Shoemaker Village

www.shoemakervillage.org
Volume 40 - October 2000

Serving the community for over 3 years



is summer reading worthwhile?

students from across the country discuss the value of summer reading

short story blowout

former umhs student sarah duncan contributes short story collection



on the inside

is halloween on the decline?
what will happen to dave as he is attacked in *the knights of the square table*?
find out the truth about the late buses at umhs
new writers contribute articles

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editor's pages

information you should know

It's sure been a while!

Mr. Cohen, the English supervisor at UMHS, is probably cringing as he reads the sentence above. However, because I've decided that everyone is tired of "Welcome to the XXX month issue of the *Village*!", I tried something different. To begin, anyone who's been receiving the *Village* regularly over the past few months has doubtless heard of the difficulties the editors have encountered over the past three or four months in compiling an issue of the *Village*. However, we are proud to announce that we're back in full force and will strive our hardest to keep the *Village* on its monthly schedule.

On September 15, 2000, we posted a message on our website stating that the September issue of the *Village* had been forced into cancellation. Throughout the months of August and September, the *Village* editors were extremely busy, occupied with such tasks as reading about 2000 pages of summer reading text along with related academic work, traveling to different locations, compiling ridiculously long and useless college essays, visiting the colleges themselves, and doing so many things that I can't remember them all. Needless to say, it would have been impossible for the Editor to find enough time to put together an issue of the *Village*, even if all of our contributing editors were available as well.

By the time you are reading this, however, you can be assured that the college admissions process has finally been completed after a hellish week, and the Editor will be able to resume the normal publication of the *Village*. What does this mean for you? Hopefully, we will be able to resume our normal publication schedule (schoolwork permitting) and bring you the usual Holiday Bonus issue in a little over a month and a half, with some special additions to celebrate the coming of the new millennium in January!

To begin, we would like to address a controversy that occurred in the neighborhood in late August, after we were accused of printing unproven information. Those who looked closely most likely noted that the article one of the editors entitled "Vandals with guns?" was contributed by Rozanne Spiecker, who is not a *Village* staff member. While we will accept articles from anyone willing to contribute, as we have carefully stated on the acknowledgments page for most of the *Village*'s history (including the August issue), *the opinions of outside contributors to the Village do not necessarily reflect those of Village staff*. The article that was published in no way reflected our opinion on the issue that was discussed, as we will remain impartial on any issue.

In addition, please note that the article published did not accuse any group

of committing wrongdoing; it simply reinforced the vandalism problem in the neighborhood so that neighbors would be aware of the consequences that might occur if the problem continued. The text of the letter does not contain the name of anyone who lives inside or outside the neighborhood, and no accusations were expressed or implied in the article. The publication of the article in question was not intended to demean groups or individuals; the article was included simply for the neighborhood's benefit. The *Village* will never take sides on any article such as Rozanne's.

Moving on, we suggest that the readers who have not had an opportunity to visit the *Village* website do so regularly during the next month. Shortly after the publication of the August issue, the editors spent many hours completely revamping the *Village* website. While visitors previous to August 4 may have noticed that broken links, missing information, and other navigational errors were common, we are extremely satisfied with the current state of the website. From the site, located at www.shoemakervillage.org, visitors can download every issue of the *Village* that has ever been published since May 1997 (with the exception of the April 1998 issue, which has been lost). The current issue is also available in WordPerfect 9 format, a format that can be read by users with both WordPerfect and Microsoft Word. Visitors can also download free software, a collection of which is steadily growing with each month. Finally, several humor pages with hundreds of jokes have been posted on the *Humor from the Village Square* section of the site for your reading pleasure.

However, the biggest news about our website is that you can now sign up for a **free** full year subscription to the *Village*! The first thought that comes to mind when reading the word "free", however, is that there is a "catch" to what we're advertising. We assure you - you won't pay a single cent in signing up for the *Village*. However, we cannot assure you that this opportunity will be available even next month, so we encourage you to sign up online now to extend your subscription.

If you're not interested in how this works, skip to the next paragraph. We use a service called PayPal (www.x.com) which allows users to transfer funds quickly and easily electronically. PayPal, since earlier in the year, has been offering a signup bonus: $5 for a user to sign up, and $5 for the person that referred the new member. Therefore, all you have to do is sign up for a free account and transfer the $5 that is already in the account to our account. You can then continue to use or cancel your account with no penalty. You don't have to put even a penny into your account. For those who are still hesitant, PayPal has over two million members and is the largest payment service for auction sites such as eBay. We encourage you to sign up today before PayPal discontinues its offer!

In addition to the features mentioned above, the website now offers several interactive features that anyone can use. A site poll now collects

information that will be used in Discussion Forum articles to be published in the *Village* beginning in November. A new Internet forum allows readers to share their views on neighborhood news and *Village* articles. Over four thousand visitors per month visited the *Village* site during the months of August and September, and we hope you'll visit the site as well!

In October, a new contributor joined us. Frederick Brown, a 9th grade student from Atlanta, Georgia, has contributed an article to The Discussion Forum in this month's issue. This story marks the third time that a contributor from outside the area has had his or her work included in the *Village*. The *Village* staff welcomes Fred and hopes that he will continue to contribute in the future.

In addition to our international writers, a former UMHS student, Sarah Duncan, has also joined the *Village* staff as a story contributor. Sarah now lives in Bradford, New Hampshire. She was formerly the layout editor for *Tapestry*, Upper Moreland High School's literary magazine, which won several awards in 2000. While this month's publication was rather rushed, Sarah has agreed to help out the editors with formatting and editing in the future. Sarah has included four contributions in this month's issue: An article to the Discussion Forum, two short stories, and the *Life's Ironies* comic, which can be found on page 15.

Speaking of The Discussion Forum, you'll find two sets of articles in this month's issue: articles on the college admissions process (last month's topic), and articles debating the decline of Halloween (this month's topic).

In addition to the formal topics, a number of people have contributed articles on the topic of summer reading at high schools around the country. We encouage you to browse through these articles, as this topic has affected or will affect almost every child who travels through the Upper Moreland school system. As always, if you have any comments on these works, send us a rebuttal or visit our website to discuss the topic in our forums!

That's all the editors have to say for this month. Enjoy this issue of the *Village*, and we hope to be hearing from you before the November issue!

acknowledgments

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The November issue of Shoemaker Village is tentatively scheduled to be published on Friday, October 27, 2000.
All contributions for the next issue must be received by Monday, October 23, 2000.

Upcoming topics in **The Discussion Forum:**
November 2000: Check our website throughout the month for further information!
December 2000 (currently not final):

-What event do you think was most memorable as the millenium comes to a close?
-Share your Christmas experiences in past and current years with the *Village*.

Legal Information: The opinions of outside contributors to the Village are not necessarily those of Village staff. All articles contained in Shoemaker Village are copyrighted (2000) by their respective authors. Contact them if you want to republish an article. You are free to distribute copies of the Village and to make extra copies of the magazine, but you may not sell them for profit.

Puzzle Page Solutions (August 2000)

2	+	4	X	1	6
X		X		-	
7	+	5	+	6	18
+		-		X	
3	+	8	X	9	75
17		12		-53	

1	+	4	+	7	12
+		X		+	
2	X	5	-	6	4
+		-		X	
9	/	3	+	8	11
12		17		55	

9	/	3	+	6	9
+		+		X	
5	X	2	+	8	18
+		X		-	
1	+	4	+	7	12
15		11		41	

2	+	4	+	1	7
-		-		-	
6	+	8	X	7	62
/		-		+	
3	+	9	X	5	48
0		-13		-1	

puzzle page

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U K Z X Y R E A D I N G L P U M P K I N S U D E R
O A K P Q Q J H A J Y U E C G K U F L S R A E S M
A U N W O R B A S X X V C I A R J H Y O U H R T B
N M U T U A S G N I N E T H G I R F S T H G I N K
E O C V J N Z H U E K A R X W M Y T A K F Y Q I O

Aliens
Anthony
Attack
Autumn
Banner
Barn
Bats
Brown
Burgess
Candy
Cave
Caverns
Chapin
Chickens
Chill
Christopher
Cold
Colors
Cornfield
Curiousity
Daniel
Dave
Death
Decline
Demon
Devil
Dogs
Download
Driving
Evan
Fall
Fireplace
Frightening
FullMoon
Ghost
Ghoul

Puzzle Page, continued

Halloween
Harvest
Haunted
Hayride
Horror
House
Irresponsible
Jackolantern
Katie
Knights
Leaves
Mike
Mischief
Orange
Problems
Pumpkins
Quest
Rake
Reading
Red
Scary
School
Scream
Terror
Trees
Trickortreat
Trouble
Vandals
Website
Yellow

humor from the village square

ALASKA

Bubba and Jake chartered a plane with a pilot to drop them off in the wilds of Alaska for a week of elk hunting, just the same as they did the year before.

When the pilot returned with the plane, Bubba exclaimed joyfully to the pilot, "We had a great hunting trip! We bagged four elk!" The pilot regretfully explained, "Unfortunately, our plane can only fly with the weight of two elk. You'll have to leave the other two behind."

Bubba and Jake were both infuriated and insistent. "We won't allow you to fly this plane out without all four elk," Jake demanded.

The eager-to-please pilot relented and the plane took off with the three of them and their four elk. About fifteen minutes into the flight the engine started to sputter, and within seconds they were hurtling to the ground.

Wearily arising from the wreckage, Bubba looked at Jake and wheezed, "Do you have any idea where we are?"

Jake, quite pleased with himself, replied, "Yes! We're about a mile from where we crashed last year!"

BUY YOUR GRADE

A professor was giving a big test one day to his students. He handed out all of the tests and went back to his desk to wait.

Once the test was over, the students handed the tests back in. The professor noticed that one of the students had attached a $100 bill to his test with a note saying: "A dollar per point." The next class the professor handed the tests back out. The student got back his test and $64 change.

RAIDERS

Al Davis had finally put together the perfect Raiders team for '00. The only thing he was missing was a good quarterback.

He had scouted all the colleges and even the high schools, and he couldn't find a ringer quarterback that would ensure a Super Bowl win.

Then one night, watching CNN, he saw the war zone in Bosnia. In the background, out of the corner of his eye, he spotted a young Bosnian soldier with a truly incredible arm. He threw a hand grenade straight into a 15th-story window 200 yards away . . . ka-boom! He threw another hand grenade into a group of about 10 soldiers a good 110 yards away--ka-blooey! A car passes going 90 miles an hour--bulls-eye! Right into the barely open window.

"I've got to get this guy," Al says to himself. "He has the perfect arm!"

So he brings him to the States and teaches him the great game of football. Predictably, the young man breaks all the NFL records for completed passes, and the Raiders go on to win the Super Bowl.

The young Bosnian is lionized as the Great Hero of that year's Super Bowl, and when Al asks him what he wants, all the young man wants to do is to call his mother. "Mom," the young man says into the receiver, "I just won the Super Bowl."

"I don't want to talk to you," the old woman says. "You deserted us. You're not my son."

"I don't think you understand, mother," the young man pleads. "I just won the greatest sporting event in the world. I'm in the middle of thousands of adoring fans."

"No, let me tell you," the mother

implores. "At this very moment, there are gun shots all around us. The neighborhood is a pile of rubble. Your two brothers were beaten within an inch of their lives last week, and this week your sister was attacked in broad daylight . . . " The old lady pauses, in tears, " . . . I'll never forgive you for moving us to Oakland!"

NOISE ABATEMENT

"Flight 1234," the control tower advised, "turn right 45 degrees for noise abatement."

"Roger," the pilot responded, "but we're at 35,000 feet. How much noise can we make up here?"

"Sir," the radar operator replied, "have you ever heard the noise a 727 makes when it hits a 747?"

PIZZA DELIVERY

"What's the usual tip?" a man growled when, Jason, a college student delivered his pizza.

"Well," Jason replied, "this is my first delivery, but the other guys said that if I got a quarter out of you, I'd be doing great."

"Is that so?" grunted the man. "In that case, here's twenty dollars."

"Thanks," Jason said, "I'll put it in my college fund."

"By the way, what are you studying?" inquired the man.

Jason replied, "Applied psychology."

THE GI

The General went out to find that none of his G.I.s were there. One finally ran up, panting heavily.

"Sorry, sir! I can explain. You see, I had a date and it ran a little late. I ran to the bus but missed it, I hailed a cab but it broke down, found a farm, bought a horse but it dropped dead, ran 10 miles, and now I'm here."

The General was very skeptical about this explanation but at least he was here so he let the G.I. go. Moments later, eight more G.I.s came up to the general panting. He asked them why they were late. They all had the same story.

"Sorry, sir! I had a date and it ran a little late. I ran to the bus but missed it. I hailed a cab but it broke down, found a farm, bought a horse but it dropped dead, ran 10 miles, and now I'm here."

The General eyed them, feeling very skeptical but since he let the first guy go, he let them go, too. A ninth G.I. jogged up to the General, panting heavily,

"Sorry, sir! I had a date and it ran a little late. I ran to the bus but missed it. I hailed a cab but . . . "

"Let me guess," the General interrupted, "it broke down."

"No sir," said the G.I.. "There were so many dead horses in the road, it took forever to get around them."

DENTIST AND PATIENT

Dentist - "Try to relax. I'll pull your aching tooth in five minutes."

Patient - "How much will this cost?"

Dentist - "It`ll be $100."

Patient - "That much for just five minutes' work?"

Dentist - "Well, if you prefer, I can pull it out very slowly."

HOW TO WEIGH YOURSELF

1. Weigh yourself with clothes on, after dinner ... as well as in the morning, without clothes, before breakfast, because it's nice to see how much weight you've lost overnight.

2. Never weigh yourself with wet hair.

3. When weighing, remove everything, including glasses. In this case, blurred vision is an asset. Don't forget the earrings. Those things can weigh at least a pound.

4. Use cheap scales only, never the medical kind, because they are always five pounds off ... to your advantage.

5. Always go to the bathroom first.

6. Stand with arms raised, making pressure on the scale lighter.

7. Don't eat or drink in the morning until AFTER you've weighed in, completely naked, of course.

8. Weigh yourself after a haircut. This is good for at least half a pound of hair (hopefully).

9. Exhale with all your might BEFORE stepping onto the scale (air has to weigh something, right?).

10. Start out with just one foot on the scale, then holding onto the towel rack in front of you, slowly edge your other foot on and slowly let off of the rack. Admittedly, this takes time, but it's worth it. You will weigh at least two pounds less than if you'd stepped on normally.

HOW TO BUILD A WEB SITE

1. Download a piece of Web authoring software - 20 minutes.

2. Think about what you want to write on your Web page - 6 weeks.

3. Download the same piece of Web authoring software, because they have released 3 new versions since the first time you downloaded it - 20 minutes.

4. Decide to just steal some images and awards to put on your site - 1 minute.

5. Visit sites to find images and awards, find 5 of them that you like - 4 days.

6. Run setup of your Web authoring software. After it fails, download it again - 25 minutes.

7. Run setup again, boot the software, click all toolbar buttons to see what they do - 15 minutes.

8. View the source of others' pages, steal some, change a few words here and there - 4 hours.

9. Preview your Web page using the Web Authoring software - 1 minute.

10. Try to horizontally line up two related images - 6 hours.

11. Remove one of the images - 10 seconds.

12. Set the text's font color to the same color as your background, wonder why all your text is gone - 4 hours.

13. Download a counter from your ISP - 4 minutes.

14. Try to figure out why your counter reads "You are visitor number +16.3E10" - 3 hours.

15. Put 4 blank lines between two lines of text - 8 hours.

16. Fine-tune the text, then prepare to load your Web page on your ISP - 40 minutes.

17. Accidentally delete your complete web page - 1 second.

18. Recreate your web page - 2 days.

19. Try to figure out how to load your Web

page onto your ISP's server - 3 weeks.

20. Call a patient friend to find out about FTP - 30 minutes.

21. Download FTP software - 10 minutes.

22. Call your friend again - 15 minutes.

23. Upload your web page to your ISP's server - 10 minutes.

24. Connect to your site on the web - 1 minute.

25. Repeat any and all of the previous steps - eternity.

GOLF BUDDIES

A foursome of senior golfers hit the course with waning enthusiasm for the sport. "These hills are getting steeper as the years go by," one complained.

"These fairways seem to be getting longer too," said one of the others.

"The sand traps seem to be bigger than I remember them too," said the third senior.

After hearing enough from his Senior buddies, the oldest, and the wisest of the four of them at 87 years old, piped up and said, "Just be thankful we're still on the right side of the grass!"

GOLF WITH DIGNITY

An older gentleman is on a golf green about to putt out, and a foursome is behind him, waiting for him to finish. Suddenly, on the road alongside the golf course, a shiny black hearse pulls into view, followed by an entourage of some fifty vehicles.

Immediately, the man takes off his hat, places it over his heart, and stands at a respectful silence until all fifty cars have slowly passed. He then puts on his hat, taps his ball into the hole, and walks to the next tee. The members of the foursome are impressed, and, when they catch up to him, say that it has been some time since they have witnessed such a display of respect and dignity. To which the older gentleman replies: "It's the least I could do ... on Monday we would have been married fifty years!"

HEALTH CARE FAQ

Q. What does HMO stand for?
A. This is actually a variation of the phrase, "Hey, Moe!" Its roots go back to a concept pioneered by Doctor Moe Howard, who discovered that a patient could be made to forget about the pain in his foot if he was poked hard enough in the eyes. Modern practice replaces the physical finger poke with hi-tech equivalents such as voice mail and referral slips, but the result remains the same.

Q. Do all diagnostic procedures require pre-certification?
A. No. Only those you need.

Q. I just joined a new HMO. How difficult will it be to choose the doctor I want?
A. Just slightly more difficult than choosing your parents. Your insurer will provide you with a book listing all the doctors who were participating in the plan at the time the information was gathered. These doctors basically fall into two categories -- those who are no longer accepting new patients, and those who will see you but are no longer part of the plan. But don't worry -- the remaining doctor who is still in the plan and accepting new patients has an office just a half day's drive away!

Q. What are pre-existing conditions?
A. This is a phrase used by the grammatically challenged when they want to talk about existing conditions. Unfortunately, we appear to be pre-stuck with it.

Q. Well, can I get coverage for my pre-existing conditions?
A. Certainly, as long as they don't require any treatment.

Q. What happens if I want to try alternative forms of medicine?
A. You'll need to find alternative forms of payment.

Q. My pharmacy plan only covers generic drugs, but I need the name brand. I tried the generic medication, but it gave me a stomach ache. What should I do?
A. Poke yourself in the eye.

Q. I have an 80/20 plan with a $200 deductible and a $2,000 yearly cap. My insurer reimbursed the doctor for my out-patient surgery, but I'd already paid my bill. What should I do?
A. You have two choices. Your doctor can sign the reimbursement check over to you, or you can ask him to invest the money for you in one of those great offers that only doctors and dentists hear about, like windmill farms or frog hatcheries.

Q. What should I do if I get sick while traveling?
A. Try sitting in a different part of the bus.

Q. No, I mean what if I'm away from home and I get sick?
A. You really shouldn't do that. You'll have a hard time seeing your primary care physician. It's best to wait until you return, and then get sick.

Q. I think I need to see a specialist, but my doctor insists he can handle my problem. Can a general practitioner really perform heart transplant right in his office?
A. Hard to say, but considering that all you're risking is the $10 co-payment, there's no harm giving him a shot at it.

Q. What accounts for the largest portion of health care costs?
A. Doctors trying to recoup their investment losses.

Q. Will health care be any different in the next century?
A. No, but if you call right now, you might get an appointment by then.


Life's
I
R
O
N
I
E
S
Sarah Duncan
First Federal Bank
Stop!! Police! Help! The Bank's been robbed!
Ha, ha! I'll just hitch a ride on that remote country road, and I'm home free!
Gee, thanks, Man! I need to get away from the city fast.
Hands up! Police!
Police Dept.
You're lucky you caught me coming HOME from my vacation, crook!

College Admissions

In my mind, the SATs are not good enough to measure a student's acceptance into a particular college. Since I will be starting my Senior year of high school in September, I know a little bit about the college process. First of all, if you are reading this and have not taken the PSATs yet, let me give you a word of warning. There is a small portion of the answer sheet that asks you if you want the College Board to send you information from colleges regarding their programs, scholarships, and other things. If you check off yes, you will be getting a lot of mail from a lot of different colleges and universities. I have received mail from colleges in Indiana, Wisconsin, Florida, and many other states. Ninety-five percent of the colleges I am getting mail from I have never heard of. Be prepared to get a lot of mail from a lot of places. Here I am rambling on about colleges and I am not addressing the topic at hand.

The SATs are not good enough to measure how successful a student is in school. If that were the case, what have we been doing for the last thirteen years of our life learning about such things as The American Revolution, the life expectancy of a Blue Whale, and the proper way to do a pull-up when the only two subjects that are covered on the SAT are English and Math? We should have been learning how to work with numbers and how to read critically. If the SATs are the only way to measure how good a student is, then the education world is telling us that we are going to waste three and a half hours on a Saturday morning to fill in circles and that will tell us what colleges we have a chance of attending. That is a bunch of bull.

Another way to say that the SATs aren't enough is that some people are not good test takers. These students know that these scores will be sent to their homes, their schools, and any colleges that they are interested in. It doesn't matter if the test is a chapter test in

Biology or the CAT or PSAT tests--some students do not like to take tests. Luckily, most colleges are also looking at a student's grades and what he/she does for extracurricular activities in school and in the community. The bad news is the SATs still play a factor in the possible acceptance of a student into a college. The good news is that colleges are looking at different things as well.

Halloween

Teenager or not, Halloween is now, and will always be, my favorite holiday. It's the only time of the year when we can pretend to be someone else for an entire night. Halloween isn't just a one-night event, however. It's picking the perfect pumpkins and carving them into masterpieces. It's watching the leaves change colors as the trees bare their branches to prepare for the spookiest night of the year. Even if the superstitions and ghost stories don't scare you, it's still fun to be enthusiastic about the not so haunted, Haunted Hayride. All the fun is in the anticipation.

Most people think of Halloween as a childish holiday, but to me it's just a socially acceptable time to act like a kid. Dances and Halloween parties make up for trick-or-treating, or if you have a younger brother or sister, you can take them out and maybe even accumulate some candy for yourself. It's a time to be excited about something and have a little fun. When we're little, we're happy when October comes around because we get to dress up and hoard three months worth of junk food. I, for one, see nothing wrong with teenagers acting a little childish, even if it is just once a year.

One year, I dressed up in a cheerleader costume, and my parents bought me huge, puffy, gold pom-poms. We came up with a sort of cheesy cheer for me to scream out at the top of my lungs as I eagerly rang the doorbells of the bustling houses, and only twice in my life have I gotten as much candy as I did that year. On another occasion, I played the all too familiar part of the wicked witch and did my best to scare all the toddlers. I've never seen so many smiles on the faces of little kids. It's human nature to react to enthusiasm. Maybe the majority is right. Maybe Halloween is going out of style, but just maybe if the masses of people who call Halloween a child's holiday would take the time to remember just how much fun they had, we could again make Halloween great.

Do YOU Celebrate Halloween Anymore?

I remember a few years ago when everyone I knew celebrated the holiday of Halloween. Every year, near the beginning of October, neighbors would go about their yearly rounds of decorating, purchasing costumes, and procuring a large bucket of candy for the neighbors to gather while they went around trick-or-treating. When the holiday finally arrived, it was a social event. Whether one dressed up and walked around the neighborhood as a kid or as a parent, or whether he or she remained indoors to distribute treats to neighbors, it was almost given that neighbors would greet each other with kindness and generosity. There was no trouble to speak of, those who attended a party or a dance were able to return home without being afraid of anything, and everything generally turned out fine.

Today, however, the picture painted in one's mind is very different. I will admit that my favorite holiday is Christmas, not Halloween. Therefore, one would think that I agree with the huge festivity that the Christmas season has become. By the beginning of October, holiday merchandise is on sale and people are already planning and decking their house with Christmas lights. Last year, I recall riding down Davisville Road and observing two houses that had Christmas, not Halloween, decorations outside their houses almost a week before Halloween. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that Halloween, in the present day, is almost forgotten.

In earlier years, I recall seeing scary commercials and Halloween decorations by the end of September. Now, one would be lucky to see them at all. Numerous events and parties were scheduled, very few of which survive to this day. And the central event of Halloween, trick or treating, is now almost nonexistent. Whereas in the early 90s my parents reported hundreds of ghouls, demons, pumpkins, and witches appearing at the door to our house, last year I observed the incredibly large number of *five* approach the threshold on

Halloween night. My father, who had purchased a large bowl of candy, forgetting the state of the holiday, was forced to give most of it away to his co-workers. My smaller brother, who has trick-or-treated avidly since he was in first grade, reported that he saw almost nobody while walking from door to door.

While I'm sure the increased emphasis on Christmas, Hannukah, and the corresponding holidays has lead to the decline of this American tradition, I am convinced that the great amount of vandalism and criminal activity that is increasingly prevalent around our homes has also contributed to the downfall. Mischief night, before Halloween, is particularly bad. If the vandals will do almost anything at other times of the year to cause trouble and to irritate their neighbors, what says that they won't do it on Mischief night? My family has awoken many times to find eggs splattered on the glass panes of our front door, plants trampled, pumpkins smashed, or those giant pumpkin or ghost leaf bags torn open. The neighbors who live adjacent to our house have doubtless experienced similar horror stories over the years. After seeing the results of this sort of activity and washing eggs off your house or car in the morning, wouldn't you be hesitant to allow your children to venture outside trick-or-treating the following night?

It's ironic that over the past several years, the crime rate has appeared to decrease. The key word in the previous sentence is "appeared"; the statistics only track the number of felony crimes committed. While the felony crime rate is lessening, the rate for these petty misdemeanor crimes is definately increasing, at least in the immediate area. While it is a shame, the simple fact is that Halloween is making an exit from our culture. Last year, I dressed up with a scary mask to "greet" unspecting children who ventured to our front porch. Even my brother, who used to love the holiday, is considering not going outside due to the lack of houses that actually give away candy. Think - do you celebrate Halloween like you used to?

UMHS's Late Bus Schedule

by Stephen Sokolowski

I have written many articles for *The Bear Print* and my magazine in recent times, and most of them have been about controversial issues that concern the school. In all of these editorials, however, I have never come across a subject as puzzling as the late bus schedule at the district's schools. The time schedule of the buses puzzles me and many others and helps little in the transportation field.

For those of you who are new to the school or have never taken one of these buses, there are two late buses that leave the high school at 4:00 and 5:00 PM to provide transportation to students who stayed after school for activities. The buses then travel to the middle school, arriving there fifteen minutes later, for middle-school-aged kids to board the bus and for high school students to disembark from the one bus that transports them to the middle school and board one of the three buses that are waiting, each for different routes. The buses then leave the middle school to take students home.

The most puzzling aspect of this schedule is why the 4:00 time was chosen. The late bus departure times make no sense whatsoever, especially when referring to the schedule of most school activities. Most non-athletic activities hold meetings after school for about a half hour or an hour on the days they meet, and then conclude, leaving students to find their own way home, or to wait an hour for the bus. The athletic teams, for the most part, continue their practices after both the 4:00 and the 5:15 departures of the buses.

I have taken advantage of these buses only twice in my high school career: a few years ago when I was in 9th grade, and on a Friday afternoon when I had happened to still be around at 4:00. During the first trip (using the 5:15 bus), there were only five people on the bus (presumably due to the awkward time schedule), and, with the trip to the middle school, the journey took almost 45 minutes, and I didn't arrive home until 5:45. Needless to say, I

decided that I would find alternative methods of transportation after that. On the second trip, I took the 4:00 bus. I arrived at 3:40 in the lobby and found that most of the bus riders were already waiting for the vehicle to arrive. I, myself, had also been waiting in a different room and would have leapt at the opportunity to start the weekend a half hour earlier. Every time I have been walking through the school at 3:30, I have noticed the same occurrence: students biding their time near the doors for the bus to arrive.

As many students and teachers remember, the administrative detention schedule was changed in 1999, reducing the time that obligated students had from the end of the school day to the time when detention started. Reportedly, the aim of the change was to reduce the number of incidents where troublemakers left school property and were charged with trespassing, drug use, and other illegal or immoral activities before detention began. While a fine plan, the time that detention gets out was also made earlier. Now, these same students who don't have a license must wait for around a *half hour* every day to catch the bus. What is stopping these students from causing the same sort of trouble they were causing before? In a word: nothing. In fact, the change may have made things worse.

On October 4, there was a naturalization ceremony held at the high school that was to be attended by two hundred immigrants as well as by the 11th and 12th grade students. Because of the anticipated parking troubles, students were ordered to park in the Cold Spring Elementary School lot so that guests could park in the high school lot. I never realized how many students drive to school. Cars lined Bear Boulevard, and I assume that the Cold Spring lot was packed. It seems as if half the students in the building drive to school every day.

Why? One UMHS teacher offers an explanation with which I concur: most of the students who drive to school do so because they have no other option by which to get home after the end of sports practices, which conclude after the 5:15PM late bus departs. The

administrators are always complaining of a shortage of parking spaces, yet they allow the late buses to leave early, thereby adding a significant number of cars to the lot. When I walk past the parking lot around 5:00, there are more than half the number of cars that are there in the morning, meaning that over *half* of those students drive home from sports practices. If the administration gave students another option to get home, such as a later second bus, the parking problem might be nonexistent. There is supposedly an environmental club in the school that participates in various service activities throughout the school year: instead of traveling far away to improve the environment, do something about the late bus issue! Imagine how much less pollution there would be if even a quarter of the student body didn't drive to school every day! Why do the administration and school board still drag their feet on this issue? It's clearly evident that something needs to be done both about the late buses and the parking problems, so why not do something about it now?

All of these problems could be eliminated if the administration of the school changed the bus schedule so that the first late bus arrived a half-hour earlier, at 3:30, and the second later than 5:15. I simply don't have time to learn to drive with four AP-level courses this semester, and I stay after school often. Every time, I am forced to call my parents because the late bus schedule is so inconvenient. I sincerely hope that the administrators will look outside at the parking lot one of these days and realize that the late bus schedule at UMHS simply isn't working.

The Uselessness of Summer Reading Assignments

Many schools around this area practice one of the least educational methods of schooling: the assignment of required summer reading. While theoretically summer reading is an idea that will improve students' learning habits and introduce them to great works of literature, in reality, the assignment of required material to be read during the summer provides little instructional value.

At the end of each semester, the same monotony occurs: teachers break out the summer reading lists and distribute them to students on the day of the course's final exam. These teachers simply tell the students to read each book on the list, giving little or no information as to what to expect from each of the works. When the next semester of English arrives, which may be almost an entire year since the summer reading list was assigned, a short test that is worth about 1% or less of a student's grade for the course is given.

I am baffled with how every English teacher I have been assigned since ninth grade has handled this summer reading. First, the teacher will give a short quiz that, if the student fails, would only deduct two or three percentage points from his or her grade. Subsequently, a composition will be given, wherein the student is either assigned or asked to choose one of the summer works on which to write. Thereafter, the compositions are graded, a few days of discussion are held on each of the books, and the class moves on. In the end, less than a week is spent on the enormous summer reading selections while the class will read an equal amount of literature over the next *six to nine* weeks. For each of the following class assigned readings, of course, a separate composition is assigned, so the value of these compositions exceeds the value of the summer reading composition by almost five times. And, finally, the work of your choice is generally ignored, except in a few instances where students were asked to give speeches on the reading. However, because the teacher knows little or nothing

at all about the topics on which his or her students are speaking, the speech can be easily filled with useless information and “fillers” without the teacher suspecting that the student is cheating.

Furthermore, simply ask any English teacher at UMHS and you’ll find that many students simply don’t read the books that are assigned. If a student does read the books as assigned, they are largely forgotten by the time the summer draws to a close. I failed this year’s summer reading test, mostly because I was unable to remember the books that I started reading in June. Then, as the end of the summer neared, I rushed to complete the assignment. (I had saved several books for August so that I wouldn’t forget them.) I finished only 400 pages short, and scored a 58% on the quiz that was given later that week, which I consider a high grade in a no-win situation. On the composition, I did little better because I had forgotten much of the plots of the works I had read. During the discussions, I fared equally poorly and was unable to add many comments to the class discussion because I didn’t comprehend much beyond the basic plot development of the novels.

Reading these novels was, in my opinion, a waste of my and others’ time. I was unable to search for a job this summer due to many reasons, one of which was the immense amount of reading that was required. I believe that work experience during the summer months would have been much more beneficial to my future. When I filled out Penn State’s application a month ago, I was forced to leave the work experience section somewhat empty, because I have never had the opportunity to hold a paying job. While having little experience made no difference in being accepted to Penn State, more competitive colleges such as the University of Pennsylvania look highly upon work experience, as will future employers - they either don’t comprehend the enormous assignment that I had completed over the summer or don’t care about it. It was depressing to find out that my efforts will go to raising my average by only 3.3%.

I also feel that summer reading reduces the amount of time students have to read other novels of their own choice and removes the enjoyment from reading. Since last December, I have been reading a 6300 page series of novels and continued to do so over the summer. Currently, I switch between the school reading I am assigned and these books every day; generally, I complete the schoolwork with my regular homework and then read the other books later in the night, because TV before the Olympics was just awful (but that's another topic altogether). During the summer, the required summer reading limited my time in reading the other books, which is the opposite of what the teachers had intended. By assigning summer work, teachers are stopping students from reading other books for their enjoyment, taking the fun out of reading. If year-round school will not be instituted, then a different method of addressing the summer retention issue must be developed. Even teachers agree: An English teacher at UMHS to whom I spoke said that "there were some problems" with the system.

One solution to this problem, as the author of another article in this section has said, would be to change the required summer reading lists to suggested lists. I was reading The Miller's Tale of *The Canterbury Tales* last night, and stopped for a moment to attempt to reflect upon why I was not enjoying the story, which would normally have been hilarious. I realized, and upon further examination found to be true, that no matter what the content of the work that is assigned, time constraints on reading literature reduce what students can gain from the reading. I had experienced this while reading *A Prayer for Owen Meany*, which was a book I would ordinarily liked, except that I had to read one hundred pages of the work every day. If a suggested reading list were given, there would be no time constraints on students' enjoyment of the works, and the comprehension level would be greatly increased.

While the time for me to benefit from a decision involving summer reading has passed, I am writing this article as a plea to teachers to reform the practice of assigning summer

reading for future students. The current system is plainly not working at this or any other school, and something needs to be done about it now. However, the English teachers are not at fault: the school board most likely mandates summer reading as it does to all other school programs. I sincerely hope that this matter is investigated promptly, and look forward to seeing my brother bring home a “recommended” summer reading list when he attends the high school.

Summer Reading: Useful or Useless?

By Frederick Brown

It's a student's worst nightmare; their summer is all planned out, just a few days of school left and their English teacher hands them a list of reading to do over the summer. Now, some students enjoy this, in an interview with a seventh grader she stated: "Oh it's [summer reading] such a great idea! They [teachers] give us so many great books to read!" But, most students share a different view on the matter; summer reading is a rape of time.

Most teachers at a local high school admit that summer reading is an ancient ploy to get kids who wouldn't normally read over the summer to engage in this opportunity. But, what does that mean for the rest of us who actually read for the joy of reading? A local tenth grade teacher is quoted in saying, "Its unfortunate that children who do read on a regular basis have to read additional literature that can be, at times, well… boring."

Even those students who don't read on a regular basis don't benefit from this rare chance at an academically stimulating experience. An overwhelming majority of students such as these either don't read these works of literature seriously enough for any level of comprehension above the basic plot structure, or, they don't read them at all. In either case no one is benefitting anything out of the experience.

Summer reading tests are a hassle over nothing for teachers. They take forever to grade, they don't count enough to be worth anything on student's final averages, and they are a waste of earth's natural resources. Over five million pages of paper dedicated to summer reading tests have been used this year alone. So why require summer reading? There really isn't a reason except for maintaining tradition. Yet another local teacher, in an interview stated: "The only reason I assign summer reading is because my superiors tell me to."

One solution that is on everyone's mind is banning summer reading all together. But, if you recall from earlier, some students like the summer reading because it provides them with

a list of what they consider to be quality literature. A more reasonable compromise would be to give a suggested reading list, as opposed to a required reading list. Several independent school systems have already initiated this compromise and the results have been exceptional. In some cases, this compromise has produced better results than required reading because students feel less pressure of the set time frame of 3 or so months to read these books and therefore read them with greater comprehension and accuracy.

Schools are faced with an easy decision in the next school year, either renew this habitual nightmare for all students, or make a controversial and productive leap into a new age, an age where student's opinions are heard and acted upon, an age where the traditional barrier of authority between faculty and students can be broken, an age most call the twenty-first century.

Saturday Evening Catastrophe

by Sarah Duncan

I suppose I must have been daydreaming because it was a beautiful, sunny day, but I was rudely awakened from a pleasant thought by the earth-shattering sounds of crunching steel and breaking safety glass. Just feet away from our own car, two other cars had miscommunicated in some way, creating a tangled jungle of steel and twisted, broken windshields. My heart leaped as I was plunged into a memory that no one should have to relive…

On a beautiful Saturday, June 10, 1990, to be exact, a seven and a half-year-old girl is spending hours on end carelessly playing the weekend away. At such a young age, I'm not exactly worrying about world hunger or unemployment in the US. My five-year-old brother is riding his little bike with training wheels along the sidewalk, and I'm zipping on and off the same walk, in and out of the street because I'm a big girl, old enough to use common sense and evade the traffic. I'm **old enough** to ride at the speed of a train, flying down the street, the warm sun on my face, the wind playfully tossing my hair around. My hair! The wind is touching my hair! I've forgotten. We bought those weird new bicycle helmets last week at K-mart. I better go get mine before Mom gets mad.

I use my momentum to get back to my house just up the street a little ways, and I run in. I hastily grab my helmet from the floor, quickly blurt out to my mother something about forgetting my helmet, and dash out the door again.

This time, I have my helmet on, so it's safer to continue my daredevil riding—on the driveway. The yellow house is how I remember it best. It's the yellow house with the steep, asphalt-paved driveway. If a child were to drag her bike up that driveway, turn around, and fly down again into the street, it would be the thrill of a lifetime. That thrill was truly a daredevil

stunt, however, because bushes blocked any view of the street from both directions. In order to check for cars, I would have to dismount the bike, leaving it at the top of a complete stranger's driveway, traipse down to the street, trudge back up to the top again, and remount the bike. This is highly impractical for two reasons. One, by the time I would be once again riding my bicycle, a car could be zipping down the street and I would never know it. Two, it means stopping, mid-pedal, which takes at least forty-five percent of the thrill from the entire venture. At nearly eight years old, I'm not about to sacrifice fun for common sense, now, am I? I'm a veteran driveway biker by this date so I see no danger in making the journey one more time, and one more, and one more, even. This time, however, will be my last.

Lincoln Avenue has pretty much always been used as a cut-through between two main streets, Easton Road and York Road, both major health hazards to the chicken that crosses roads. Both Easton and York have higher speed limits than Lincoln Avenue, a residential street. For this reason, drivers have a tendency not to reduce their speeds when they get to Lincoln. During my bike adventure, a seventeen-year-old driver, out of force of habit, I suppose, is zipping down good old Lincoln Avenue at 35 miles per hour when the posted limit is 25. I soar into the street at increasing speed as usual, and I am met face-to-face by a gigantic mass of metal hurling toward me. I frantically glance from left to right, desperately searching for a route of escape, and the next thing I know, I'm lying on the ground, a few seconds later, twenty feet from my last memory. I haven't been unconscious; I just don't have any memory of flying twenty feet through the air and landing head first on the sidewalk.

I look down at my legs, stunned and disbelieving. My vision is that of a cartoon character that has just been rendered semi-conscious by a soccer ball, which spins around the character's head in an endless circle. The one clear thought that burns into my mind is *This has to be a dream. I have to be dreaming.* The scene in front of me only continues to spin for a few seconds, and then I realize that my left ankle is hanging over the edge of the

curb just a little bit so I inch it onto the sidewalk. The collision has caused a serious injury to my leg, and blood is spilling from the complex wound of missing bone and torn muscle. I'm lucky that my leg is still attached, but I don't realize the severity of my wound until much later.

Time becomes blurry to me, and the next day or so goes by as if this day has been singled out to be the one day in all eternity that lasts for the equivalent of forever more. Before I can fully comprehend what has happened, people are surrounding me, sending a wall of questions in my direction that I can't decipher at all. A party has been going on just down the street at the corner of Lincoln and York so there are a few cops within running distance, and a volunteer firefighter lives up the street just a couple houses from the crash site. The Second Alarmers are at my side within almost no time at all, a miracle that, no doubt, saved my life.

A paramedic places an oxygen mask over my face and repeatedly asks me questions. I have difficulty answering because he forbids me to move my head in a nod, and I have the mask inhibiting my speech. The only spoken sentence I remember from that event is the agonized cry of my mother, "Oh God! My baby! Please don't let my baby die!" I think my father and others are struggling to keep my mother back and semi-sane, but how can anyone stay sane in a situation such as this?

People are still crowded around me. I'm always awake but not always registering. There's a flash of a ride in a dark ambulance. There's a flicker of lying on a hospital table at Abington Hospital. Then, I wake up in a hospital bed at Children's Hospital Of Philadelphia. There's the moment I look into the defiant, yet heart-broken faces of my parents, disobeying the orders of the doctors to lie to me, and telling me straight faced and pained that I have a twenty percent chance of ever walking again.

…Moments after the start of my painful vision of my own "Day that will live in infamy," the images faded away. I was left, hanging between present day and

years ago, slowly realizing that I was safe in our car, after years of physical therapy and 10 surgeries, surrounded by my loving, supportive family, my leg heavily scarred but intact, no crutches or wheel chair, just a pure, sweet, miraculous ability to **run**.

Ice Cream and Potato Chips

by Sarah Duncan

The most often seen food in the Duncan house, otherwise known as chicken, is never the most memorable. It's the abnormal traditions based on food that I remember the most fondly.

For instance, on Sunday morning, on no particular holiday, if I remember correctly, my father woke me early. I must have been four or five, I suppose. A little confused and quite distraught at having been dragged from my beautiful dreams, I emerged from my room, a sleepy-eyed child. I recall padding down the stairs, as all young girls seem to do, with my baby brother, an impish little elephant behind me. There, on a coffee table that was then almost at the level of my shoulders, were two enormous ice cream sundaes.

"What about breakfast?" a wide-eyed youngster asked.

"You're looking at it." My father tossed a sly grin aside to my mother, a slightly devious smile still wide on her face, and they looked as if they had just won a prize. Joey, my brother, and I delved into the heavenly feast as if the three bears would soon arrive home to their cottage to reclaim their after-porridge sundaes. That was the first time, and the only time, I ever had ice cream for breakfast.

There is a tradition that occurs more often, however. Every New Year's Eve brings the same ritual for the Duncan family. It takes all of New Year's Eve Day to plan out the evening to come. There's a trip to the grocery store, hunting through a jungle of aisles for both ordinary appetizers and more unique food, such as shrimp dip and crackers or precooked appetizers that only find the Duncan house once a year, at most. Two to four two-liter bottles of soda find the cart, and what some might picture a week's worth of salad becomes a New Year's Feast: Tomatoes, celery, mushrooms, cheese, croutons, dressing, ham; the works. A

month's worth of potato chips, Doritos, and pretzels tops off the cart, covering a few flavors of ice cream and toppings. Maybe we'll even pick up some croissants for the morning.

After the feast has been chosen, it's off to the video rental store or our basement shelves on which stacks and drawers full of well-used videos are stored. Six hours worth of movies, usually of a particular theme, maybe science fiction or a series or trilogy, are eagerly placed on a table, alongside our buffet. For all six hours until the clock strikes midnight, the Duncan family lounges on couches or sleeping bags and pillows on the floor, enjoying salad, chips, and soda. A few minutes before 12:00 AM, the movie marathon and feasting stops, and the Ball Dropping at Time Square appears on the television screen. Two enthusiastic children grin as sparkling cider appears from a secret spot in the refrigerator. The seconds tick away. We all yell along with the television, "Ten! Nine! Eight! Seven! Six! Five! Four! Three! Two! One! Happy New Year!" Cider flows from wine-like bottles into special stemmed glasses, and four merrymakers play at toasting a new year. The movies are finished off and placed back on the shelves, the feast stowed away as leftovers. Sparklers are lit just outside the front door, and a sleepy family slinks into three rooms and slides into bed, already dreaming of the day's events and ready to reenact the fun at the next stroke of midnight.

Two people outside of the family have witnessed our New Year's ritual, on two different years, of course, and they were my two best friends. The year that Liz, a grade older than I, spent New Years Eve with the Duncan family, she was just happy to be sharing such a close family tradition with us, and she joined in as if she were the sister that I never had. My other best friend, Matt, on the other hand, spent most of the night making cracks at the movies we had chosen, the "Anne of Green Gables" box set. It was an apparently bad choice for a year in which we had a teenage male along for the ride, but he, too, was simply happy to be there.

He snacked on our food, and he practically finished off a lot of what would normally have been left over for the next day, but we didn't mind. It was our holiday.

Evan's Quest

by Daniel Burgess

Chapter 10 - Final Training (Part II)

As that day progressed and the sun was gradually ebbing, Evan was starting to get ready to go to sleep, Ry said,

"Well, goodnight Evan. We are going to go out for the day tomorrow for some more training, so pack your things ready for an early start."

"Ok Ry, goodnight."

The next morning Ry and Evan were up early, they had packed their things for the day and where about to leave.

"Are you ready Evan?" Evan nodded and Ry flicked his fingers.

Outside the morning sun was no where to be seen. The sky was still quite dark, but was getting lighter quickly. Evan could here a few birds singing and couldn't hear much else. Ry began walking and Evan sprinted forward to catch up with his fast pace.

"Ry, where are we exactly going?" Evan asked as he walked at the side of Ry.

"We are going to three places. Each will give you some training, and will make you a much better wizard." Ry replied, not straying his view from straight in front of him.

The two walked along a dirt path, through the area Evan recognised, he has wandered around this area a few times. There wasn't much at the sides of the path, just some grass fields. To Evan's right and left, in the distance he saw some gentle, rolling hills.

They had been walking for about thirty minutes, and Evan was becoming bored. He looked up at Ry slowly, and examined him closely. Evan thought to himself about Ry, he was quite a strange, old man, but wise. Evan noticed that Ry had not moved his head from straight ahead all the time they had been walking. Ry suddenly surprised Evan by saying,

"I am thinking about my magic, and you would be a much better magician if you did the same, and did not nosy into other peoples business." Evan looked straight forward, and felt awful. He remembered that Ry could hear what Evan was thinking.

After that incident Evan was reluctant to say anything else, or think anything else for that matter. The sun was almost above the horizon now, and Evan could feel the warmth. Eventually Evan plucked up the courage to say,

"Ry, are we almost at the first place yet?"

"Yes, be patient, we are close to our destination." Ry replied. Evan thought to himself about Ry's clothes, they were very fancy, he was wearing a long cloak, which was patchwork with many pastel colours. Ry turned his head left and looked at Evan, he raised his eyebrows,

"There you go again," Evan looked down at the floor.

"I'm sorry Ry, I can't help thinking about things."

The next ten minutes were silent between the two, and the scenery around them did not change much. The dirt path they were walking along was now more of a road, it was wider and had more stones and pebbles than dirt. Evan looked down the road trying to see the place they were supposed to be going, and he was surprised to see a man walking towards them. Evan whispered to Ry,

"Ry, look." Ry looked up as the man drew closer.

The man was wearing quite shabby clothes, which were brown and grey. He had long, scraggy, brown hair and was carrying large bags. As the man drew quite close the man said,

"Hello, I'm looking for somewhere to stay, do you know anywhere near?"

"No, I'm sorry," Ry replied walking past. Evan turned his head as they walked past, looking at the man. The traveller was stood still, as they went past, moving his head as the walked. Evan couldn't believe what he was seeing, the man's face was going red, and his skin seemed to be bulging. His skin was actually moving, and getting bumpy and moving about. The man's face was looking angry.

Evan put his hand out and tapped Ry,

"Ry, Ry! Look at him!" Ry turned his head and looked at the traveller. Ry turned his whole body to a hostile position. The man looked up, and opened his mouth. An enormous roar began, Evan put his hands over his ears and closed his eyes.

Within seconds the roar stopped, Evan took his hands away and opened his eyes.

"Oh my god, what happened?" Evan said, looking at the corpse on the floor.

"He is an evil demon. There are only a few in the kingdom, and are very powerful, so I cast a spell on him." Evan stared at the body on the floor.

"How did you do a spell like that?" Evan asked to Ry, there was no reply,

"Ry?" Evan said still with his eyes fixed on the body, he turned to look at Ry, and saw that he was quite a way in front of him walking down the path.

"Ry! Wait for me" Evan shouted.

"Hurry up Evan, we need to make good time!" Ry replied walking off. He ran and caught up with the old wizard.

Evan looked up ahead and saw a small clump of buildings.

"Ry, is that where we are going?"

"Yes, we will be staying there for a short while." Ry replied.

As Evan got closer he saw the buildings were very detailed, with carved wood beams and small, green windows with a lot of small diamond panes. The roofs were curved and were made of yellow, thatched hay. Evan saw a ground of the buildings around a central courtyard, in the middle was a small, wooden well. With tine blue tiles on it's small roof. Evan and Ry entered the village and stopped,

"We will be staying here over night," Ry said to Evan." Ry moved off towards a building, which had a small sign hanging outside, Evan looked at the sign carefully and saw that there was a picture of a plump man with a round glass of ale in his hand, and underneath the word ‘Tavern' was wrote.

The two travellers pushed open the large wooden door by the cold, metal ring, which was the handle. Inside the tavern was full of life. There were about fifteen people inside the inn some singing, most talking to one another, some laughing and some just sitting drinking.

There was a bar at the far side of the room, and Evan and Ry walked up to it. Evan looked behind the bar and there was a plump man behind it, he was wearing a cream clothes, which were stained, probably from ale.

"Yes?" The barkeep said, in a low, deep voice.

"We have a room booked," Ry said, looking down at the small man.

"Ok, would you like any drinks before you go up?" The barkeep asked.

"No thank you, but we will sit down over here." Ry replied, while steadily walking

towards an empty table in the corner.

They both sat down, Evan looked around, examining the people in the tavern more carefully. There was a couple sitting on the table next to Evan. A large, bulky man, with shoulder length, black hair and his wife, she had waist length ginger hair. The woman was quietly giggling at something the man just said, but Evan couldn't hear what it was. Across the room, by the bar, stood a knight. He had large, shiny armour all over his body. The sword which lay by his side glinted in the sunlight, which beamed through the near by window.

"Evan, we'll go to our room and have a little rest, then we'll go out and look around, okay?" Ry said quietly to Evan,

"Sure." Evan replied.

After Ry and Evan had a rest in their room, they walked down the wooden stairs, and down into the tavern. The tavern was now busier, and had cheerful music playing loudly. They walked through the tavern and out through the wooden doors. The sun was still shining brightly in the sky, and the air was warm.

"Evan, I want to go see a friend of mine, he's also a wizard. Hi lives in this village, so I wont be long, do you want to go and look around while I go see him?" Ry said to Evan, already walking off slowly.

"Umm, okay," Evan replied.

Ry walked off towards some small cottages, and Evan looked around him, trying to choose where to go first. He decided he'd stay where he was for a moment and watch who Ry was going to meet. He looked over to the small cottages, they had yellow straw on the roofs, and had small circular windows. Outside of the cottages where small patches of grass, and a small white fence all the way around them. Evan looked at Ry standing at one of the wooden doors, it opened slowly, and inside Evan saw a woman, she was quite young looking and she had brown hair down to her shoulders. She was wearing a brown and green dress, with a dark green apron around her waist.

The woman looked very pleased to see Ry and she ran to him and hugged him. Evan could only see the back of Ry, so he couldn't see how Ry was reacting. The woman pulled Ry into the cottage, smiling all the time, and she shut the door behind her.

Evan was quite surprised that the wizard friend Ry was talking about was a woman. He turned his head and carried on looking around.

Evan began to walk slowly, towards a large house, East of the town centre. The house was two floors high, and had a grand, red tiled roof. The window was made of small, green, diamond shaped panes of glass. The door was large and had a round, black handle. As Evan got closer he walked to the window and looked through.

Inside Evan saw a big room, there was a huge fireplace, with a burning fire, and the room was full of chairs, tables and shelves. Evan saw an old man and a young boy in the room. The man was hugging the boy, and Evan realised they were father and son. The image of Isaac suddenly jumped into Evan's head. A tear emerged from the corner of Evan's eye, and fell through the air. The teardrop landed on the green painted windowsill.

Evan walked back towards the centre of the courtyard, and his foot slipped on the cobbled, stone ground. Evan fell to the ground, and the pain in his ankle was excruciating. He slowly stood up, but his ankle buckled and he fell back down.

Evan eventually managed to stand up, he looked around, and the only bench he could see was across the courtyard, next to the entrance to a small wood. He limped across and sat down. Evan sat for about ten minutes, rubbing his ankle all the time.

The silence in the courtyard was suddenly broken, Evan listened carefully. He could here a quiet laughing, he looked around. Evan couldn't see anyone at all. He looked behind him, into the small wood. Evan stood up carefully. His ankle was still tender, he limped slowly into the wood. But the laughing stooped. Evan stopped and listened carefully. The laughing started again and Evan carried on.

The wood was covered in white mist. Evan couldn't see two metres in front of him, because the mist was so thick. The trees were all around, and the wood was getting thicker.

Evan stopped, he knew he'd get lost if he carried on any further, so he ignored his curiosity and began to head back to the village.

"Hey, come back!" The laughing stopped, and Evan heard a squeaky, quiet voice. Evan turned his head quickly,

"Yes, you!" The voice said again.

Evan turned his whole body and squinted through the mist, to try and see who was talking.

"Can't you see us? Maybe this will help." The voice said again, Evan heard the sound of some fingers flicking. The mist all around him for at least four metres cleared instantly.

Evan saw six fairies in front of him on the floor.

"Oh my god," Evan said under his breathe. The fairies where only about the size of Evan's hand, and had small dresses on, that were ragged at the edges. They had tiny wings, which were transparent, but had a tint of different colours. One fairy had pink tinted wings, another had green, and another had blue. They all had different colours.

"Do not be alarmed, we won't hurt you. We just want to help you. That ankle seems painful, and we can heal it for you." One fairy said to Evan.

The pain in Evan's ankle was hurting a lot, and he knew he shouldn't but Evan said,

"You can? Please do," The fairies all smiled, and another said,

"Follow us, and we'll heal it for you." The fairies all suddenly flapped their wings, and they floated about one metre above the ground. They turned and flew off further into the wood. Evan staggered as fast as he could to try and keep up with them. His ankle hurt more the faster he tried but the fairies were getting further away from him so he tried to go faster, but his ankle gave way. Evan fell to the damp ground, and his face was in the mud.

"Wait, please wait for me," Evan muttered, then everything went black and Evan lost consciousness.

The Knights of the Square Table

by Stephen Sokolowski

Chapter 15

When the rumbling had finally subsided, Christopher looked around him at the soldiers gathered together in the small entrance. Chapin, standing next to him, checked the fallen bodies near the pile of snow that shut out all traces of the outside. It was a grim sight, but most of the knights that had been knocked over during the calamity possessed only minor injuries.

Suddenly Christopher remembered, and shouted “Anthony?” There wasn’t a reply, and several groans came from behind him, where the knights were gathered. He realized that he, like them, was expecting the worst.

Suddenly there was a tiny sound, such as if something was rubbing against the ground, and Anthony pulled his head out of the snow, gasping for air. When the avalanche had descended upon them, most of the snow had fallen straight down, blocking off access to the cave. However, some had fallen inside the entranceway, just enough to hide a body below. During the entire time, all Anthony would have had to do was to poke his head up out of the snow.

“Is everyone alright?” he asked, looking around as if nothing had happened, and *they* were the ones in danger.

After the amazement over Tony’s survival subsided, reality set in.

“Because the entrance here is closed off,” Christopher said, “there better be another entrance on the other side of the mountains, or not even the stones will get us out in time.”

“We’ll worry about that when the time comes,” Chapin said. “Let’s get moving. Yavin obviously knows we’re here by now, and we don’t want to upset him.”

Orders spread quickly throughout the crowd, and the knights began moving forward. After the first one hundred feet, the passage narrowed significantly, and the group was hard pressed to maintain even two adbreast. The column began to stretch out. The passageway extended in front of the knights for miles, and by the time every last person had left the front entranceway, it was a half hour later.

The trek through the dark caves was slow and uneventful. Without lanterns, it would have been impossible for anyone to see anything at all. As it was, it was nearly impossible anyway. The air grew warmer so that the knights became drenched.

As the hours in the long, narrow corridor passed, Christopher became increasingly aware of a dampness that hung in the air. Several of the knights commented on it, but not much more was said until Chapin, who was in the front of the army, said,

“Isn’t that water dripping off that rock over there?”

“Halt!” Tony called, and the knights stopped in ripples traveling back into the depths of darkness. On the wall nearest Chapin, a tiny rivulet of liquid flowed out of a small crack in the rock. It was then that Christopher realized that the group had been traveling slightly uphill for the past few hours, as the water was trickling down the slope to a point where it eventually spread so thin it evaporated.

“Keep observing what’s around you,” Christopher warned. “There might be something important up ahead. We wouldn’t want to be caught by surprise.”

“March!” Tony shouted, and the knights continued on. Single file they continued down the long corridor, boots shuffling over the damp rock, water dripping slowly off the coats of the knights, the occasional shout echoing for minutes.

At the time Christopher was considering calling a halt for the night, Tony, who was in front of the six thousand or so included in the force behind them, the passageway suddenly opened up around him. Christopher stumbled as Tony stooped abruptly in front of him. Christopher stopped as well as he beheld what lay stretched before him.

On all sides, the walls shone with all the colors of the rainbow, illuminating the chamber with different hues of reds, oranges, blues, and more tones than Christopher could imagine. At the center of the chamber, the light converged on a large round circle inscribed into the ground with Characters unknown to either Christopher or Tony. Entrances to other caves and smaller rooms stood throughout the massive chamber, which was by far large enough to house the entire army alone. The room was so bright that not a single corner was left in the shadows. In contrast, the luminance that seemed to radiate from the walls somehow simply *stopped* at the threshold. From where Christopher and Tony were standing, it was obvious what lay in front of them. Katie, however, standing immediately behind them, could see nothing.

“What’s going on?” she asked impatiently, craning her neck to see above the heads of the taller men in front of her. After another minute, Christopher turned around and said ostentatiously, “Don’t be surprised with what’s ahead.” Then he continued walking forward and branched off to the right. Katie, Chapin, Mike, Dave, and the rest of the knights who were waiting behind them gasped at the illusion as Christopher walked to the right and impossibly out of view.

The others followed, crying out in amazement or muttering beneath their breaths at the impossibility of such a place existing. The exclamations continued for quite some time as the knights filed into the chamber. Christopher stood in the exact center of the area, watching the arrivals.

“I must make an announcement,” Christopher said to the knights closes to him. “Have everyone gather around here while I talk with Tony. Tony looked at Christopher questioningly, and the knights hesitated, wondering whether or not to carry out the order. “Go on!” Tony snapped when the knights didn’t move, and they scurried out of the way, leaving the nearest people out of earshot.

“There is something significant about this place,” Christopher said. “Look at this.” He pulled out the water stone from his pocket and held it out in such a way that nobody else but Tony would see the pulsing blue light that was now being emitted by it.

“What does it mean?” Tony asked, keeping his voice down.

“You know as much as I do. But whatever it means, the stones are drained of power. Nothing can happen - yet.”

“From these carvings, it looks as if this is some sort of magical device,” Tony pointed out.

“Perhaps. What could its purpose be? Certainly Yavin has discovered it, unless this

area is protected in some fashion. Possibly none of Yavin's servants have ventured near this area in the past. Whatever the reason for the device being deactivated, I don't believe we should experiment - this far under the mountains, it could explode or cause a cave in."

"Of course," Tony said.

With all the knights now watching Christopher and him, Tony turned around to address them in Christopher's stead. He knew what Christopher had been going to say. "Stay inside this large cavern. Nobody knows what's outside, and we can't afford to lose any of you when you get lost."

Many of the knights looked at him questioningly, for the obvious reason that what Tony had just said was common sense. "That's all," he said, and stepped down from the platform.

"Good handling," Christopher said. "If they knew I was biding time to get everyone away from the platform, there would be a line to see in a minute."

"Shall we get going?" Tony asked.

Christopher headed throughout the cavern on a futile search for the others, but found only Dave, who was sitting with his back to a wall eating some of the rations the knights had been issued before they left. Katie and Mike were nowhere to be found, and neither was Chapin.

Christopher was forced to come back to the cavern once because he and Tony had forgotten the cavern's strange illumination. He obtained a torch, and proceeded into the small passageway, which sloped further upward.

"What do you expect to find here?" Dave asked.

"I'm not sure," Christopher replied, to the point. "However, something I saw in the cavern was strange. I want to find out about it."

Holding the torches out in front of themselves, the group continued upward for an indefinite period of time. While it seemed to take just a short while, time was deceiving in these caves, as Christopher well knew.

The path eventually became so steep that it was impossible to climb without the help of small gaps that had appeared on the walls of the caverns at regularly spaced intervals. Christopher still made no comment, to Dave's amazement.

After what seemed to be days, the three were standing at an intersection where the current path they were on split into two smaller paths, one sloping upward, and the other downward. There was no adornment, and it could have seemed that these passageways were entirely natural.

"Which way should we proceed?" Christopher asked, while Tony walked back and forth, peering down one corridor first, then the other. Nothing was visible in the pitch darkness.

"There seems to be an equal chance of finding something important either way," Tony said.

"Let's throw it to chance, then," Mike said. He pulled an old die out of his pocket and held it up to the light. "One, two, or three, we go upward. Four, five, or six, we go down. Agreed?"

"Makes no difference to me," Tony said.

Mike threw the lone die up high into the air. It ricocheted off the roof of the

passageway, and clanked off the near side to Mike, then the far side, and then rolled along the floor. The worn, yellow cube bounced and rolled along the floor, making noises that sounded like they were in the middle of a battle. Then the die stopped, and there was silence.

"Six," Mike said.

"Downward we go," Christopher said. "It sure took a long time for that die to stop!"

Heading down the steep decline, Christopher undertook the task of taking in every detail of their surroundings. As difficult as it was with there being no source of light other than the torches, Christopher was able to make out strange carvings on the wall, similar to those he had observed in the large hall. Like the previous, these were also indecipherable.

The trek stretched onward. The meager supplies of water the three had brought along were almost halfway deleted, and the torches were nearing their halfway mark as well. The path continued a steep decline, first approaching the level that the large cavern was at, then the level of the surface adjacent to the mountain. Eventually, Christopher, Dave, and Tony had climbed so far downward that it was almost impossible that they were actually that far below the earth.

Christopher was leading the party, with Dave following close behind and Tony heading up the rear. Christopher was considering stopping and turning back, and the other two wouldn't have objected. Therefore, the last thing on their minds was the figure that stepped in front of them with a club and began swinging.

"Everyone down!" Christopher shouted, and no sooner had Tony and Dave ducked than a large metal club thudded into the cave wall above them, reverberating with a high-pitched tone that cut through the darkness.

Christopher drew his sword in a heartbeat, and Dave and Tony weren't far behind. The unseen figure slashed at Christopher. A battle cry signaled that another assailant was coming from behind. Tony was ready. The figure swung his club far over his head, and Tony ran him through with his blade. Rushing forward on top of the corpse of the first, another figure came at Tony from behind. Christopher had acquired a fresh wound on his shoulder, and red liquid dripped onto the ground in an ever-widening pool. Dave, caught between the two, could see nothing except what the torches, which now lay on the ground, illuminated.

From Dave's vantage point, determining exactly how many were attacking the three of them was impossible. Shouts and screams echoed throughout the passageway on both sides, and Christopher and Anthony moved closer and farther, advancing and retreating. After what seemed like hours, there was one final scream, and silence ensued.

"They're gone," Christopher said.

"Clear on this side," Anthony said. "Quickly, David, where is the lamp?" Dave handed Anthony the lamp, which revealed the fact that Anthony no longer had a shirt. It lay on the ground a few feet from his legs in a slashed heap. Underneath, however, it appeared that Anthony was unhurt except for minor scrapes and bruises he had acquired when his shirt was cut into pieces.

Christopher, on the other hand, was not so lucky. A large gash on his shoulder seemed very serious, made worse by not having enough light to see all of his wounds clearly. Reaching for the tattered remains of his shirt, Anthony cut small strips and tied them around

Christopher's arm to slow the bleeding.

"Who were they?" Dave asked after the initial excitement had died down.

"I have never seen the like," Christopher said, grunting as Anthony tied yet another piece of cloth on top of the bloodstained others underneath.

"Nor have I," Anthony stated after a while, and straightened from his medical duties. "Whatever they are, we must return to the cavern to warn the others. There may be more like our assailants down the path we chose to avoid."

As they turned to head back, Christopher caught a glimpse of light out of the corner of his eye. "Halt!" he cried, walking in the opposite direction from which they had come.

"Where are you going?" Anthony and Dave said almost in unison.

"You'll bleed to death with that arm if we aren't able to return to the camp soon," Anthony added.

"Look at this!" Christopher exclaimed, stopping abruptly.

Following, Dave was unable to make out what Christopher saw at first. Suddenly, as the three had experienced up above, a scene opened up before his eyes. The large open space in front of them was larger than the one from which they had come, but that was not the only aspect of the new cavern that caught their eyes. Houses made of shining materials of impossible design filled their view from wall to wall.

"Impossible!" Anthony exclaimed, pushing past Dave into the chamber. There were enough houses for several thousand people, and entranceways to other passageways and caves suggested a larger number was possible.

It was then that all three noticed at the same time the strange figures that walked between the buildings. Seeming invisible at first, the eye did not register the figures as living beings unless Dave concentrated on them. Even then, it was common to lose track of one without warning.

However, it was hard to miss the gathering that was forming directly ahead of Christopher, who stood slightly in front of Dave and Anthony. Though many of the shapes flickered in and out of view, two remained solid while they made their ways through the crowd.

"It's them! Arm yourselves!" Christopher exclaimed, and struggled to draw his sword out of its scabbard with his uninjured arm. Anthony, recognizing the figures as the same type as their attackers, did not draw his sword, but reached for a knife he had recovered from one of the corpses.

At the sight of the weapons, the others drew back, but the two in the middle continued forward until they stood little more than ten feet away from the three. There were several hundred figures gathered now, flickering in and out of the eye in impossible ways. The two stopped and spoke.

"It has been a long time since we have entertained guests in our home," one of them said.

"Yes, it has been a while," the other said.

"Twenty-four years has passed already - it is hard to believe," the first said.

"Yes, but our efforts have failed. The world will know of us now."

"There must be something that can be done."

“There is nothing that can be done.”

“We must tell them everything. It is the only way,” the other said. They both seemed oblivious to Christopher, Dave, and Anthony standing in their presence. Christopher cleared his throat loudly, but the others ignored him as if they had not heard.

“The secret is forbidden to tell under the penalty of death,” the first said loudly, and Dave became more confused. The argument continued for several minutes while the others looked on in wonder.

“Very well,” one said eventually. “We will tell them. This may bring down our way of life, but I will do so at your command.”

Turning toward Dave, Christopher, and Anthony, the other said in a forceful tone, oblivious to their standing in that place all along, “What we have allowed has not happened in twenty-four years, and what we are about to tell you goes against all customs in our land. However, it is past time that our secret be revealed.”

Christopher, confused, said, “I am honored to keep your secret.” The two frowned for some reason, if it could be called a frown.

“Welcome,” they said in unison. “The people of Terringrama welcome you.”