was simply the exploratory prod of the Korat's beak as it sought the best place on which to launch its gory attack. Fearing the worst Roal flattened himself as much as possible and hugged the cool, moist earth for all he was worth but even he knew that this was a futile gesture a fact that was soon confirmed, as he found himself lifted aloft by the seat of his pants and dangled some distance off the ground. Perhaps the Korat was toying with him and that it just wanted to extract the ultimate amount of 'pleasure' from the death of this young halfling, or perhaps he was about to be borne away to some high peak and once there, his bones would be picked over by the evil bird and its brood these and other such thoughts flashed through his mind and he resolved to make one last effort to break free of the clutches of the Korat.

Letting out an almighty cry, he squirmed this way and that, his legs flailing in all possible directions at once, but the creature still held him in a vice-like grip then to his sudden amazement a rather gruff voice said "Stop wriggling young halfling, you are worse than a great sand-eel of the northern rivers!" Opening his eyes, Roal peered at the coarse face of the Grundar that was presently holding him at arm's length and for a fleeting second his heart stopped beating . . . "Had he gone out of the frying-pan and into the fire?" was the thought that darted through his mind or was there some sort of salvation in this strange being that now held him aloft?

The Grundar gently lowered Roal to the ground and then, with its head half-cocked to one side, said "What is a young halfling like you doing wandering this forest unprotected and just where were you going in such a hurry?" Amidst great gasps of breath, Roal related his tale of the sighting of the Korat war-band, his meeting with the surrel and of his flight through the forest in a forlorn attempt to save his village at Torag Minh. Then overcome by emotion and shock, he slumped to the ground to be overwhelmed by a great soft darkness that blotted out the outside world.

Roal awoke to find himself propped against the base of a tall tree and glancing around he spied the large bulk of the Grundar some distance to the east. Carefully adjusting his feet and gathering his strength for an anticipated flight to freedom, Roal was astounded to hear the soft tones of the surrel echoing in his ears "Grundars are the one thing they fear the most." and looking down he saw two soft, amber eyes peering at him from beneath a pile of leaves.



The surreal emerged slowly and then seeing the puzzled look on Roal's face he said, "I thought you might need some help, so I have been following you as fast as my little legs would carry me. However it was only your recent collapse that enabled me to catch up." With that it scrambled onto Roal's right leg and sat there gazing at him. Reaching out a hand Roal stroked the small creature and a feeling of well-being surged over him. "That Is the only chance of saving your people." whispered the surreal, pointing in the direction of the great black shape that was the Grundar. "Go on, ask it for yourself if not for your people. It can only say 'NO!' and you have nothing to lose by trying." Roal took a deep breath, gave a shrug of his shoulders and slowly advanced towards the waiting Grundar As Roal approached the squatting Grundar, he could not help but notice that it seemed to be deep in meditation . . . that is if Grundars ever did such a thing . . . for its gaze appeared fixed on some far-distant object and its breathing was shallow and slow. Then suddenly, without even the slightest movement of its head, the Grundar spoke. "Come closer young halfling, for I will do you no harm, or at least I won't as long as you behave yourself and don't start making that walling noise that you halflings seem so fond of doing."

Edging slowly forward, Roal drew closer to the immobile Grundar and then with a sharp intake of breath within reach of the creature. Gradually the Grundar swivelled around to face the stock-still halfling, its warm breath disturbing the loose hairs that hung down over Roal's eyes. With a swift movement of its left hand it brushed aside the hairs and growled "That is better, at least I can see what you look like now." Never had such a large hand been so close to Roal's head before and he found himself fighting against an urge to close his eyes and jerk his head out of reach. The small veins in the side of his temples began to pulse wildly and just as it seemed that panic would prevail, the large creature seized Roal with his other hand and lifted him quickly towards himself. A strange 'musky' scent filled Roal's nostrils as he was drawn closer to the Grundar and he was vaguely reminded of the time when he spent a long dark night in the confines of the burrow of a Tarat Kacj and he had been out hunting the blue creatures that hopped and skipped over the meadows of the vast grasslands, when a sudden storm had caused him to seek warmth and shelter in the first place they would find . . . to Roal's disgust Kacj had chosen the spacious burrow of a Tarat, a plump round creature that lived on acorns and tree-roots, and liked nothing more than wallowing in a pile of semi-dry oak leaves. For days afterwards the smell of that burrow had clung to Roal and only a quick dip in the cool waters of a swiftly-flowing stream had enabled him to get rid of it Roal sensed that perhaps he would be taking another dip in that stream, if only he survived long enough to find it again.

"You need my help", grunted the creature and before Roal could figure out whether it was asking a question or not, it continued "so I guess I can find the time to come to the aid of one who stands to lose all he loves most dearly in the world. The Korats can and will be stopped, of that you can be sure, but first you must promise me never to relate any of what you might see. You must tell nobody . . . understood, NOBODY!" Roal nodded in dumb silence and hoped that the Grundar would believe him. He would promise anything if only this mighty creature could halt the slaughter of his people at the talons of the Korats.





Rising to his feet the Grundar lifted Roal onto his left shoulder and then turned in the direction of the small surrel that was sat at the base of the tall tree. "We might as well take this 'thing' with us" It said and then scooped up the surrel and stuffed it into a small pouch that was hanging from its belt. Eager to familiarize itself with its new home the surrel stuck its head out of the neck of the pouch and gazed around. However the close proximity of the Korat's talon that also dangled from the belt was more than it could bear and it quickly ducked back inside the pouch. For a moment Roal thought he had heard a small chuckle merge itself with the cool forest air but surely Grundars never laughed, so he must have been mistaken.

"Hang on tight little one" grunted the creature, "we have a long way to go and only a very short time in which to get there." With that the Grundar began to make its way through the forest and head in the direction of Roal's village. In the confines of the small leather pouch the surrel smiled to itself and felt sure that Roal's people would not go down the same dark road that his own had done . . . the Grundar would see to that!

Roal was surprised and somewhat puzzled to see that there was no slackening in the pace of the Grundar as it sped through the forest, and at no point did it deviate from the path in order to seek out those other Grundars that Roal felt sure were to join them in their struggle against the Korats. Perched upon its shoulder, Roal clung on for dear life as the Grundar continued on its way, each stride eating up large chunks of the forest floor and bringing the approach of the inevitable battle ever closer.

Looking down at the pouch that was swinging precariously from the belt around the Grundar's waist, Roal wondered what the surrel was thinking at this time, and whether it was any the wiser in regard to the plans of this creature that was carrying them both to a meeting that neither wanted but neither could avoid if the fate of Roal's people was not to be decided by the sharpness of the talons and the quickness of the beaks of the vast armada of Korats presently heading in their direction.

Meanwhile, in the village, life continued as it has done for countless years, the daily tasks were undertaken and gossip exchanged with passing brethren. "Bit cold for this time of year," exclaimed Nann as she passed the hut of old Kacj and drawing nearer to his small camp-fire she continued, "Has Roal returned from his fishing-trip yet or is the little scamp still doing battle with those brown trout he loves so much?" A small smile wrinkled Kacj's forehead and looking up he said, "Don't worry, he will probably turn up later today, stinking of fish and bearing some outrageous tale of the 'big one' that got away." Just then something caused him to glance in the direction of the far horizon and Nann could see his old eyes screw up in effort as he tried to focus on a small dark patch that was barely discernible in the distance. Nann looked in the direction of his stare but the dark patch had vanished behind a fluffy cloud and she turned her head once more to the comforting glow of the small fire. "Well this won't get them pots washed, so I best get off home and set about cleaning up before his lord and master gets back." With that Nann smiled down at old Kacj and headed in the direction of her dwelling. If she had but looked back she would have seen a flicker of recognition as the dark patch emerged from behind the cloud and Kacj remembered a time when such sights were more than commonplace. As the thoughts crawled across his mind he reached down to the hilt of the small dagger tucked into his belt and closed his fingers tightly around it.

In the confines of the pouch the surreal braced itself the best it could against the constant buffeting and reminded itself that perhaps it had not been such a good idea after all to have become involved with this young halfling and his problems; then a warm sadness gripped its heart and it remembered times when surrels darted hither and thither across the floor of the forest and their excited chirping could be heard echoing across the land . . . as a moistness filled its eyes, it thrust aside all doubts and vowed that the halfling would have all the help it could possibly give.

From his precarious perch on the Grundar's shoulder Roal glanced up and in the distance the greenery of the forest seemed thinner and the light seemed much brighter. "Surely they could not be approaching the edge of the forest already?" was the thought that ran through his mind, but as he stared ahead of himself the trees did indeed begin to thin out and he knew that they were almost on the edge of the grasslands that served as the northernmost boundary of Tousel. "Just a few moments more and they would be 'home' but where were the rest of the Grundars? Surely this great creature that presently bore him aloft was not intending to take on the might of Korats single-handed?" These thoughts hammered away inside his head and chipped bits off the wall-of-confidence that the meeting with the Grundar had installed there. "Not even he can take on the Korats in such large numbers and live to tell the tale," thought Roal and gripping the Grundar by the ear he screamed in an hysterical voice . . . "Where are all the others?????" For just an instant the pace of the creature slackened and its head turned in the direction of the tiny halfling. "Have faith little one, I will not let you down," and with that the Grundar once more strode off in the direction of the edge of the forest and Roal's village.

Sprinting into the open meadowland, the Grundar placed itself between the village and the oncoming armada and then reaching up with one hand, gently plucked the halfling from his lofty perch and placed him on the ground. "Now is the hour young halfling. It is time to see if Korat blood still runs as swiftly as it has always done." Roal glanced up at the mighty creature towering over him and though his heart swelled with pride at the way the Grundar was ready to lay down his own life for that of the people of the village, he could not help but doubt the ability of a lone Grundar to bring down the might of the massed army of Korats that was presently winging its way towards them.

"How about me?" squeaked a small voice from the confines of the pouch that was dangling from the Grundar's belt and for a moment a half-smile flicked across the creature's cragged visage. Unhooking the drawstring of the pouch from around his belt, the Grundar stretched open the neck, shook the pouch and desposited the surreal on the damp grass beside Roal. "Hmmp!" It cried, preening its bent whiskers back into shape, "It is about time I was let out of that smelly darkness!" and then peered around at its surroundings. The sight of the approaching Korats was the first thing to catch his eye and just at that moment in time the smelly old pouch seemed a more than welcome haven.

High aloft the 'outriders' of the armada spotted the tiny band of travellers standing between them and their intended target and swooped down to investigate, their talons extended and their beaks open in anticipation. As the wind whistled through their flight-feathers they gathered speed at an alarming rate and were soon within striking distance of the trio. Then suddenly a spark of recognition registered with the lead 'outrider' and it broke off its attack and swooped away to one side. The second 'outrider' was not so quick and the last thing it saw was the grinning features of the Grundar as it reached out and plucked the Korat from the air by the throat. Less than three seconds later the Korat's crumpled body lay at the feet of the creature and its talons hung from its belt . . . the first 'trophy' of this particular battle had been taken!

Open-mouthed Roal gawped at the talons and the blood that was dripping from them to form a small pool by the left foot of the Grundar . . . "Close your mouth little one" growled the creature, "or else one of those darg-files might just decide to fly in there!" Roal did just that and then stepped further away from the small pool of blood where the darg-files were now gathering in their thousands.

Overhead the Korats now whirled in uncertainty and seemed very reluctant to continue their approach. This puzzled Roal, for surely even blood-thirsty predators such as them had nothing to fear from one solitary Grundar. As Roal gazed at the wheeling mass of birds two 'outriders' left the flock and set out on their respective journeys . . . one to the east and the other to the west . . . as though in search of something or somebody!

A deep rumbling noise caused Roal to break off from his study of the Korats and he turned in the direction of the noise. To his surprise the Grundar was sat cross-legged on the grass, eyes tightly closed and head bowed. In one hand it held a small greenish-coloured stone and in the other hand a small sphere pulsed with a bluish light. The rumbling noise was coming from the creature's mouth, for it appeared to be chanting some strange incantation but Roal was not sure what as the 'words' were totally incomprehensible to him.

Just then the 'outriders' returned and wheeled aloft before rejoining the armada. The Grundar sensed their return and rose to its feet, placing the stone and the sphere on the ground as it did so. Then raising itself to its full height it extended its arms and let out an almighty cry. To Roal it sounded like a cry of pain but to the surreal it sounded like the cry of one who was ready to join his ancestors . . . both of them were mistaken. However, to the Korats hovering high above, the cry meant only one thing . . . this day would end with the talons of many more Korats dangling from a Grundar belt.

Once more the Grundar raised its arms aloft, took a deep breath and cried . . . "GRAAAFKHAR!"

As the last remnants of the Grundar's cry echoed their way into the distance, the sky darkened and a heavy grey mist began to descend onto the meadowlands. Lowering its arms to its side, the creature turned to the small halfling . . . "Now is the time little one, so remember what I said and never tell anyone of what you are about to see." Roal nodded in dumb understanding and edged slightly closer to the Grundar, who seeing this movement reached out a large hand and gently guided the halfling into place. "No, it will be safer for you if you stand directly behind me and then I can always be between you and those 'birds'." The last word almost spat from between the lips and Roal sensed the intense hatred that the Grundar nurtured for the Korats.

Taking his place in the shadow of the mighty creature, Roal felt a small drop of water trickle down his neck and glancing up, noticed that 'rain' was beginning to fall from the grey cloud. As he did so, he could not help but notice that high above him the Korats milled as though in confusion and seemed reluctant to press home their attack. It was as if they were awaiting the arrival of something or somebody.



Meanwhile, back at the village, old Kacj looked up from the warmth of his fire and a sense of unease hung heavy over him. To the north he could see a rainstorm approaching, though this one was unlike any normal storm and reminded him of the ones his father had told him of. It had been said that such storms heralded the arrival of the Grundar and that even after their passing, the ground upon which they fell remained perfectly dry to the touch. Legend had it that the Grundar came and went under the cover of these storms and that no creature had ever lived to see their movements . . . but that was 'legend' and surely such things never actually happened. Kacj drew his blanket tightly around his shoulders and tried to see through the greyish coloured mist that hung over the meadowlands but it was too dense and the vast majority of the grasslands, and the lands beyond them, were obscured from his view.

As the 'rain' became heavier Roal looked down in the direction of the small surreal squatting at his feet and was puzzled to see a look of fear on the small creature's face. "I have heard of these things," whispered the surreal, "and my people have always lived in awe of being out in the open when the 'Grey Rain' comes." With that, it closed its eyes and covered its head with its paws.

Just then Roal 'sensed' rather than noticed a change in his surroundings and quickly glanced to his right and then to his left. To his astonishment, where each raindrop had fallen there now stood a fully-armed Grundar warrior and as he watched, more appeared until there were hundreds of them stretching out as far as the eye can see.

High aloft the Korats did their best to peer through the mist but even their sharp eyes were no match for the dense grey blanket that covered the ground below them. Many times before they had encountered this mist and many times before they had swooped into it never to return again. However this time was to be so different, for beneath that mist stood one lone Grundar and their compulsion to destroy it was too strong for them to resist. . . . If only one of their kind had been able to return from a journey into the mist then maybe they would have known just what awaited them, and how wrong their assumptions were.

With a mighty "Kraaaakkk!!!" the lead bird dove into the mist. The armada of Korats followed, each intent on being the first to draw blood from the creature waiting for them below. Their 'blood-lust' was up and nothing would now deter them from slaking their thirst for Grundar blood.

As the Korats emerged from out of the grey mist, beaks agape and talons glistening, the sight of the massed ranks of Grundar warriors was almost more than the birds could believe and panic took over from aggression. Wings flapped frantically in an attempt to avoid the deadly thrusts of the Grundar swords and loud squawks were emitted as the Korats attempted to rise to the air again and the comparative safety of the open sky. Black-feathered bodies swooped this way and that in a vain effort to elude the unerring accuracy of the Grundar's blades, but the ensuing chaos only helped to make the Grundar's task even easier.

From behind the vast bulk of his protector, Roal watched in awe at the slaughter of the Korats and at the manner in which the Grundars dispatched them. Swords soon lost their shine as the Korat's blood ran forth, their edges taking on a crimson hue as the blades bit deep into their targets. One by one the Korats were chopped down in flight and their talons, in some cases still twitching, clipped to the belts of the triumphant Grundars. Soon the air was heavy with the sickly smell of warm blood and the buzzing of the thousands of darg-flies attracted by the blood almost overwhelmed the very sound of the battle itself.

Throughout all this the surreal remained with its paws covering its head and its eyes tightly closed, and it was not until the headless body of a Korat hurtled to the ground next to it that anything changed. Hearing the dull thud and smelling the sickly-sweet odour, the surreal opened its eyes just in time to witness the last convulsions of the dying bird before a large hairy hand reached down, seized the Korat by the talons and deftly removed them with a swipe of a sword. The surreal shuddered and then looked away, but something to the southern edge of the meadowlands caught its eye and it tried to focus on that.

Completely taken by surprise, the Korats were unable to make any account of themselves and the battle was short-lived. As the last of the Korats was put to the sword the grey mist lifted and the sky began to lighten in colour. The noise of the gorging darg-files was almost deafening but then, if as one, the Grundars clapped their hands and the darg-files took flight . . . they knew better than to stay. Their time would always come again and now was not the moment to risk incurring the wrath of the Grundars.

Just as the last of the grey mist swirled away the creatures took their places in line again and with heads bowed began to chant. This time the words were more gently, tinged with a touch of serenity and altogether different from the harsh cry that had summoned them. Then, as Roal looked on, the Grundars went as they had come, leaving only the scattered dead bodies of the Korats as a sign of their passing. The one who had befriended the young halfling was the only one who remained and it was now busily engaged in the ritual with the stone and the sphere, completely oblivious to all that surrounded it.

The speck to the south still intrigued the surreal and it strained its tiny eyes in one last effort to ascertain what it was. To its immense horror it suddenly recognised what it was looking at . . . It was a Korat . . . obviously an 'outrider' that had not rejoined the flock in time to take part in the attack. However having seen its compatriots put to the sword it intended to make its mark on the small party of three and by the looks of things the small halfling that had brought death and destruction to its companions was its ultimate target. The surreal turned quickly to warn Roal but for some inexplicable reason found that it was not unable to make any sort of vocal noises . . . It was as if the words were frozen in its throat! Glancing back over its shoulder it was all too obvious that this lone Korat was hell-bent on its task and judging by the speed at which it was approaching there was very little time to waste, so it sank its teeth into Roal's leg! "Hey! What in the name of Rodar is going on!!" screeched Roal, turning to face the surreal.

As the small black speck grew larger and the true flight-path of the lone Korat became more evident, Roal knew that 'death' was but a brief moment away and memories of the 'feel' of a Korat's talon ripping through flesh and the smell of warm blood, came flooding into his head. On that occasion he had been lucky, but dancing with old death once and living to tell the tale was no solace at a time like this. To stay where he was would surely mean that the Korat would strike its target, gouging and slashing as it came. Anxious to avoid such a fate Roal flung himself to one side and landed with a thump on the ground to his left. As he did so his hand struck a cold metallic object and he quickly snatched it away again, then glancing up he noticed that where he had once stood there was now a clear path to the unprotected back of the squatting Grundar. The creature, still engrossed in its ritual act, was completely oblivious of the approach of the speeding Korat . . .



For a moment it seemed as if the surrel was still struck dumb, as it still stood rooted to the spot with not a sound emanating from its mouth. Then suddenly it managed to stir itself into action and to find the words it had been seeking to emit. "Use the sword!" It yelled in the direction of the prone Roal. "Use the sword and protect the Grundar!" but its words were feeble and barely carried across the open space between it and the halfling.

Still stunned by his landing, Roal shook his head and the buzzing in his ears eased for a second. As if spoken from a long distance away, some words drifted into his ears . . . "Use . . sword . . Grundar!" He shook his head fiercely in an attempt to clear his mind, surely the surrel did not want him to kill the Grundar. After all had it not been the one responsible for their well-being and had it, and its kind, not risked their very existence to save his village from destruction at the talons of the Korats? But the words kept drifting in and out of his head . . . "Use . . sword . . Grundar!" In a final attempt to bring some sanity to the events now taking place Roal gave himself a sharp slap to the forehead and this time the words were a shade clearer . . . "Use . . sword . . protect . . Grundar!"

Totally bemused by Roal's reluctance to pick up the sword and defend the unprotected back of the creature currently deep in 'prayer', the surrel bounced up and down, waving his arms in the air and yelling for the halfling to take hold of the sword.

Reaching out Roal seized the hilt of the sword in his right hand and quickly turned to face the oncoming bird. Stepping swiftly to his right he lunged forward and felt the sword strike home. There was a sound of tearing flesh, the warm smell of blood and the sword was ripped from his hand. Amidst a cloud of feathers and blood Roal was knocked to the floor and something large and heavy descended upon him, a sharp talon raking his cheek as he fell. The next he knew was the approach of a soft warm darkness and his fight was over.

"Come, come little one. It is over and done with now and there is nothing to fear from those birds ever again." Roal slowly opened his eyes and found himself gazing up at the coarse features of the Grundar. "That was a very brave thing you did there and if you had not acted as you had I would have been skewered through the heart by the Korat's beak." As Roal sat up, his head ringing and his cheek stinging with pain, he looked to one side and shuddered. For there on the ground lay the crumpled body of the bird, the sword still embedded in its breast. Just then the Grundar reached across, withdrew the sword from the bird and hacked off the talons. "Take these" the creature grunted, "and hang them proudly from your belt, for you are now truly a 'Grundar-Warrior'." With that the Grundar rose to its feet, patted the surrel on the head and turned to the northern horizon. "My people await me and I must go, so take care young halfling and remember our exploits." In less than the twinkling of an early evening star the creature was gone.

In the years to come Roal and the surrel would often reflect on the fishing trip that went wrong and of their encounter with the Grundar and his people, and of how one small halfling came to possess a pair of Korat talons.

THE END



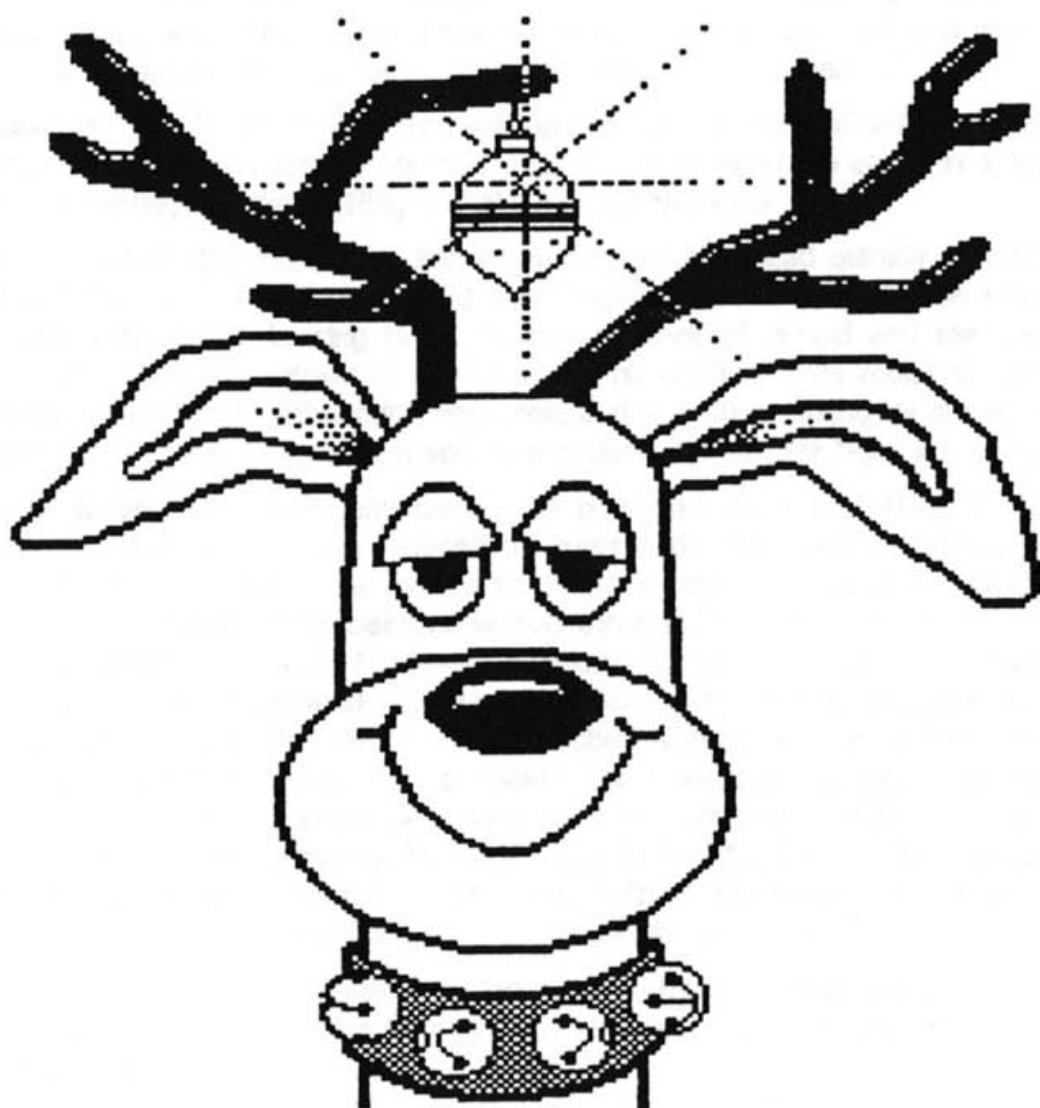
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