

FLOWERS OF CRYSTAL



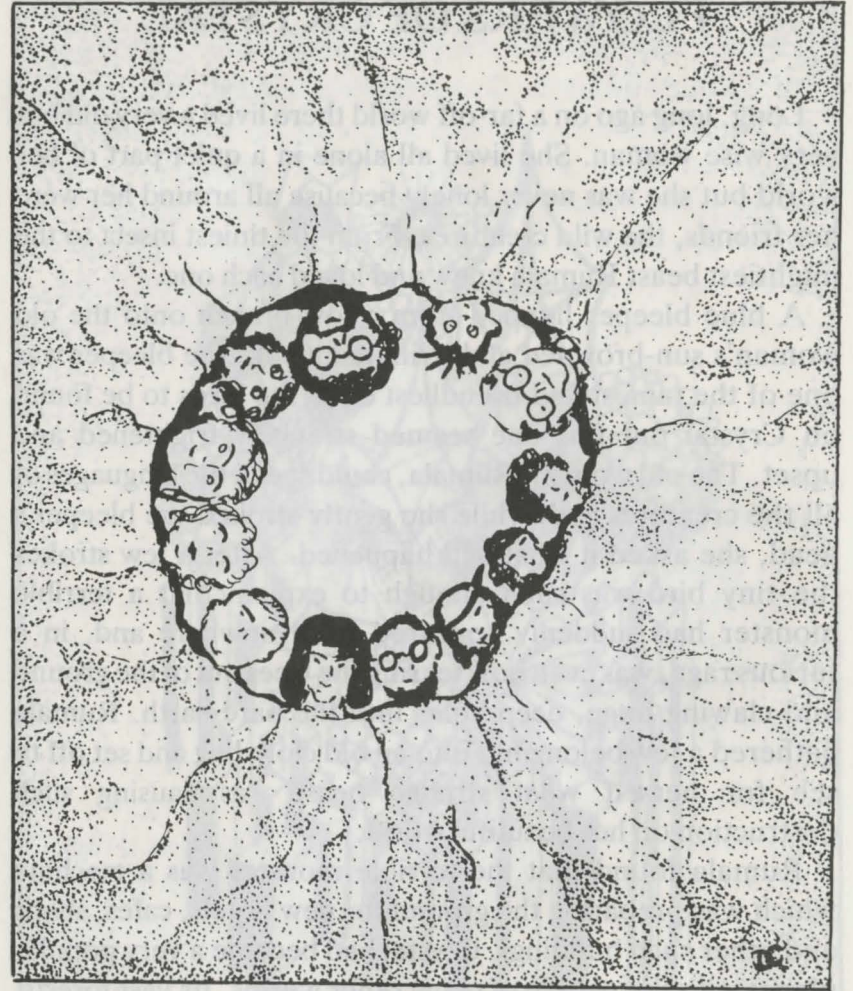
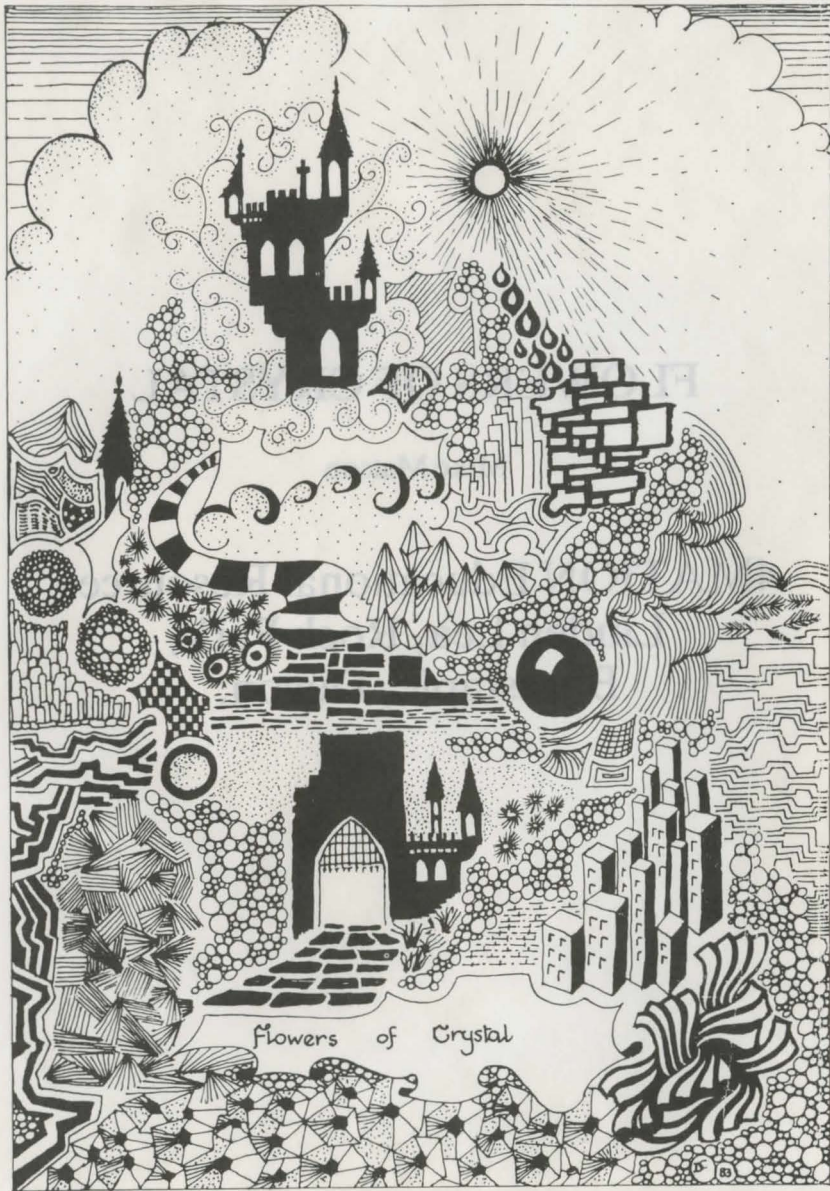
THE STORY



**FLOWERS OF CRYSTAL**

Mike Matson

**4MATION Educational Resources  
Linden Lea, Rock Park,  
Barnstaple, Devon.**

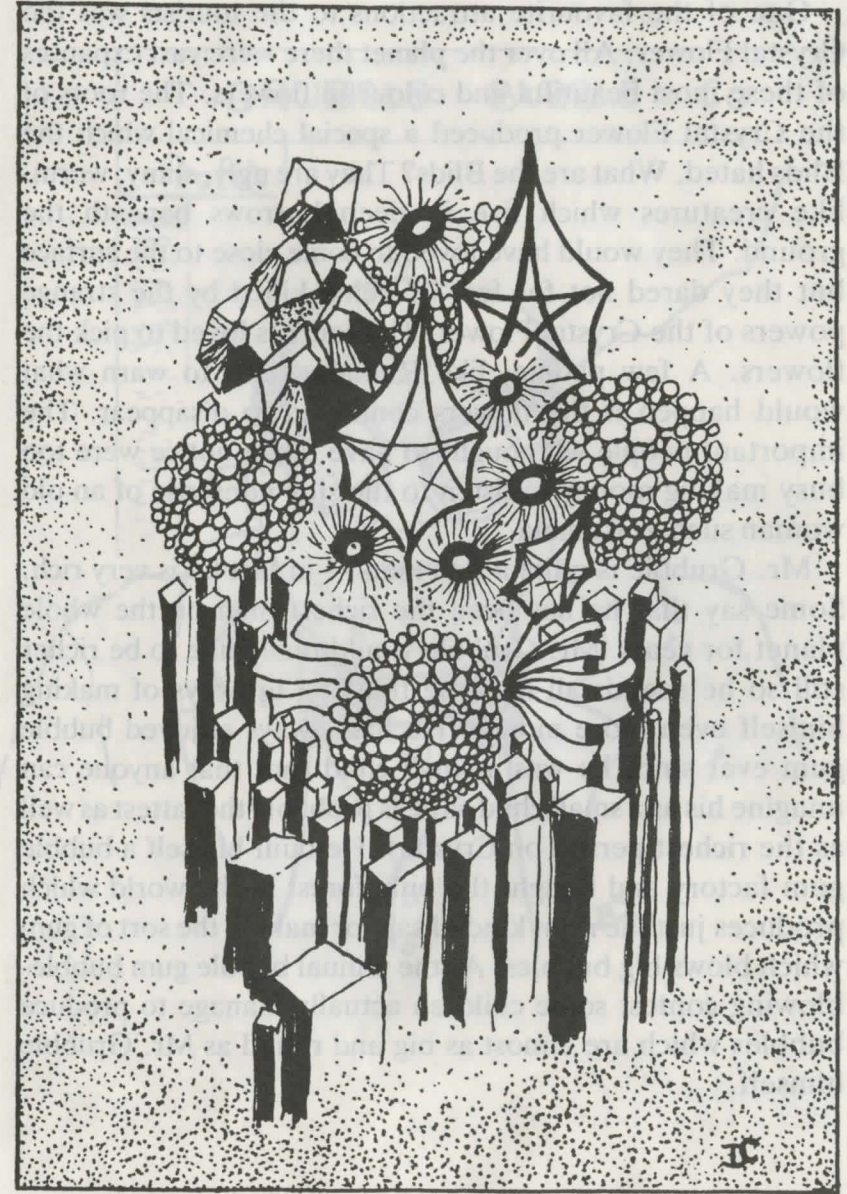


## FLOWERS OF CRYSTAL

Long, long ago on a far-off world there lived a very old but very wise woman. She lived all alone in a quiet part of her world but she was never lonely because all around her were her friends, the wild creatures. From the tiniest insect to the mightiest beast Rumala knew and loved each one.

A blue bleeper hopped from a low branch onto the old woman's sun-browned and wrinkled hand. The bleeper was one of the tamest and friendliest of all the birds to be found on Crystal but this one seemed strangely frightened and upset. The old woman, Rumala, could speak the languages of all the creatures and, while she gently stroked the bleeper's head, she asked it what had happened. After a few strokes the tiny bird was calm enough to explain that a terrible monster had suddenly appeared from nowhere and, in a furious rage, was even now tearing the trees out of the ground and clawing huge, deep holes into the bare earth. Rumala gathered a few belongings into an old cloth bag and set off to see for herself what strange beast was causing such destruction on her beautiful world.

Rumala found that the terrible monster was a machine which was preparing the ground for new hotels, cafes, shops and other such buildings. Crystal had become a very popular planet with the people of many other worlds. Its vast forests, blue lakes and clear streams were attracting more and more people every year and each day more of Crystal's beauty disappeared as the glass and concrete blocks spread across the planet's surface.



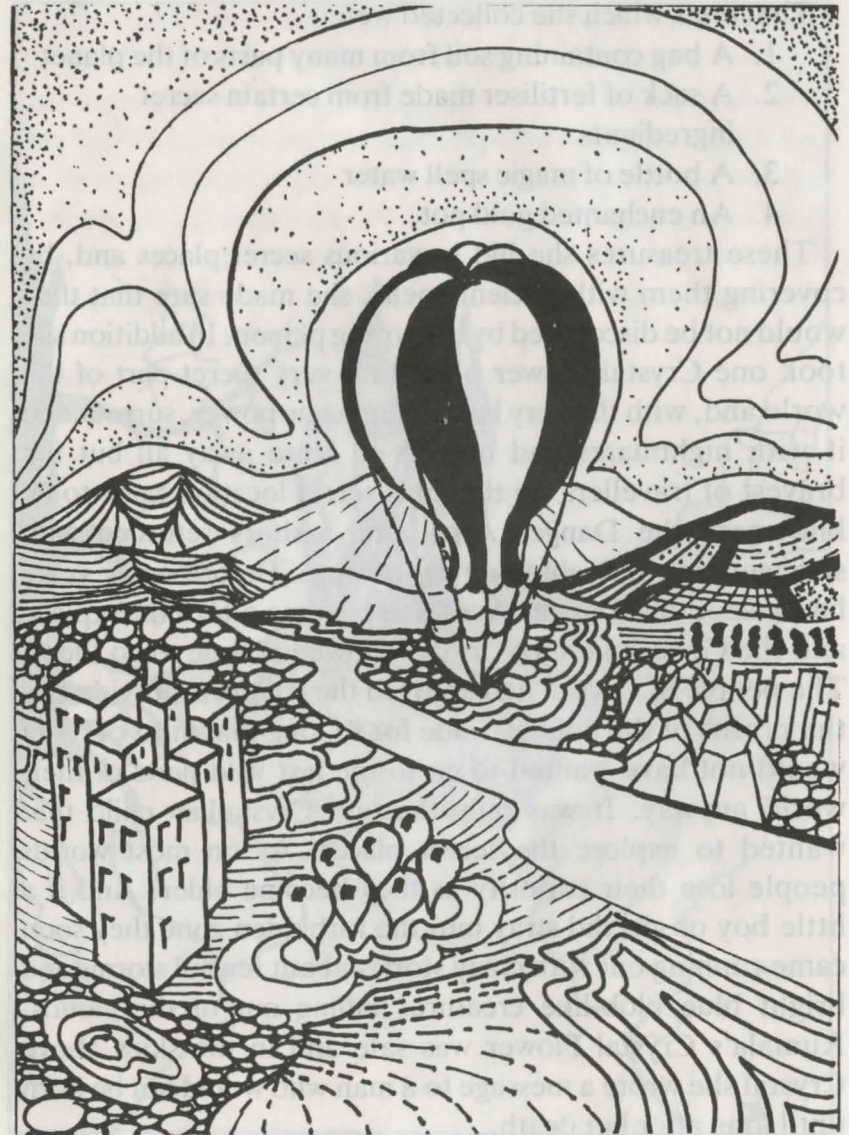
One of the favourite attractions to the tourists was the Crystal Flower. All over the planet there were vast expanses of these most beautiful and colourful flowers. The roots of the Crystal Flower produced a special chemical which the Blids hated. What are the Blids? They are ugly, slimy, worm-like creatures which live in deep burrows beneath the ground. They would have loved to come close to the surface but they dared not for fear of being killed by the strange powers of the Crystal Flower. The tourists loved to pick the flowers. A few people, like Rumala, tried to warn what would happen if the flowers continued to disappear. The important people who ought to have taken notice were too busy making money to listen to the silly nonsense of an old woman such as Rumala.

Mr. Grubble is quite a rich man — in fact he is very rich. Some say that he has been the richest man on the whole planet for years. Mr. Grubble would really like to be richer still so he spends all his time thinking up ways of making himself even more money. He has always enjoyed bubble gum ever since he was a small child (not that anyone can imagine his as a small child as he is probably the fattest as well as the richest person on Crystal). He built himself a bubble gum factory and bought the only forest in the world which produces just the right kind of sap for making the sort of gum which blows big bubbles. At the annual bubble gum bubble-blowing contest some children actually manage to produce bubbles which are almost as big and round as Mr. Grubble himself.



It was at one of these bubble-blowing contests that Mr. Grubble made the astounding discovery which was to make him the most famous and, at the same time, the most hated man in half the known universe. The contest was taking place next to The Hole, a gigantic natural pit which had a very strong fence all the way around it to prevent anyone tumbling to their deaths. At the end of the day's events, immediately after the final of the Under-Twelves Mixed Doubles, it was decided to hold a special competition to see who could spit their old bubble gum into the pit from the greatest distance. As can be imagined a vast quantity of gum fell into The Hole that day and every time a piece flew through the air and disappeared into the pit there came a strange and excited squeaking, groaning and hissing sound from the depths of the earth. It was discovered that the Blids were at the bottom of The Hole waiting for the gum to tumble into their open mouths. Mr. Grubble's money-grabbing brain soon realised that here was the answer to his money-making problem. He would sell his gum to the Blids and they would pay him with the precious metals which lay hidden in the rocks below.

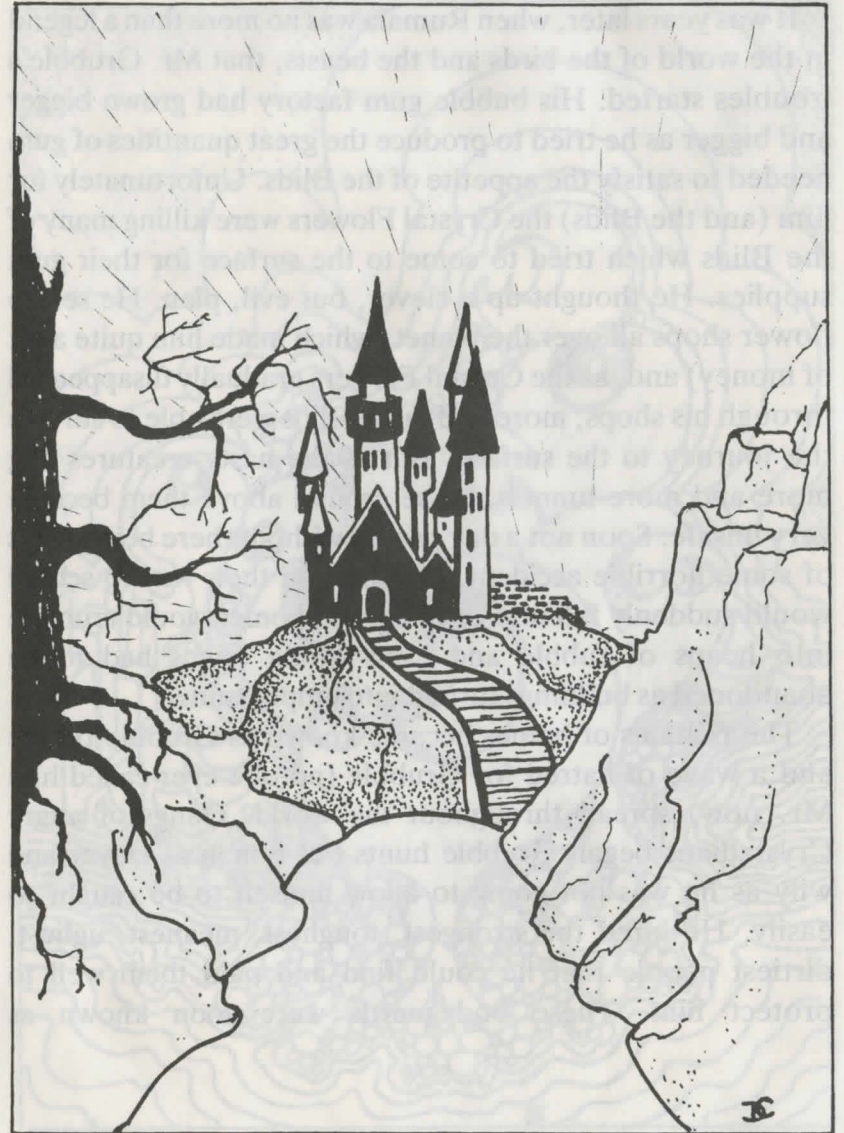
Long before Mr. Grubble was born Rumala had realised that there was no point in trying to talk sense into the heads of the money-mad Crystallians. At her home in one of the few parts of Crystal which still remained unspoiled she prepared her plan for the survival of the planet. With the help of her few magic powers she gathered together a collection of items which, she hoped, would one day save her world from destruction.



The items which she collected were:-

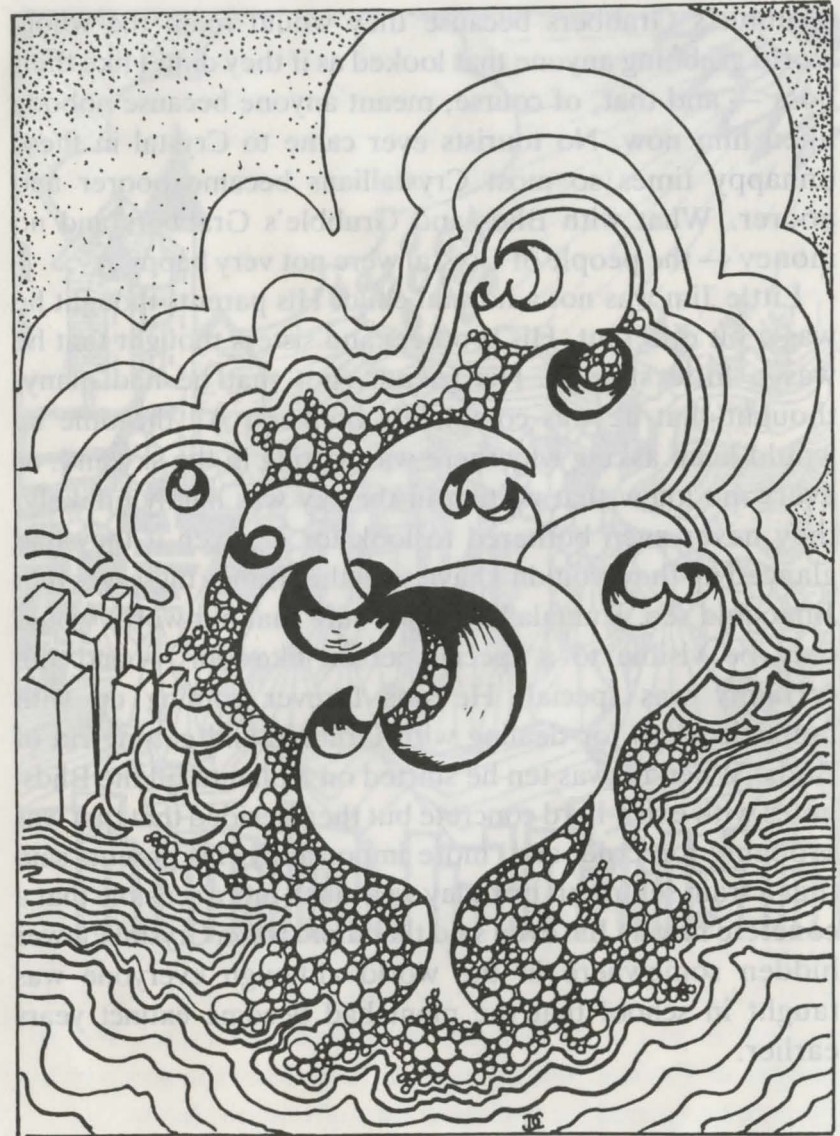
1. A bag containing soil from many parts of the planet
2. A sack of fertiliser made from certain secret ingredients
3. A bottle of magic spell water
4. An enchanted gold pot.

These treasures she hid in various secret places and, by covering them with ancient spells, she made sure that they would not be discovered by the wrong person. In addition she took one Crystal Flower plant to a very secret part of the world and, with the very last of her magic power, surrounded it with nightmares and horrors to scare away all but the bravest of travellers. In time this secret location came to be known as the Danger Area after visitors returned with strange tales of frightening happenings. Before many years had passed the Danger Area had become a forbidden place and the Government of Crystal allowed no-one to go there. The people of Crystal had enjoyed the comforts provided by the profits of the holiday trade for so long that most of them would not have wanted to go to the last wild parts of their world anyway. It was only the odd Crystallian child that wanted to explore the secret places. As on most worlds people lose their curiosity as they become older. And if a little boy or girl did stray into the forbidden zone they soon came running out with crazy stories about fearful storms and bright blue blob-like creatures falling out of the clouds. Rumala's Crystal Flower was safe and in the skies above Crystal she wrote a message to a man who would not be born until long after her death.



It was years later, when Rumala was no more than a legend in the world of the birds and the beasts, that Mr. Grubble's troubles started. His bubble gum factory had grown bigger and bigger as he tried to produce the great quantities of gum needed to satisfy the appetite of the Blids. Unfortunately for him (and the Blids) the Crystal Flowers were killing many of the Blids which tried to come to the surface for their gum supplies. He thought up a clever, but evil, plan. He set up flower shops all over the planet (which made him quite a bit of money) and, as the Crystal Flowers gradually disappeared through his shops, more and more Blids were able to survive the journey to the surface. But as the nasty creatures dug more and more tunnels so the ground above them became very unsafe. Soon not a day passed without there being news of some horrible accident. Children on their way to school would suddenly fall into deep cracks, homes would crumble into heaps of rubble and even whole towns had to be abandoned as buildings turned into empty ruins.

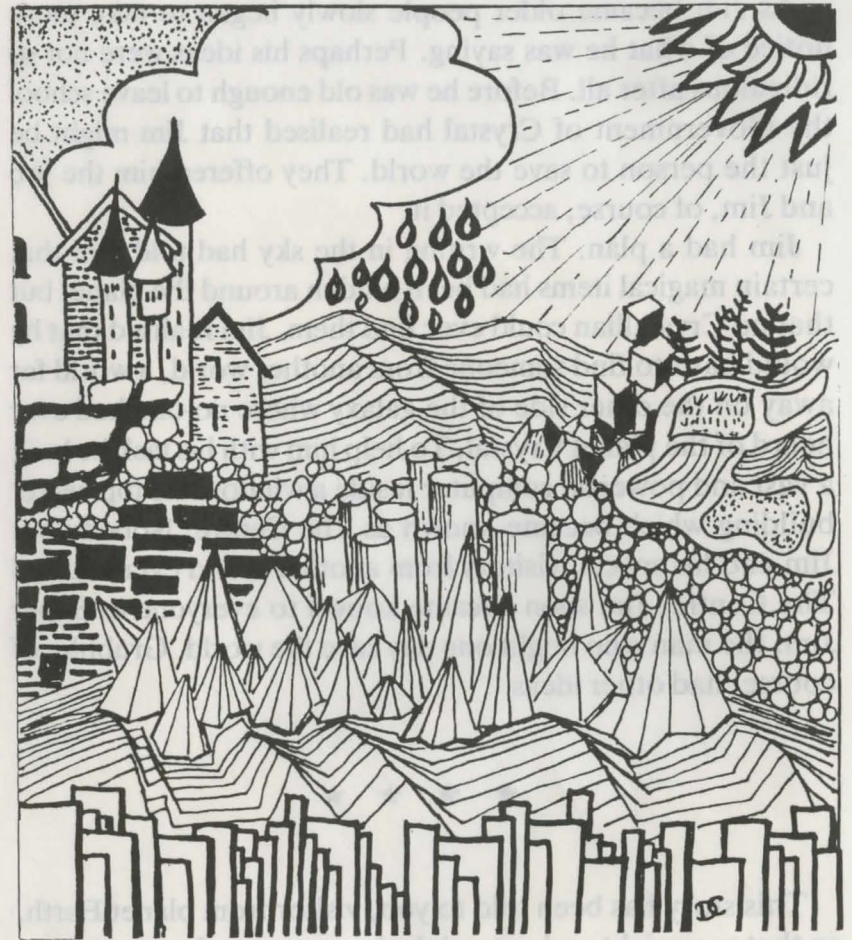
The remains of homes became known as Grubble-rubble and a wave of hatred for Grubble (no-one ever called him Mr. now) spread throughout the world. Gangs of angry Crystallians began Grubble hunts but a man as clever and wily as he was not going to allow himself to be caught so easily. He hired the strongest, toughest, meanest, ugliest, dirtiest people that he could find and paid them well to protect him. These bodyguards were soon known as





Grubble's Grabbers because they would roam the whole world grabbing anyone that looked as if they didn't like their boss — and that, of course, meant anyone because nobody liked him now. No tourists ever came to Crystal in these unhappy times so most Crystallians became poorer and poorer. What with Blids and Grubble's Grabbers and no money — the people of Crystal were not very happy.

Little Jim was not a normal child. His parents thought he was a bit different. His brothers and sisters thought that he was a little strange. His friends, not that he had many, thought that he was completely bonkers. All the time he would keep asking why there was writing in the sky and, as everyone knew that writing in the sky was highly unlikely, they never even bothered to look for it. Even if they had glanced up they wouldn't have seen the strange messages that Jim could see. Rumala had made sure that her words would only be visible to a special person like Jim — and Jim certainly was special. He was forever coming up with fantastic ideas for dealing with Grubble and getting rid of Blids. When he was ten he started on a plan to fill the Blids' holes with extra-hard concrete but then decided that that was probably too cruel and, more importantly, his parents said that a train set for his birthday was much more sensible than a concrete mixer. Jim even said that there was a Crystal Flower hidden somewhere in the world although everyone was taught in school that the plant had become extinct years earlier.



As Jim became older people slowly began to take more notice of what he was saying. Perhaps his ideas were not so ridiculous after all. Before he was old enough to leave school the Government of Crystal had realised that Jim might be just the person to save the world. They offered him the job and Jim, of course, accepted it.

Jim had a plan. The writing in the sky had told him that certain magical items had been hidden around the planet but that no Crystallian could ever find them. Jim realised that he would have to find someone from another world, a world far away on the other side of the galaxy where no-one had ever heard of the planet Crystal. To help him with his task he built a vast and powerful computer inside a windowless top-secret building which became known as The Centre. Nobody but Jim and his special visitors from another world ever entered The Centre. Jim soon became known to everyone as Super Jim, the man who might one day save the world. Grubble, of course, had other ideas.



This story has been told to you, visitor from planet Earth, so that you might understand the importance of your mission. You know as much as we do now and we wish you every success as you try to find the last Flower of Crystal. We, the people of Crystal, wish you good luck. May the seeds of the Flower be spread far and wide throughout our lands.

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