Shoemaker Village

Volume 32 - October 1999



Hurricane Floyd wreaks havoc on area residents! Special report included!

Animals still out of control! Read neighbors' views in The Discussion Forum!



PLUS!

The Knights of the Square Table reaches a critical point! Follow the adventurers as they explore the city in the sky!

More Steven Wright comedy in *Humor from the Village Square*!

Find out the latest UMHS happenings in *The Bear Facts*!

Expanded Short Stories section!

Table of Contents

October 1999

Editor's Pages 3-4
A Note From the Assistant Editor 4
Acknowledgments 5
Puzzle Page 6

Neighborhood News 7
Lost and Found 7-8
Going to the Dogz 8
The Bear Facts 8-9
Humor from the Village Square 9-13

Special Report: Hurricane Floyd Devastates Area 14-15

The Discussion Forum
Is it Fair to Allow Animals to Roam Unattended?-16
The Dangers of Unattended Pets 17-18

Short Stories
Another Essay On the School Computer System 19-20
Extracurricular or Co-Curricular? There Is a Difference 21-22
Family Reunion 23-24

The Knights of the Square Table Chapter 6 25-31

Editor's Pages

Information you should know

Thank you for reading the October issue of *Shoemaker Village*!

To begin, we would like to welcome back those subscribers who had elected to discontinue their subscriptions over the summer. We're sure you'll find that the *Village* is finally back in order after the long summer break. Though several of our writers were unavailable during the two summer months for various reasons, everyone has returned and we hope to get things back to normal soon.

In this issue, you may have noticed the included special report entitled "Hurricane Floyd Devastates Area". This report, the fourth such special report in *Village* history, details the wrath of Hurricane Floyd as it pounded the area on September 16. The report boasts a number of pictures that depict the true extent of the damage. Be sure to check out this special addition to this month's publication.

In other happenings, the *Shoemaker Village* webpages have vastly increased in popularity to the point where there have been 25 visitors in one day! Several people have asked to be added to the Internet mailing list from various parts of the area. Because of the increased hit count, we will be expanding the content of the web site after this month's publication. Since we have finally acquired the amount of disk space we require to post the *Villages* online, it will soon be possible to read all past issues of the *Village* by downloading them from our website. We hope you view all that the website has to offer.

You may have figured out by now that our large print publication plans have hit yet another snag and haven't fully taken shape as of yet. Currently, we have no definite date for the realization of large-print publishing, but rest assured that we are working our hardest to make this possible. If you have an Internet connection, however, you can download the latest issue of the *Village* and adjust the screen resolution to your desired size. Thank you for your understanding.

This month's issue includes another seven pages of *The Knights of the Square Table*. Since it was introduced over two years ago, in June 1997, it has grown to become a 230- page novel. We are sorry to report that it is now impossible, due to the high cost of printing materials, to supply our readers with printed copies of this story in the future. However, the story is still available for download over the Internet. In its compressed state, it can take only 10 seconds to download the entire novel. If you are interested, see the *Village* webpages to download the most current version.

We have included this month, in the *Humor from the Village Square* section, another column of jokes from the comedian Steven Wright, which has proven to be extremely popular with our readers in the past. For the past several months, we have been using jokes from one Internet site, Kevin Lowey's Humor Page. The site, located at http://duke.usask.ca/~lowey/humor/correct/ features several hundred jokes organized by category. Most of the jokes from the past few months of *Village* publication have been taken from this site. (We already used all the Steven Wright jokes. Sorry!) If you

want to read more jokes between the months of *Village* publication, be sure to check out this site. We will continue to publish jokes from this site until they are exhausted.

That's all for this month! Have a great month and we hope you'll still be with us in November!

A Note from the Assistant Editor

Matthew Care

I'd briefly like to apologize for my recent slacking off. You may have noticed that I haven't contributed as much in the past two or three months. I won't bother making excuses because I can't. There has really been no good reason for the neglect. I felt I should address this issue. The powers that be, or rather, the power that is (we won't mention names, but it rhymes with Steve) has asked me if I want to continue being Assistant Editor. I do. I enjoy being so. I can't promise more in the future. My best writing can't be forced. Some months I just don't get any inspiration. This month I did not write a forum. The subject simply did not interest me. I've never had a problem with animals in my neighborhood. Having addressed the vandalism in the neighborhood, I'm leaving the rest of the affairs to an internal discussion. Let the neighborhood work it out. I choose not to comment.

I did, however, write a personal experience for this month. You heard me. "Ooh, those are always entertaining," you think. I hope you enjoy it.

Thank you for supporting Shoemaker Village!

-Matthew Care, Assistant Editor

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TOTAL NUMBER OF CURRENT READERS: 74

Shoemaker Village is published by The Curry Courier Publishing Group
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E-Mail: *ShoeVill@aol.com*
Internet: **http://come.to/ShoemakerVillage**
The *Shoemaker Village* webpages contain information that is not published in the magazine.

The next issue of *Shoemaker Village* will be published on Friday, October 29, 1999.
All contributions for the next issue must be received by Tuesday, October 26, 1999.

Upcoming topics in **The Discussion Forum:**
November 1999: Will the Y2K bug cause a breakdown of the world as we know it, or will nothing happen?
*Suggestions for the December 1999 topic are welcome.
February 2000: Is the state of the environment better or worse than it was twenty years ago?

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Puzzle Page

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

Autumn
Bat
Black
Broom
Candle
Candy
Costume
Creepy
Crisp
Dark
Demon
Eerie
Fear
Frighten
Ghost
Goblin
Halloween
Haunted
House
Lantern
Leaves
Moon
Night
October
Orange
Party
Patch
Phantom
Pumpkin
Sack
Scary
Shadow
Smoke
Spider
Treat
Trick
Walk
Warlock
Witch
Woods

Neighborhood News

October 1999

LONG TERM FORECAST SHOWS MILD WINTER AHEAD

The recent wild weather has left many wondering what will be next. Now, the forecasts are out, and the results are less than promising.

Since the La Niña phenomenon is expected to continue throughout the fall and winter, residents can expect a milder than normal winter season, with little snow and lots of rain.

The forecast also calls for above normal precipitation for the next three months. Even Hurricane Floyd was not able to break the drought, so more rain is needed. Many experts say that slower, soaking rainfall is needed to finally put an end to the drought.

However, weather extremes are not uncommon. Though many are quick to blame the recent rash of disasters on a weather phenomenon, such happenings are common in the past and not unusual.

We'll keep you updated on the latest weather news as soon as it is available.

OTHER NEWS TIDBITS

-The Slouskys' Labor Day Picnic was enjoyed by all, despite intermittent rain from Hurricane Dennis. A tent was set up in the backyard for the festivities, though many decided to play volleyball and other sports in the rain.

-The Torellis, who reside next to the Hoffmans on Pioneer Road, have finally been able to locate a buyer for their house. As you may recall, the Torellis had placed their house up for sale in the Spring.

Lost and Found

CHICKENS INVADE ALTIMARIS' YARD

On Wednesday, September 1, as many in the neighborhood were preparing to leave for work, several chickens quietly made their way into the Altimaris' yard. What happened next was anything but quiet.

Reportedly, Pat Altimari either did not notice the chickens in her yard when Jake, her Golden Retriever, was let out, or they entered while Jake was outside. In any case, Pat was shocked when Jake returned to her porch door with a mouthful of feathers.

Pat then called the police. "This probably isn't an emergency to you," she began, "but it certainly is to the chickens in my yard!" The police arrived a few minutes later.

Pat's neighbor Jean Sokolowski noticed the commotion through her son's window at about 8:20 that morning and went outside to join Pat, who appeared distressed. One chicken that was present had a shortage of tail feathers, presumably having lost them in the dog attack. (Let's not forget that the dog is a golden retriever and would instinctively retrieve those chickens.)

The police went to work in the yard a few minutes later. One officer, wearing heavy duty gloves and carrying a steel cage, watched as the others decided what to do about the chickens. Finally, they elected to simply shoo the chickens out of the yard, though this presented problems. It took at least ten minutes to remove all the chickens from the Altimaris' yard.

As the officers returned to the squad car, Pat commented that she was embarrassed. A female officer replied, "That's OK; now we've had our laugh for the day."

Many neighbors who own pets are now concerned that a similar incident could occur again. Different animals have, on many occasions, been spotted roaming the neighborhood unattended. This presents a major problem of disease transmission to animals or even humans. It is still unknown as to whom the chickens belong.

"It's a serious problem," one resident said. "It has to be dealt with before somebody gets hurt."

ANIMAL CONTROVERSY CONTINUES

Several other animal sightings have been reported throughout the month of September, in addition to the ones listed above.



This chicken was spotted in the Sokolowskis' yard several times.

The chicken in the picture to the right was spotted several times during the month of September in the Sokolowskis' and Altimaris' yards. The chickens were also reported to have been spotted in other yards earlier in the month. When they were approached, the chickens ran quickly away, but would be no match for a dog or cat.



The roosters in this picture, however, did not shy away when approached.

To complicate matters, two roosters were spotted in this landscaping on Saturday, September 12, at around 7:00 p.m.. It is unknown as to the origin of the roosters or where they went to after dark.

Keep reading the *Village* for up-to-date news on the continuing animal problems.

Going to the Dogz

KLAUS INJURED IN ACCIDENT, RETURNS TO NEIGHBORHOOD

Sometime during early September, Klaus, formerly the Hoffmans' dog, was injured in a car accident.

Throughout the past months since the dog left the neighborhood, Klaus has been shifting back and forth between the Hoffman residence and Tim's, Mr. Hoffman's oldest son, home. Over the weekend when Klaus was injured, Klaus had been residing at Tim's home.

Reportedly, a six-foot tall fence surrounds Tim Hoffman's property in Bucks County. It is believed that the dog somehow was able to get past the fence and onto the road in front of the house, where he was involved in a collision with an oncoming car.

The method Klaus used to escape from the yard is unknown, however, because the height of the fence would have prevented his escape. The most likely scenario was that Klaus was able to crawl under the fence.

Klaus received several broken bones, but will make a full recovery. When he has recuperated, however, it has been decided that Klaus will stay at the Hoffmans' property from now on.

Tim works ten-hour days and can't be there to care for the dog, Mr. Hoffman said one morning.

As you may recall, Klaus left the neighborhood during the Spring because the dog was originally given to Tim as a present.

The Bear Facts

by Lori Blickley

School has begun. I've already been in that place for two weeks! Sports seasons are in session, clubs are up and running, and classes are already piling on the homework. It is going to be another busy year for Upper Moreland.

Students in 10th and 11th grade are now signing up for PSATs, while 11th and 12th grade students are preparing to take SATs. The school does provide an SAT prep. course; however, many kids take classes with private tutors or small groups through other places. Others just don't care. With PSATs, juniors have a chance to qualify for National Merit Scholarship if they receive high enough grades

on the test.

In sports action, the Bears' football team has been playing great. So far, they are undefeated. Their record is 3-0. The team has designed practice shirts and shorts which say "relentless" across them. So far, the team has lived up to this standard. Will they be able to continue their winning streak? On Friday, September 24, the bears will play at Pennridge. The following Friday, there is another away game at Methacton. Go out and support our football players at these away games.

Girls Field Hockey is also off to a great start. So far, they are undefeated. The girls have set high hopes of making it to the district games this year. After Districts comes States. It is a high goal, but everyone hopes to accomplish it. The field hockey girls have a saying, "BBWW." This stands for "Beat-em Beat-em, Wreck-em Wreck-em." They cheer this saying before every game in hopes to do just that.

Other sports teams at the high school are also doing great. Different individuals on the golf, cross country, and girls' tennis team are sticking out as doing a great job. Different individuals have already placed in many races or won their matches. "It is hard to compete alone and play one-on-one matches, especially when you are losing," says a junior tennis player who plays singles, "but, you learn to keep your head up at all times and the team will support you in your match."

The Marching Band is also doing well this fall. They won against Hatboro-Horsham last Saturday night. The home cavalcade of bands will be held Saturday, October 23rd. Upper Moreland does not compete at their home show, but they will perform. The marching band is kept very busy with practices every day after school, Friday night football games, and Saturday night competitions.

In October, the 3rd annual Mr. Upper Moreland pageant will be held. It is on Friday, October 16th, from 7:30 p.m - 10:00 p.m. Here, boys from 9th - 12th grade compete against one another. These boys are either asked to run by a student council member or sign up to run. Any male can enter. It is very, very funny watching them perform on stage for the student body and any others who come to watch. These boys dance, have a talent competition, and even a swimsuit competition. Then, they are asked questions to wrap up the fun. Nothing is serious. Everyone laughs and it is just a night of fun. Go and watch the pageant this year!

For the first time in a few years, the school district has set up early dismissal dates. The first date is Friday, October 8th. The first marking period ends Tuesday, October 19th.

Autumn has officially started. Everybody is adjusting to get back into the swing of things. Remember: set your clock back one hour on Halloween!

Humor from the Village Square

LAWYER GOES TO HEAVEN

Joe the lawyer died suddenly, at the age of 45. He got to the gates of Heaven, and the angel standing there said, "We've been waiting a long time for you."

"What do you mean," he replied. "I'm only 45, in the prime of my life. Why did I have to die now?"

"45? You're not 45, you're 82," replied the angel.

"Wait a minute. If you think I'm 82, then you have the wrong guy. I'm only 45. I can show you my birth certificate."

"Hold on. Let me go check," said the angel and disappeared inside. After a few minutes the angel returned. "Sorry, but by our records you are 82. I checked all the hours you have billed your clients, and you have to be 82."

ADVICE

A tough old cowboy once counseled his grandson that if he wanted to live a long life, the secret was to sprinkle a little gunpowder on his oatmeal every morning.

The grandson did this religiously and he lived to the age of 93. When he died, he left 14 children, 28 grandchildren, 35 great grandchildren and a fifteen-foot hole in the wall of the crematorium.

DELAYED FLIGHT

This is a true story published in the Chicago Tribune "Travel" section for Sunday, June 6, 1999 in a story entitled "Choppy Skies - A white-knuckle flight on Air Zimbabwe" by Gaby Plattner.

It seems that Plattner was traveling with a backpacking group through Africa as they found themselves waiting in Kariba airport for a flight to Hwange . . . .

Our flight was delayed, so we settled down to wait. And wait. Three hours later, we were finally told the plane was ready to board.

Air Zimbabwe bought many of its planes second-hand from other airlines, and the one we got into was no exception. Dirty and ancient, the mid-size jetliner was clearly one that no one else had wanted. Inside, we settled into the seats with 80 or 90 other passengers and waited. And waited some more.

Finally, the pilot's voice came over the loudspeaker. 'We're all ready to go, ladies and gentlemen. However, we've been waiting for the copilot, and he still hasn't arrived. Since we've already waited so long, we're just going to be flying without a copilot today.'

There was a nervous buzz through the cabin. He continued, 'If any of you feel uncomfortable with this, feel free to disembark now and Air Zimbabwe will put you on the next available flight to Hwange.' Here he paused. 'Unfortunately, we are not sure when that will be. But rest assured, I have flown this route hundreds of times, we have clear blue skies, and there are no foreseeable problems.'

No one in Plattner's group, doubtful as they might have been, wanted to wait any longer at Kariba for a plane that may or may not materialize, so they stayed onboard for the one-hour flight. Once the aircraft reached cruising altitude, the pilot came on the loudspeaker again. 'Ladies and gentlemen. I am going to use the bathroom. I have put the plane on auto-pilot and everything will be fine. I just don't want you to worry.' That said, he came out of the cockpit, and fastened the door open with a rubber band to a hook on the wall. Then he went to the bathroom.

Plattner continues: Suddenly, we hit a patch of turbulence. Nothing much. The cabin just shook a little for a moment. But the rubber band snapped off with a loud 'ping!' and went sailing down the aisle. The door promptly swung shut.

A moment later, the pilot came out of the bathroom. When he saw the closed door, he stopped cold. I watched him from the back and wondered what was wrong. The stewardess came running up, and together they both tried to open the door. But it wouldn't budge.

It slowly dawned on me that our pilot was locked out of the cockpit. Cockpit doors lock automatically from the inside to prevent terrorists from entering. Without a copilot, there was no one to open the door from the inside. By now, the rest of the passengers had become aware of the problem, and we watched the pilot, horrified. What would he do?

After a moment of contemplation, the pilot hurried to the back of the plane. He returned holding a big axe. Without ceremony, he proceeded to chop down the cockpit door. We were rooted to our seats as we watched him. Once he managed to chop a hole in the door, he reached inside, unlocked the door, and let himself back in. Then he came on the loudspeaker, his voice a little shakier this time than before. 'Ah, ladies and gentlemen, we just had a little problem there, but everything is fine now. We have plans to cover every eventuality, even pilots getting locked out of their cockpits. So relax and enjoy the rest of the flight!

TEMPERANCE SERMON

A preacher was completing a temperance sermon. With great expression he said, "If I had all the beer in the world, I'd take it and throw it into the river."

With even greater emphasis he said, "And if I had all the wine in the world, I'd take

it and throw it into the river."

And then finally, he said, "And if I had all the whiskey in the world, I'd take it and throw it into the river." He sat down.

The song leader then stood very cautiously and announced with a smile, "For our closing song, let us sing Hymn # 365:

"Shall We Gather at the River."

H_2 BEER

TOKYO (AP) - The recent craze for hydrogen beer is at the heart of a three-way lawsuit between unemployed stockbroker Toshira Otoma, the Tike-Take karaoke bar and the Asaka Beer Corporation. Mr. Otoma is suing the bar and the brewery for selling toxic substances and is claiming damages for grievous bodily harm leading to the loss of his job. The bar is countersuing for defamation and loss of customers.

The Asaka Beer corporation brews "Suiso" brand beer, where the carbon dioxide normally used to add fizz has been replaced by the more environmentally friendly hydrogen gas. A side effect of this has made the beer extremely popular at karaoke sing-along bars and discotheques.

Hydrogen, like helium, is a gas lighter than air. Because hydrogen molecules are lighter than air, sound waves are transmitted more rapidly; individuals whose lungs are filled with the nontoxic gas can speak with an uncharacteristically high voice. Exploiting this quirk of physics, chic urbanites can now sing soprano parts on karaoke sing-along machines after consuming a big gulp of Suiso beer.

The flammable nature of hydrogen has also become another selling point, even though Asaka has not acknowledged that this was a deliberate marketing ploy.

It has inspired a new fashion of blowing flames from one's mouth using a cigarette as an ignition source. Many new karaoke videos feature singers shooting blue flames in slow motion, while flame contests take place in pubs everywhere. "Mr. Otoma has no one to blame but himself. If he had not become drunk and disorderly, none of this would have happened. Our security guards undergo the most careful screening and training before they are allowed to deal with customers," said Mr. Takashi Nomura, Manager of the Tike-Take bar.

"Mr. Otoma drank fifteen bottles of hydrogen beer in order to maximize the size of the flames he could belch during the contest. He catapulted balls of fire across the room that Gojira would be proud of, but this was not enough to win him first prize since the judgement is made on the quality of the flames and that of the singing, and after fifteen bottles of lager, he was badly out of tune."

"He took exception to the result and hurled blue fireballs at the judge, singeing the front of Mrs. Mifune's hair, entirely removing her eyebrows and lashes, and ruining the clothes of two nearby customers. None of these people have returned to my bar. When our security staff approached, he turned his attention to them, making it almost impossible to approach him. Our head bouncer had no choice but to hurl himself at Mr. Otoma's knees, knocking his legs from under him."

"The laws of physics are not to be disobeyed, and the force that propelled Mr. Otoma's legs backwards also pivoted around his
center of gravity and moved his upper body forward with equal velocity. It was his own fault he had his mouth open for the next belch, his own fault he held a lighted cigarette in front of it and it is his own fault he swallowed that cigarette."

"The Tike-Take bar takes no responsibility for the subsequent internal combustion, rupture of his stomach lining, nor the third degree burns to his esophagus, larynx and sinuses as the exploding gases forced their way out of his body. His consequential muteness and loss of employment are his own fault."

Mr. Otoma was unavailable for comment.

BLOOPERS FROM CHURCH BULLETINS

Weight Watchers will meet at 7 p.m. at the First

Presbyterian Church. Please use large double door at the side entrance.

Pastor is on vacation. Massages can be given to church secretary.

8 new choir robes are currently needed, due to the addition of several new members and to the deterioration of some older ones.

The Senior Choir invites any member of the congregation who enjoy sinning to join the choir.

Scouts are saving aluminum cans, bottles, and other items to be recycled. Proceeds will be used to cripple children.

Don't let worry kill you, let the church help.

Thursday night, potluck supper. Prayer and medication to follow.

Remember in prayer the many who are sick of our church and community.

For those of you who have children and don't know it, we have a nursery downstairs.

This being Easter Sunday, we will ask Mrs. Lewis to come forward and lay an egg on the altar.

A bean supper will be held on Tuesday evening in the church hall. Music will follow.

At the evening service tonight, the topic will be "What is Hell?". Come early and listen to our choir practice.

MORE STEVEN WRIGHT WIT

Depression is merely anger without enthusiasm.

Eagles may soar, but weasels don't get sucked into jet engines.

Early bird gets the worm, but the second mouse gets the cheese.

I'm not cheap, but I am on special this week.

I almost had a psychic girlfriend but she left me before we met.

I drive way too fast to worry about cholesterol.

I intend to live forever - so far, so good.

I love defenseless animals, especially in a good gravy.

If Barbie is so popular, why do you have to buy her friends?

Quantum Mechanics: The dreams stuff is made of.

Support bacteria - they're the only culture some people have.

Televangelists: The Pro Wrestlers of religion.

The only substitute for good manners is fast reflexes.

When everything's coming your way, you're in the wrong lane.

Ambition is a poor excuse for not having enough sense to be lazy.

If I worked as much as others, I would do as little as they.

Beauty is in the eye of the beer holder.

24 hours in a day . . . 24 beers in a case . . . Coincidence?

If everything seems to be going well, you have obviously overlooked something.

Many people quit looking for work when they find a job.

When I'm not in my right mind, my left mind gets pretty crowded.

Everyone has a photographic memory. Some don't have film.

Boycott shampoo! Demand the REAL poo!

If you choke a Smurf, what color does it turn?

Who is General Failure and why is he reading my hard disk?

What happens if you get scared half to death twice?

Energizer Bunny arrested, charged with battery.

I poured Spot Remover on my dog. Now he's gone.

I used to have an open mind but my brains kept falling out.

I couldn't repair your brakes, so I made your horn louder.

Shin: a device for finding furniture in the dark.

How do you tell when you run out of invisible ink?

Join the Army, meet interesting people, kill them.

Laughing stock: cattle with a sense of humor.

Why do psychics have to ask you for your name?

For Sale: Parachute. Only used once, never opened, small stain.

OK, so what's the speed of dark?

Black holes are where God divided by zero.

All those who believe in psychokinesis raise my hand.

Hurricane Floyd Devastates Area

A *Shoemaker Village* Special Report

Hurricane Floyd, unpredictable until the last moment, pounded the area on Thursday, September 17, causing schools to close early and leaving massive clean-up for many residents.

Originally, the storm was scheduled to hit the Philadelphia area with its worst effects at night between September 17 and 18. The speed of the storm lessened the damage total significantly, though the damage that was experienced was unprecedented.

Heavy rain began the night of Wednesday, September 16, and continued throughout the morning, dumping an inch of rain on the area shortly before midnight. Conditions worsened throughout the day.



This storm drain was flooded up to the top.

At the peak of the storm, rain was falling at the rate of at least one inch per hour. Though winds had originally been expected to cause major damage, the rain was the largest problem.

In Willow Grove, over 8 inches of rain was recorded. At the Philadelphia International Airport, a new all-time 24-hour record rainfall total was recorded: 6.6 inches.



"The ditch", as many refer to it, had its highest volume in history.

Flooding began early in the day and worsened, nearing its peak just after the storm ended. As you can see in the pictures below, the result was nothing less than disastrous. The windspeed was so high while the pictures were being taken that many are blurry from the movement of the camera.

The retention basin at the lower part of the development where the sewer system deposits runoff was completely filled with a roaring lake that was even complete with whitecaps. The creek that runs behind the development flooded out of its banks and halfway across the flood plain.

Several neighbors living in the low part of the development were affected. The Haggerty family, who live at 2050 Butternut Drive, saw their entire backyard flooded, almost up to their back porch. Adam Hammerman, who resides at 2060 Butternut, commented, "Our basement's under four feet of water!"



In this picture, you can clearly see the results of the record rainfall.



The creek behind the neighborhood reached record levels.

Byberry Road, which floods even in moderate thunderstorms, was completely covered and closed for most of the day. Large barriers blockaded the Shoemaker-Pioneer intersection, but many cars didn't heed the warning and passed anyway. Immediately after the railroad bridge, the entire intersection was flooded under three to four feet of water. Entering into the Masons Mill Park area was impossible, though it appeared that at least two people attempted to, as there was one car stuck in the flood waters up to its roof. One had its

trunk open at an odd angle, suggesting that the passengers escaped in that direction.

Though the neighborhood itself never lost power during the storm, the Justa Farm shopping center, where the Huntingdon Valley Federal Savings bank is located, was in the dark for several hours. The Marketplace, the adjacent shopping center, never experienced a power outage. Flooding was also reported in Pileggi Park.

The Hurricane continued throughout the day, the storm reaching critical fury at around 4:00. At that time, rain at the rate of an inch an hour and winds in excess of 35 mph were reported.

However, by the next morning, there was almost no evidence that flooding had ever occurred. The Byberry Road intersection had drained completely, leaving no sign except that the leaves of formerly submerged plants were covered in dirt. Several cars were also left in the grass next to the road that had been underwater.

Compared to other developments, the Shoemaker Village neighborhood fared fairly well, as shown by the disaster coverage on the news. Montgomery County was later declared a Federal Disaster Area, opening the possibility for federal funding to help residents clean up.

Hurricane Floyd, however, did not put an end to the drought, though there is now a surplus of rainfall over the past six months. The reason is unclear, although some suggest that much of the rain ran off into streams and rivers, and not into the reservoirs. Therefore, drought restrictions still remain in effect, meaning that residents may not water their lawns or water landscaping with sprinklers, along with postponing all outdoor water activities.

To complicate matters, more significant rain was forecasted to fall on Tuesday, September 21. The already soaked ground could repel any rain that falls, creating more flooding problems.

“It could have been a lot worse,” neighbor Jean Sokolowski said. “I feel sorry for the people whose homes were flooded.”

Is It Fair to Allow Animals to Roam the Neighborhood Unattended?

Dogs are a man's best friend. Dogs bite, scratch, claw and go to the bathroom in unwanted places. Dogs that run around without any discipline would be more likely to do these things. I think dogs are like little kids. If you don't discipline them, they will run wild and are uncontrollable. Every neighborhood has animals running around loose. I don't live in the "Shoemaker Village" neighborhood, but my neighborhood has its fair share of animals roaming around.

When I was little, my parents owned a German Shepherd/Black Lab mix. The dog never hurt me, so I wasn't afraid of it. Several years later I was playing at a friend's house when a big black dog ran from a neighboring yard toward us. Instinctively, I screamed and covered my face. From that day I have been scared of strange dogs, not an unsubstantiated fear.

I don't think animals should be left unattended to roam around neighborhoods. It is both unsafe for the animal as well as people nearby. If your dog were out alone and ran into the street and got hit by a car, that would be tragic. Animals that roam free can be hurt and even killed. Also, animals can carry diseases that can be transmitted to humans, such as rabies. Strange animals can be overly aggressive and attack innocent people.

The Dangers of Unattended Pets

With the recent problems many neighborhoods have been experiencing in the animal control area, it's no wonder that many people are now afraid that animals may destroy property or even injure somebody.

It's surprising to know how many people own pets. If you went into any class or workplace and took a poll to find out what percentage of the people present owned animals, the results would probably show that at least 80% had answered yes. Some experts claim that owning a pet reduces stress and can lead to a longer, happier life. It has always been my belief that no animals were meant to be pets. Before humans began to colonize the planet and create high technology to take care of themselves, animals were left to fend for themselves. Did they die alone? No. Now, however, due to bad care from some owners, many animals die due to mistreatment.

I have had many bad experiences with animals that were out of control. For example, there was an accident a few years ago when a car hit a tree in front of the house. The entire road had been blocked off. I was only ten or eleven, and my mom dropped me off at the corner to walk home while she found a spot to park the car until the road was reopened. She ended up going all the way to the shopping center and didn't return for quite some time. As I was walking down the street, a dog rushed out at me. I scrambled behind a telephone pole as the dog snarled and growled at me. I had to move around the pole several times to stay away. The entire time, a police officer had been standing at the corner, directing traffic. I stood there for ten minutes while I tried to get his attention without startling the dog and making it attack. Finally, almost fifteen minutes later, the owner came out and retrieved the dog. The officer never even noticed that I had been standing there the entire time.

Twice last year, another neighborhood dog got out of its leash and rushed toward me. The first time, I was dusting off the lawnmower after cutting the grass and I was able to jump on top of my dad's nearby car. The second time, however, I was unable to get away as I was helping trim some

bushes. The dog crawled under the bushes, over the flowers, and through the landscaping. I had to jump up on top of the narrow window ledge above the bushes to stay away from the attack. The dog almost stepped on the live electrical and phone wires that my dad had been working on below. That's not all the attacks that have happened. Chickens have invaded my family's yard and pecked peppers off the plants. (My mom had to put up a fence for protection.) Big, black dogs have appeared numerous times, big enough to kill anyone who stood in their way. A goat even defecated on the porch as I was doing homework! The list goes on and on.

Something clearly needs to be done about these attacks before anyone is hurt. All that is required is a simple fence to prevent pets from going on a rampage. Some people I see even walk their dogs down the street *without a leash* and assume that their precious treasure will never hurt anyone. It has happened before, and it will happen again. It's just a matter of time.

Another Essay on the School Computer System

by Stephen Sokolowski

Though there are many parts of UMHS that need improvement, I feel that improvement in the school computer system is one of the top priorities. There are many aspects of the system that have to be changed in order to make the system more useful to everyone.

Looking back two years, I actually think that the old DOS-based computer system was, in many ways, more advantageous to everyone. When the new Windows 95 system was installed last year when the library was refurbished, there was very little software available on the computers. Though the number of programs has increased significantly this year, the security program detracts from the functionality of the software.

The program disallows access to many web sites which it considers having questionable content. I can understand that this is important so that some students don't view websites with inappropriate content. Unfortunately, the program also blocks access to several educational websites, along with restricting all file transfer access. This means that it is impossible to send work home to complete later, as the e-mail software isn't working yet.

There are also problems with the e-mail software, mainly why it exists in the first place. Everybody who's been on the Internet knows that there are too many free e-mail services to count. Many users already have accounts on these services and had used them in school until the Groupwise program was suddenly installed and all other e-mail access banned. While the program is a nice addition to the system, and will help those who need an e-mail, it is completely unnecessary to ban all outside e-mail access. Having access to an account that a student can reach from both the school network and his or her home computer only makes it less complicated. Why waste the enormous amount of money (usually thousands of dollars) for a site license for the GroupWise program, when anybody can get an e-mail account for free on the Internet? (The money could even have been used to reduce the prices of the cafeteria food!)

I've always disagreed with the school's decision to have Microsoft Word as the word processing software on the computers. Every teacher I've talked with has had negative comments on the Word software. The program is extremely unfriendly to figure out for those who have never used any word processor before, and it lacks the features that an experienced user needs. I had a word processing class with the WordPerfect software on the network, and I must say that it was extremely easy to use, much more so than Word. All the way back to when most of us were in Middle School, WordPerfect had been the program of choice, so why was it changed?

I believe that the computer administrators need to address these issues as soon as possible to ensure the best possible system for both the students and teachers. While there may be factors that I am unaware about, the network needs to be changed immediately.

Extracurricular or Co-Curricular? There is a Difference

I've written a few pieces about extracurricular activities for the *Village* in the past. I had no intention of writing another one until I saw the letters that were sent out during the first weeks of school. The letter in question listed the usual procedures for back-to-school, but there was an important change: the word "extracurricular" had been replaced by "co-curricular". This one word that was changed represents an entirely new philosophy about school.

For the previous two years, teachers and administrators had kept up the charade that so-called "extracurricular" activities were just that - not required in school. Now, however, they have finally acknowledged that these activities have become just as important as (if not more so than) academics in getting into colleges and universities. I believe that this is completely wrong.

A student should join an activity because he or she wants to, not because some college requires that the student participate in a certain number of co-curricular activities. One of the prime examples of this is the National Honor Society admission process. The requirements for this club are so high that anyone even hoping to apply would have to do so much work that they would have no free time to themselves. Take the school activities form, for example. To be considered, the Society requires 10 points in club activities. Each activity or sport is assigned a point value. The point values, however, are ridiculously unbalanced. While certain clubs such as the chess club are worth one point, being an officer for the club is worth 3! I, having attended meetings of several of these clubs, can say that the officers are usually just other people in the club with an extra hour of work to do the entire year. In addition, being a staff member of *The Bear Print*, the school newspaper, will net you one point, regardless of whether you contributed 1 or 10 articles. The National Honor Society itself is worth 2 points! If you're a senior and reapply, you could get two points for just being in the society last year! As if this weren't enough, you have to list leadership positions, community service, work experience, and write an essay on the topic of leadership. I would guess that very few people are actually admitted

each year.

While co-curricular activities are important for students to become involved in, they should never be required for any reason. Students should become involved because they want to, not because they have to.

Family Reunion

by Matthew Care

Doesn't the very title send shivers down your spine? Well, maybe that's because your family stinks! Kidding! I'm joking, of course. I recently survived one--more than survived it. I enjoyed it very much.

The Sunday before school began, the entire Schmitz family (that's my mom's side) got together at my uncle's house, although it was my oldest cousin who organized it. If you can recall that day, it rained . . . and rained. First surprise, we're out of propane. It's not the end of the world. So, we got some more, and we has a good old-fashioned barbeque in the garage. I ate really well. At the same time, I talked to all the relatives that I don't usually see. A few years ago it was just, "So, how's school?" Now I'm at the, "So, what are your plans for the future?" age. Ironically, a few years ago I knew what I wanted "to be when I grew up." Now, I really don't know.

I socialized with my younger cousins. They all love me because I give them attention. I played a fair share of video games that day. But then I thought, "This is no way to spend the day. I ought to go where the action is." I went and forced myself into the adult scene. Phew, talk about boring. My sister came down for part of the day, so I got some time with her. Then it was time for watermelon. You just can't have a picnic without watermelon. By then the rain had stopped, which is lucky because you can't eat watermelon inside. I stayed outside for the rest of the night. I shot some baskets and got some actual, valuable career advice from my relatives. I was also able to vent some of the usual frustrations of living at home. We're quick to dismiss family as ignorant, but since they've all had families, they've been there. I don't have to explain what it's like being a teenager. Keep in mind, this doesn't work with parents. Parents, you're not allowed to bond with, but the relatives you don't see very often are excellent to talk to. Then, just before the affair started to break up, we took a family picture. It is extremely special because it's one of the very rare pictures that has everyone in it. We got a neighbor to take the picture, leaving all four children and their spouses and, what is it . . . nine? . . .

nine grandchildren--my grandmother being the point of reference. The photo doesn't look like all that much, but it is of great significance to everyone in the family.

I had a great day. It's true what they say. You really do appreciate your family more as you get older. The Schmitzs may not be perfect. What family is? But I'm proud to have them in my blood.

The Knights of the Square Table

Chapter 6

"Waiting for us?" Christopher asked. "I didn't even know about this city a day ago."

"You can practice magic, can you not?" the man asked.

"Yes," Christopher replied.

"Oh, but allow me to introduce myself. I am Edward, 5th member of the governing council."

"Governing council?" Katie asked, coming out from the shadows. Edward turned toward her and noticed the knights standing in the alleyway.

"Are you coming to invade our city?" he asked angrily, reaching into his pocket.

"No!" Christopher said. "This is all a misunderstanding! Put your weapons on the ground!" The knights obeyed.

Edward cautiously removed his hand from his pocket. It was obvious that something bulky was located inside, but he did not bring it out with him.

"Then why did you bring these knights with you?" he asked in a more subtle mood now, gesturing toward the group standing along the buildings.

"It was an accident. We were only planning to teleport ourselves here, to find out why a city was floating in the sky. It does look strange from the ground."

Edward mumbled something, and smiled.

"Excuse me?" Christopher asked politely.

"Beginner's luck," he replied with an abrupt mood change. "Many who suddenly appear here also find that they have produced unwanted effects."

"May I ask how this city is kept in the sky?" Chapin asked, moving out of the alley, which was now flooded in bright sunshine at the noon hour.

"Magic, of course," Edward replied. "But to disclose the spell would be treason, as our enemies could easily attack that way."

"I understand," Christopher said politely.

"Well," Edward said. "Come to the capitol building tonight. We'll continue our discussion there. If you'll excuse me, I have some matters to attend to."

"Of course," Christopher said, and watched as Timothy ran off down the street. The knights, who had been standing behind them, watching the proceedings, now seemed to be less tense than before.

"What was that about?" Mike asked Christopher after the excitement had died down.

"They're obviously trying to hide something," he replied. "But what? Why would they build a city in the sky?"

"For defense, of course," Katie said matter-of-factly.

"I don't think so," Christopher replied. "If they had built the city this high up and used magic to defend themselves, then why can anyone who knows the spell get up here? Yavin could teleport an army of trolls here to destroy and loot everything."

"Perhaps the city was built before Yavin came to power," Dave suggested.

"Possible," Chapin said, "but not likely. This all seems too... new!" Looking around, they discovered that she was right. There wasn't a speck of dirt on the side of the buildings, which were several stories tall and made of materials that Christopher didn't even know existed a few days before.

"If not for defense," Christopher said carefully, "then why build this city?" Nobody answered, as they didn't have a clue as to why this would be.

"Well, let's return the knights to the surface," Chapin suggested in a low voice.

"I agree," Christopher said. Katie?"

Katie came toward them, knowing why she had been called. "Help us send the knights back,"

he said, and then turned to the knights. “Timothy will...”

“Where is Timothy?” Dave asked.

“He’s not around here..,” Christopher replied after looking behind them. The knights stood rigid as stones, as if they were afraid to move.

“Sir, he wasn’t in the group before we came up here, I remember now,” one of the knights said.

“That’s bad news,” Christopher said gravely. “Why would he desert us?”

“He might simply have been separated from the group,” Katie said.

“That’s unlikely,” Christopher said. “We would have noticed that by now. There’s some magic at work. Why hasn’t anybody seen Timothy since this morning?”

The knights looked around, but nobody answered. Likewise, the five didn’t answer either, instead directing their stares at the knights.

“Some sort of enchantment has made us forget about Timothy. But why, and who would cast such a spell?” Mike asked.

“Was it possible that Timothy could have been a spy?” Dave looked around. The wind, even with the force field, was picking up as if a storm were coming. Thick clouds rolled in over the horizon below.

“If he were a spy,” Katie deducted, “then why would whoever he’s spying for decide to whisk him away just before we came up here?”

“To avoid suspicion, perhaps,” Christopher suggested. “Or because he already knew what he needed to know.”

“What could he need to know? We’re a rogue band of knights without a hometown. Yavin could wipe us out any time he wants. Timothy was looking for something more, I’m sure of it,” Chapin said. “But what could that be?”

“Everyone check your possessions,” Christopher yelled to the knights. The knights opened their bags and at once discovered a problem - their entire food supply had suddenly turned putrid for no apparent reason.

“These rations were just fine yesterday,” one knight screamed from the back, pulling some rotten fruit out of a pouch and discarding it.

“The cause might not be a spy, but this town itself,” Katie pointed out, eyeing the buildings around her suspiciously. “Has anyone noticed even a single source of food around here?”

There wasn’t a tree in sight. There weren’t even flowers on the windowsills. A single source of vegetation was not visible anywhere throughout the entire city!

“The residents have to go somewhere for food,” Dave said.

“Of course,” Christopher said. “Do they go down to the surface? I didn’t see anything down there.”

“Some magic is at work, and one of the side effects may be to spoil the food that is up here,” Mike suggested.

“Then the entire town would have to go down to the surface for nourishment,” Christopher said. “But that would be a vulnerability that could be easily exploited. Imagine - an army of trolls waiting down below for everyone to come to eat. And what about during this time of year, when there isn’t any food to be found?”

“OK,” Dave remarked. “Let’s send the knights back to the surface and we’ll continue.”

“Good idea,” Christopher said, “but look - the stones are completely drained again!”

“Well,” Chapin said, looking up toward the sun, which was now in its midafternoon phase. “I think we had better start heading toward the Capitol building, wherever that is.”

“Look up,” Mike suggested in a bland voice. “It’s not hard to find.” A large steeple rose above the rest of the city to a height which Christopher had previously thought impossible.

“Well, let’s get there then,” he replied gruffly and started off. The rest of the knights followed, suppressing a chuckle.

Two hours later, despite numerous delays, they were finally able to reach the building. It stood enormously tall in front of them. The building was a sparkling green color that was elevated above the rest of the city on its foundation. The front steps were several stories high by themselves.

They went up the stairs of the huge edifice just as the sun was beginning to blink out over the horizon. Inside, they could hear nothing. The doors to the place were so huge that it was impossible for a single man to open them. Chapin, Christopher, and Katie held the door while the others entered. The knights were instructed to stay outside.

Looking back down the stairs, the large battalion of knights had attracted quite a crowd. As they entered the building and the door slammed shut, they were in a large room. A single ray of light shone through a decorative fixture in the center of the room. The rest of the hall was lit by candles stationed around the edges of the chamber.

There was not a soul in sight. Three doors led off into separate adjoining rooms at the far end; otherwise, there was no exit in sight except the way they had come in.

Approaching the three doors, Christopher immediately shouted "Hello?", but there was no response. The words echoed throughout the hall and continued for longer than seemed natural. Behind the left door, a corridor slanted off, upward, around the edges of the building. The center door was locked. The right door led into a similar corridor, this one leading downward.

"What do we do now that nobody's here?" Katie asked.

"We can't just leave," Mike said. "There's something up, and we need to find out what it is."

"Why would they abandon the entire building like this?" Chapin asked nobody in particular, talking half to herself.

"That's what we need to figure out," Dave said.

"Let's split up," Christopher suggested. "I'll go with Dave up the left corridor, while Katie and Chapin go down the right."

"What should I do?" Mike asked.

"Go outside and keep order with the trolls. If we don't return in"--Christopher looked up thoughtfully–"two hours, get the knights and yourself out of here and continue the quest."

"How will I do that without the stones?" he asked in reply.

"The same way we'd do it, because the stones are drained anyway," Katie pointed out.

"You'll figure something out if it's necessary," Christopher said. "Let's go before something bad happens."

Nodding to each other, the five split up into their appointed paths. Mike was halfway to the door when he turned around to ask how he was going to open the door, but the others had departed into the depths of the building.

He headed for the door as quickly as possible, remembering that the door was too heavy to open. He banged as hard as he could, but it didn't budge. Suddenly, there was a loud noise from outside. The knights, watching the situation, had heard his plea and come to his aid.

The two knights that held the door open had a worried expression on their faces. Mike ventured outside, being careful to clear the opening as the massive door swung shut.

"What's the problem?" Mike asked the knights but immediately realized what was wrong before they answered. The entire area outside was deserted. Except for the nervous chattering of the knights, there wasn't a sound to be heard.

"What happened?" Mike asked one of the knights.

"I don't know," he said truthfully. "I was standing here looking around. I looked toward the capitol building, and when I turned back, everyone was gone!"

"Same here," a knight behind him added.

"Everyone felt the urge to look away at the same time," the knight said. "This is certainly some kind of trickery."

Looking upward, Mike saw that dark clouds now partially obscured the night sky, so that only a few stars were visible here and there. The clouds themselves did not look unnatural, but they looked

unusual within the current situation, as if they somehow did not fit in.

"I'm going to take a look around," Mike said, not knowing what better to do. He set off in a random direction, down an alleyway between tall buildings which were equally barren. The lights, lit by an unknown source, that were in the streets were still visible, as if nothing had happened. Candles continued to burn in the windows of the houses.

Mike continued down several more streets. In the dark, it was becoming hard to see the steeple of the capitol building, so he decided that he had seen enough. It was easy enough to navigate back by looking up.

As Mike was making his way back, there was suddenly a bright, blue flash. The blue light lit up the city, its origin being a dome that now covered the city. It looked similar to the force field that had held Riverbend while reinforcements had arrived. As suddenly as it appeared, however, it vanished, leaving not a trace that it had existed.

Five minutes later, Mike was back with the congregation of the knights. They, too, had seen the flash, and hit Mike with a thousand questions to which he had no answers. He guessed that the others somehow understood, though.

Christopher and Dave started down the corridor. It sloped gently upward behind a wall until it finally opened up ten feet above the capitol floor. A flimsy railing guarded them from falling on their left, while the path hugged the wall, winding upward. They could see five tiers of the path above them. It was a long, hard climb to the top door, and it took at least fifteen minutes to walk up the constantly sloping path to finally reach the top.

The railing stopped halfway, leaving the two to fend for themselves on their perilous descent.

Dave tried the door first, but it was locked. "All this way to be stopped by a locked door?" he complained in disgust.

"This door isn't locked by ordinary means," Christopher said, inspecting the lock, which had no keyhole and had a strange aura to it that was hard to pinpoint.

"It might be impossible to get it open then," Dave said. "If it was locked by conventional methods, we could simply burst it down."

"Wait," Christopher said, holding up his hand. "Let me try something." He took the water stone out of his pocket and held it up to the door. The door rumbled. Suddenly, the stone flew backward out of Christopher's hand. He gasped as he stumbled toward open air. Dave reached out his hand and was able to save him just as he was about to fall to his death below. Below them, the stone continued to fall and hit the ground with a ping. A blinding, blue flash erupted that seemed to penetrate the walls of the room. The door in front of Christopher and Dave blast off its hinges and flew back into the darkness of the interior. The blue light returned to darkness, and all was quiet.

"Are you okay?" Christopher asked Dave. The lights near the ground of the building had gone out after the flash, and, as a result, the large hall was in complete darkness.

"Yes," Dave said. Neither moved, lest they make a mistake in the darkness. The path had many twists and turns, so it would be impossible to retreat in the pitch dark. Continuing on was their only choice.

Christopher felt for the doorway, which was to his right. To his left, the path ended in oblivion. The door frame appeared sturdy, so he grabbed onto the sides of the frame to steady himself while he inched closer. At one point, he made a mistake that could have proven fatal had he not been guarding against it: his foot slipped over the edge. He said for Dave to follow, who, in turn, carefully moved into the doorway. As soon as Christopher reached across the doorway, however, lights appeared inside, apparently activated by his entrance. Though it was still impossible to see throughout the hall, Dave and Christopher were able to enter the room, which was now brightly lit.

The entire room was filled with controls of all kinds, including monitors that looked highly advanced for the time and knobs and switches that must have performed a thousand different functions.

"What is this?" Christopher asked Dave.

"It must be some kind of magic," Dave replied. "But why would there be a huge control room like this? Who would use it? What would it be for?"

"This may control the entire city," Christopher said thoughtfully. "Let's take a look around."

Christopher went over to the far corner of the room, where several television screens showed pictures of the square outside the capitol building. Through one of them, he was able to discern Mike, milling around the knights, appearing nervous and uneasy, despite their hardening through numerous battles.

"Look at this," Dave said. Christopher came across the room and stood behind him. There was a large switch in front of him.

"Look," he said. "It reads 'Master On'. I wonder what this could be for?"

"I don't know if we should mess around with it," Christopher said.

"For all we know, this could restore the entire world back to normal," Dave said. "It's at least worth trying."

Christopher stepped back and thought for a moment. If they pressed the switch, it could put the rest of the knights and the people of the city in mortal danger. If they didn't, however, a huge opportunity could be lost.

"OK, step back and let's throw the switch," Christopher said in a loud voice. Dave stepped away from the console and back to the other side of the room. Christopher, with little ceremony, pushed the switch upward and jumped backward.

At first, nothing happened. Soon after, a low-pitched noise began inside the huge cabinet under the switch, like a motor coming to life. Dave hadn't heard that sound for what seemed like ages. Outside in the hall, there was a flicker of light, and the two rushed over to the doorway. The candles that had lit the place before had now been relighted, and the sourceless lights that Christopher had noticed when he entered the hall were now beginning to become visible again. The noise inside the control room continued to rise in pitch as the lights increased in intensity.

Within thirty seconds, the entire room was now relit. The humming noise inside the control room reached a peak and continued to sound as if machinery were grinding away inside. Christopher ventured back inside the room and Dave followed.

The room was now making as much noise as a full-fledged battle against an army of trolls. Other switches were now lit by an inner source. The next panel had two more large switches on it. One was roughly labeled "flight controls" and the other "simulation".

"What do we do now?" Dave asked Christopher unsurely.

"What do you think this would do?" Christopher asked Dave, gesturing toward the switch that read "simulation".

"There's only one way to find out," Dave replied. Without further approval, he stepped toward the switch and threw it back. Again, nothing appeared to happen at first, but the same humming sound now began to emit from the innards of the machine, and another control panel to its right lit up, the word "Ready" flashing across the screen.

"ENTER COMMAND," a gruff voice said from somewhere in the room.

"Who is it?" Christopher yelled, looking around him. There was no response.

"What should we do?" Dave asked fearfully.

"Let's go down and find the other three."

"INPUT ACCEPTED," the voice interrupted him. "ENTER LOCATION."

"What did I just do?" Christopher asked.

"Let's go find the others," Dave said hurriedly, rushing toward the door. "They're probably in the basement."

"ACCEPTED," said the mechanical voice, suddenly. Everything was quiet.

"Out of here!" Christopher yelled. He ran out the door and began descending the ramps. He stopped suddenly and was horrified by what he saw in front of him.

Katie and Chapin were descending the passage by the time that Mike was leaving the compound. As a result, they too did not hear Mike's stopping. They did, however, hear the resulting slam of the door, and Christopher's and Dave's footsteps ascending to the heights of the building.

In front of them was a long corridor, which stretched as far ahead as could be seen. Down both sides, lights similar to the sourceless ones in the central chamber were lit. The corridor sloped downward at a great angle, making it difficult to walk steadily without being forced to run. It was slow going, but easy because of the brightness of the surroundings.

They finally reached the bottom five minutes later. Ahead of them stood another corridor, this one sloping downward in a spiraling circle, in a similar fashion to the one above.

The sides of the paths did not have rails, making the descent perilous, to say the least. The path was sloped so steeply that it was hard to stay close to the wall. It took what seemed like hours to finally complete their great descent.

At the bottom was a single room with a door leading into another one. It was slightly ajar, and voices were audible through the crack. Chapin motioned for Katie to be quiet and stole their way across the doorway without being noticed. They then settled down to listen to what was going on inside.

"Have our guests arrived yet?" a man said. His voice was tough and lacked any kind of emotion whatsoever. There was a rumble as he slid what sounded like a chair aside so he could stand up.

"No, sir," another replied. "If they had, Vahmah would have reported the disturbance to us already."

"What is taking them so long?" the first voice asked to nobody in particular. There was some noise as if he had stomped his foot down. Katie shifted position to get a better look at the room from the crack in the door.

The room was square and rather small, but the entire floor was glass, with nothing additional to stop them from falling to the ground far below if it should break. The other three walls were also constructed purely of glass, making it possible to perceive a complete view of the surface from inside.

"I have complete faith in Vahmah," said the second voice, louder than before.

"He could easily have been captured by the five of them if they were able to avert the security outside the building," the first said.

"If I may interrupt," a completely different voice said. "Let's get back to business. There . . . " he was cut off when all the lights in the entire viewing area suddenly were extinguished. From where Chapin and Katie were positioned, the only source of light was from the windows, which gave a slight amount of light because it was night.

"What the-" the first voice said in an agitated tone.

"I see our guests have arrived," the second said calmly.

"Where is your Vahmah?" the third asked angrily.

"He was upstairs, watching to see when they arrived," came the reply.

"Well, they have either arrived now, or there's something really weird going on upstairs," the first voice said at a deafening volume.

"Don't just stand there!" the third voice exclaimed. "You two - get up there and see what's going on!"

"Yes, sir!" the second voice said. Katie and Chapin flattened themselves against the wall. Two large men came out of the room. Though they had muscular builds, they were not trolls; however, they would be quite a struggle for Christopher to take on. They did not see Katie and Chapin in the pitch darkness.

"Let's get upstairs!" Katie whispered to Chapin while this racket was going on.

"The whole place must be alerted now," Chapin replied just as softly. "We can't run up corridors that are one person wide! Our only choice is to stay here." Having committed themselves, they slouched back against the wall.

“I knew that something like this was going to happen,” the first voice continued to fume.

“If we hadn’t been assigned with those imbeciles,” the third voice said, “none of this would have ever happened!”

Without any prior warning, the lights suddenly returned. Inside the room, the two men stood up from their chairs.

“See,” the third voice said. “Everything’s under control.”

“Everything’s not under control!” the first voice continued to scream. “The entire army of knights can be loose in here! We’ll be discovered and murdered!”

“They can’t get in,” the third voice continued in a calm matter. “I made sure to lock the front entrances before coming down here. Nobody’s going in or out.”

“Good. Let’s set our backup plan into motion.” There was a click, and a humming noise began. The lights flickered for a moment, and there were several noises inside.

“Reporting!” came the monotonous voice of what sounded like a few trolls.

“I want those five eliminated!” the first voice roared. “I don’t care what it takes, but they will not leave here alive!”