Shoemaker Village

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Volume 42 - March 2001
Serving the community for over 4 years

are there *unseen* people among us?

controversy over discussion forum article *the unseen* erupts with surprising developments

wild weather

in our longest special report ever, see the disorder caused by the recent snowstorm with 13 vivid images





on the inside

new writer contributes novella to be published in installments in coming months
sarah duncan writes gripping short story *danger valley*
amanda dilks compiles hilarious jokes

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editor's pages

information you should know

Welcome to the November 2001 issue of *Shoemaker Village!*

Obviously, this issue has been the first in a long while to grace mailboxes in Upper Moreland Township.

Upper Moreland High School, simply put, was the center of the *Village* over the past few years. Discussion forum articles have criticized school functions, teachers have contributed good and bad articles, and comedic experiences have even been recounted within these pages. Despite all that has happened in the past, and with all of the primary members of the *Village* staff having graduated in June 2001, the staff of the *Village* decided that it would only be fitting to review different aspects of the school in what may be the final issue of the magazine.

Our special *UMHS Review* feature begins on page | and continues

puzzle page

Mazed™ "Woolly Mammoths" by Isaac Thayer



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Directions: navigate through the mammoths' bodies from the start to finish without crossing any lines.

acknowledgments

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The publication date of the next issue of *Shoemaker Village* will be determined at a later date.

Upcoming topics in **The Discussion Forum:**

Next issue: [to be determined]

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CHRISTMAS EVE LUMINARIA TO RETURN TO NEIGHBORHOOD

Long time neighborhood residents may recall the yearly Christmas Eve Luminaria. Organized by the Altimari family, the event lined neighborhood streets with thousands of candles. In combination with the Schrope Family's enormous Christmas display, the neighborhood showcased its holiday spirit.

Unfortunately, in the early 1990s, the long-standing tradition abruptly fell into disarray when neighbor Robert Altimari was diagnosed with cancer. Shortly after, his wife, Pat, was also striken, forcing them to abandon the Luminaria because of health concerns. Until recently, the streets remained dark on Christmas Eve.

In mid-October, neighbor Jean Sokolowski announced that she would revive the Shoemaker Village Christmas Eve Luminaria. "It was great when the Luminaria spread some holiday cheer. I hope to continue the tradition."

Jean reported that she will attempt to include neighbors with homes located on Pioneer and Shoemaker Roads in the festivities, in addition to those located on Butternut Drive or Acorn Place. Neighbors living in the above area should expect to receive more information as Thanksgiving approaches, Jean stated. She points out that participation by as many families as possible is crucial, because neighborhood-wide participation would allow an uninterrupted line of candles to snake around the developments.

Look for more information on this upcoming event to arrive shortly!

THIEVERY MARS NEIGHBORHOOD'S RESPONSE TO TERRORISM

Like many other neighborhoods across the nation, the Shoemaker Village development mourned the victims of the terrorist attacks in September.

During the days immediately following the attacks, neighbors lined their curbs with candles to express sympathy for those affected. Following in the footsteps of people around the world, Henry Sokolowski lit a small candle and placed it at the end of his brick walkway on Friday, September 14.

After dusk fell, and he returned to check to confirm that the candle hadn't been extinguished by the wind, Henry was met with darkness. The candle had apparently vanished into thin air!

When Henry returned to the door five minutes later, he discovered that the candle had mysteriously returned to its place, while a shadowy figure walked away in silence, having returned the candle he or she had stolen shortly before.

Unfortunatately, because of the darkness, Henry was unable to determine the perpetrator of the crime. "I asked him if he was sick," said Henry, "stealing a candle placed to mourn the death of five thousand people."

Though the world has been altered a great deal in the last few months, it appears that some parts of life just never change.

CHICKENS AND OTHER ANIMALS STILL POSE HEALTH RISK TO NEIGHBORHOOD

Roaming chickens, which have continually posed a problem for neighborhood residents over the past five years, have returned with a vengeance.

The chickens were spotted in several backyards along the south side of Butternut Drive, roaming freely among people and housepets on more than one occasion. In addition, Max, the Rorviks' dog, defecated in a yard on the same side of the street and continued to pose a threat to residents until corralled.

As you may recall, loose chickens have prompted neighbors to make changes in the past, such as when Jean Sokolowski erected a fence around her garden to prevent the chickens from consuming her pepper plants.

OTHER NEWS TIDBITS

-Halloween, which has been declining in popularity in the neighborhood in recent times, is expected to have even lower turnout in trick-or-treating this year in the wake of recent security concerns. In 2000, several houses reported that as few as five trick-or-treaters visited their homes for candy. Local stores had declined to sell tombstones to decorate houses, citing a lack of "good taste" in the wake of the attacks.

upper moreland school district

the review

introduction

stephen sokolowski

High school is the quite possibly most important experience in a person's life. In high school, students decide upon their future careers. They develop interests that they will follow for the rest of their lives. They explore new areas of life that were previously unknown. Gen X'ers, Baby Boomers, and even those members of the Greatest Generation fortunate enough to be given the chance look back at high school as one of the best times of their lives. Myself, reminescence about high school brings back a variety of memories. Some fond, and some not so fond, high school has shaped my outlook on life a great deal.

In light of this influence, some students who attended Upper Moreland High School have come together one last time to publish a compilation of the best and the worst about Upper Moreland. Some parts of this article praise the school and its administration, while others paint a less than flattering portrait of these organizations. However, the *Village* staff and its contributors felt that the best way to bring about improvement was to publish the opinions of those who contributed in their entirety.

In early October, a poll was distributed to students from a variety of academic and personal backgrounds in order to obtain as accurate a representation of students' opinions as possible. The poll was divided into two sections: a voting section and a personal opinion section. In the voting section, participants were asked to choose three answers for each category and weight them according to their importance. The first place choice in each reply was awarded two points, the second place reply one and a half, and the third one. The votes were then tallied and yielded the statistics shown on the following pages. In addition, the editors of the *Village* have included select comments from those who included them in their responses. The "personal opinion" section included questions that varied among the participants at random so as to prompt as complete an answer on each of the given responses as possible. Every received response has been published in this section. Please note that all responses included in this issue, other than those explicitly specified, are the opinions of their respective authors.

A common theme in the following pages involves the non-academic parts of high school. After my graduation, I have come to believe that perhaps the most valuable things I learned by attending Upper Moreland aren't necessarily academic. Of course, analyzing Shakespeare, differentiating equations, and writing reactions to political events are all valuable lessons, but the lessons on life that one learns are all the more important. While solving for X in terms of Q might not be of everyday use, learning to communicate, interacting with people, and discovering goals in life are experiences that are infinitely more valuable.

Thanks to the teachers, administrators, support personnel, and everyone else at UMHS who have shaped these experiences over the past four years. They have done an excellent job of preparing students for a rewarding and fulfilling life.

the top nine

stephen sokolowski

As editor of the *Village,* I only thought it fitting that I compile these pieces of advice for future school students. While I'd like to say that you'll take my tips to heart and not repeat the same mistake, I know better because I didn't follow others' advice either. Hey, at least it makes for interesting reading.

9 life isn't fair

Unless you've been living in a cave, you've probably heard the axiom that life isn't fair. The saying is uttered so much that everyone begins to forget exactly what it means, and nobody stops to think . Is life not fair when you're passed up for that promotion for which you've worked for months? Is life not fair when your neighbor can afford to buy a more expensive car than you can? Or, is life not fair when a close friend or relative is stricken by a serious illness but you are left unscathed?

In all of the above circumstances, life certainly isn't fair, and this statement applies to high school as well. Life isn't fair when you're rejected from the National Honor Society because you participated in more out-of-school activities than in-school. Life isn't fair when someone sitting next to you can solve an equation in two seconds, while you ponder over it for two hours. Life isn't fair when athletes receive all the recognition while other clubs and activities are forgotten.

Not only is life not fair, but no matter what you do, you can't make life fair. Most of the important decisions are completely out of your control and you have no power whatsoever to change them. There are those who are gifted in every respect, and there are certain people who fail utterly even though they've tried their hardest. And finally, even though several teachers told me that they disagreed with many of the school's policies, their efforts to change them were in vain.

So therefore, in such an unequal world, how can one strive to succeed against all the odds? Some people would say to "try hard," but sometimes trying hard is not enough in such an unforgiving environment. As long as you've tried your hardest, however, what does it matter to everyone else? Sure, you could worry about what happened, but as an english professor once told her class, regret is an empty emotion. If things don't go your way, there's only one action you can take:

Accept defeat, and try again.

take a wide variety of courses 8

Whereas many of the top ten on this list were prompted by my regrets or by experiences that I didn't have, one of the positive decisions I made during my high school career was to take a variety of courses.

I would recommend that everyone take a wide range of courses, regardless of intended college major. For example, my parents and I were browsing through the course catalog in eighth grade and we stumbled upon a woodworking course. Even though I had no intention of becoming a carpenter when I graduated, I had enjoyed "industrial arts," as it was then called at the Upper Moreland Middle School. While I was nervous on the first day of class as to whether I would benefit from the course, by January I had produced several pieces, all of which are still in use in our and other family members' homes four years later.

I was also hesitant about putting AP Government on my roster at the end of my junior year. Again, I didn't know whether I would benefit from taking a government class when I could have taken any number of easier courses. While I had some luck in that I took the course during what could have quite possibly been the most

eventful presidential election in history, I enjoyed the class thoroughly and learned much general knowledge about political systems that will help me in the future as an American citizen and voter.

AP courses are also a great benefit. Through these courses and the related tests, I was able to accrue 18 credits before attending college and will be able to graduate in seven semesters. With the exception of one course (which didn't even count for college credit at Penn State), I would recommend highly all of the AP courses that I took. Be cautious though - some of these courses do require quite a bit of work, and those who don't think they can keep up would probably be best with a lighter schedule.

In conclusion, if you see a course you might enjoy or think might be of benefit in the future, take a chance and schedule it. AP courses are also a great chance to earn college credit in high school, so take advantage of these opportunities!

7 keep your grades up early

The Upper Moreland School District has a very good "transitional" program for helping students succeed in their freshman year of high school after attending the middle school for three years. Unfortunately, when I arrived at the high school, I didn't have any idea of how difficult the workload would be.

For reasons that escape me now, I somewhat slacked off during 9th grade, earning a B average. While some of the courses I took were very difficult, I should have been able to earn better grades if I had tried harder. After I was ranked 59th in the class (in about the 22nd percentile), I decided to pull everything together and work harder, eventually graduating in 10th place. While a final GPA of 99.59 wasn't bad by many standards, it wasn't good enough to earn scholarships at Penn State or (even though I had decided against it before I received their final decision) to attend the University of Pennsylvania.

Most likely, I was misled into believing that 9th grade wasn't important because of what some seniors said at an orientation day the year before I began high school. On the contrary, a poor performance in your freshman year will haunt you for the next three (or possibly even seven) years. Therefore, treat each course as if it could determine the rest of your life.

Depending on your goals, it could.

find out what you're getting into 6

One of the worst mistakes I made in the past four years was not investigating the courses I was taking. Having no information on what a course was actually like or how it would benefit me in the future, I was blindly thrown into situations for which I could have been better prepared.

Three courses in particular come to mind when I look back at experiences I may have been better off without. While I won't go into details, I will say that I gained little or no lasting benefit from these courses and could have better spent my time doing something else. However, looking at the past, I now realize that courses in which teachers attempt to "prepare students for college" are most likely not worth taking.

Throughout high school, I continuously heard certain teachers state their goals to "prepare students for college." As far back as 9th grade, I took a class where the teacher asked students in the class to define hundreds of terms in a single weekend. While I spent hours completing the assignments and "preparing myself for college," I remember very few of the terms now and have realized that college is actually *easier* than those teachers would have students believe. College teachers don't require students to define hundreds of terms for homework credit.

I encountered the last and worst class of my high school career in my senior year. At times, the teacher of this course assigned over 10-15 hours of homework in a single weekend, and I received the lowest grades of my twelve years of school. In short, what I didn't know was that most colleges, including Penn State, didn't accept the AP credit for this particular course (even though I scored a four on the test), and that scholarships were awarded for higher grades as opposed to tougher courses. Therefore, my work was in vain - but I could have discovered all of this information by simply doing a little research before creating my schedule.

Therefore, while I'd like to say that the attitude of the teacher of a particular course shouldn't have an impact on whether you roster the class, there are certain courses that simply aren't worth the effort. Becoming an informed student is another step on the road to success.



don't be intimidated by college planning

In today's world, successful people plan well ahead of the times. The typical retail chain, for example, begins ordering Christmas inventory in early January. Look at any celebrity's success story and you'll discover a hidden story where someone was outstanding in some activity at a very young age. Therefore, it's not surprising that high school students are flooded by college propaganda. Somewhere in a pile of old papers I have a college admissions "road map," which details how students can prepare for college as early as seventh grade!

Obviously, such a flood of information can be overwhelming. Between preparation for the SATs, decisions about which college to attend, and the pressure to keep the grades up, those I know who were inundated with this information took one of two paths of action: began their college search as early as tenth grade or put off the process until the last minute.

First, don't check the box on the SAT's which gives you the option of receiving information directly from colleges. Not only will you receive a thousand useless pamphlets that will require hours of your time to review, but you're probably more likely to make the wrong decision because of a nice looking picture or an unsubstantiated promise.

Believe it or not, you probably already know where you want to continue your education. As early as the beginning of eleventh grade, my dad first brought up the idea of my attending Penn State. I pushed it aside, figuring I would look through all the pamphlets, attend visitations, and eventually make a grueling decision in crunch time. As a result, I visited ten colleges and spent a hundred hours or more of my time writing nearly twenty essays, having them proofread, and completing application after application.

In the end, I decided to attend Penn State, which required no essays, and from which I had already received a decision before I even began applying to the other colleges.

I also took an SAT preparation course, but in truth, statistics agree that SAT preparation programs rarely, if ever, improve a student's scores. Finally, as I discovered, attending an ivy league school doesn't assure success in the real world - as I've heard from stories involving those who attended such schools. In most cases, a more reasonably-priced university will be as good as, if not superior to, the education offered at an ivy league school. One of my teachers at UMHS once told his students that the only reason private high schools appear prestigious is because they can afford to reject those who won't succeed no matter how much guidance is offered. The same applies to ivy league universities - they appear exceptional because their reputation allows them to reject less capable students from their larger pool of applicants.

So, in essence, the college admissions process is simpler than you might think. Ignore all the rhetoric and decide where *you* think you would succeed and be happy, and stick to your decision.

The True Danger

by Stephen Sokolowski

The attacks on America on September 11 will remain as one of the most significant events in the lives of everyone who lived through them. These horrible tragedies have changed life as we know it for the worse, and things will never be the same again. Since the attacks, Americans have been living in fear as they anxiously await what will happen next. Living in a changed world, precautions that would have been thought unbelievable before the attacks are now commonplace.....

.....Or so the media broadcasts at every chance. Simply by watching CNN for a few hours, I listened to "experts" warn the public that a civilization-ending outbreak of smallpox is imminent, that it was only a matter of time before more planes destroyed the Sears Tower and crashed into nuclear power plants to spew deadly radiation, that it would be incredibly easy for crop dusting planes to drop Sarin or some other nerve agent over large a large metropolis, or even that the risk of nuclear weapons from Pakistan or other countries would fall into the wrong hands was "dangerously real." After an hour of watching CNN, I could have been convinced that the world was teetering on the brink of destruction and that I could expect to die sometime overnight.

That was on September 21. Needless to say, the world hasn't ended yet. Three weeks after the attacks, I came across a poll that showed that 77% of the population of America was still depressed. Shortly after reading the site that displayed the statistic, I went to class where the subject of terrorism surfaced. After a few minutes, I joked that the world wasn't going to end tomorrow, and one of the people next to whom I was seated objected. This person honestly believed that the world would end the next day or shortly after. Wondering how such a statistic could possibly be accurate, I pondered for a while until I realized that the very people publishing

such polls were at fault for the depression and anxiety that supposedly was prevalent throughout the country.

The hysteria that is gripping the country is ridiculous. People stockpile gas masks to ward off potential chemical agents, but don't realize that by the time they were warned to put on the mask, they would already have been affected. A black market in illegal Cipro has formed despite that the drug would have to be taken continuously to avoid anthrax infection and that the side effects could be worse than the infection itself. Travelers avoid flying because they believe that their planes will be hijacked but fail to realize that they have a greater chance of being killed driving to the supermarket. Despite this panic, the networks bravely proclaim that giving into fear and anxiety would help the terrorists achieve their goals, and that Americans are returning to normal unaffected by the terrorist acts.

In my opinion, the terrorists have succeeded beyond their wildest expectations.

Those who say that the terrorists aren't affecting the morale of the American public should take a hard look around. The people who committed these crimes are masters in psychology. They took one of the safest forms of transportation that travels right over every house in America and used it to destroy skyscrapers like those in which millions of businesspeople spend their days. They release videotaped statements that, whether or not intended to communicate to terrorists, create panic and cause the government to restrict free speech. And in a stroke of genius, they used the US Mail system, which everyone uses every day, to send invisible pathogens in a powder that resembles ordinary coffee creamer. And the media and the people play right into their hands.

Throughout history, some of the worst inventions have turned out to prompt some of the greatest achievements of mankind. One of the most glaring examples is that of the atomic bomb. When it was first detonated in 1945, those alive at the time expected that it would eventually be used to destroy the world. I'd like to offer the opinion that the atomic bomb may

have been one of the greatest advances that man has developed. A theory called MUD (Mutually Assured Destruction) states that no state will ever launch a nuclear weapon against another because it would lead to the destruction of both countries. No longer can any nation ever have a clear military advantage, and as a result the world has been largely peaceful for the past sixty years whereas the thirty years prior to the atomic bomb's invention involved two of the bloodiest wars in history. So far, this theory has remained true.

Following the same reasoning, perhaps the bombings in September could also be considered a positive event. Of course, many innocent victims were killed and I offer my condolences to those families involved, but those who died did not do so in vain. The event, while horrific, forged an international coalition the likes of which has never before been seen in the history of the world. Furthermore, the catastrophe has brought about the hightening of security procedures so that such a disaster could never occur again. The heroes of Flight 93 brought about a revolution in the skies - I find it highly unlikely that unarmed terrorists will ever be able to hijack a plane again since passengers will no longer allow the flight to fall into the wrong hands. Also, believe it or not, trafficking in illegal substances such as cocaine has fallen to almost nonexistent levels because of heightened airport security procedures. Mr. Touchton, AP Government teacher at UMHS, always said that the "echo boomers" needed a war to teach them the value of patriotism and to give them something in which to believe. It looks like his wish was granted.

In conclusion, I'm not afraid of the terrorists but the panic that the terrorist acts are causing among citizens of this country. I highly doubt that the world is going to end tomorrow, next month, or even next year. The real test will be if people continue to act calmly, or if mass panic erupts.

The General

by Moishe ben Ahrron, Ph.D.
Part II

The tape data banks behind The General were now spinning furiously, but The General leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes, while Blake relayed the orders. When Blake finished talking, The General again leaned forward and said evenly, “I expect you’re interested to know that I estimate the probability at point niner seven three that the message is, in fact, an execute command.”

Blake broke his communication connection and turned to The General. “About the contact in the U. D. Situation Room, Sir. About 20 years ago, a family with a seven-year-old son was sent to live in the U. D., and the son was gradually ‘groomed’ toward being our agent in the U. D. high command. He succeeded in making a military career and after ten years has just been promoted to a senior technician level in the U. D. Situation Room.”

The General leaned back again, his eyes closed, the tapes behind him whirling furiously for several seconds. Then he leaned forward again, swept his eyes methodically over the Big Board and over the Situation Room, and then relaxed. “That’s a very interesting example of human foresight and ingenuity. I suppose we did similar things to most of our potential enemies...and allies,” he added almost casually.

“Does The General wish me to query Central Intelligence on that, Sir?”

“No, it is not pertinent to our present problem, although human distrust and planned treachery never cease to amaze me.” Once more The General relaxed his posture. The whole room seemed slightly more relaxed. There were no pending, unfulfilled orders, surveillance was being maintained as ordered, and no new events were being detected. The General looked at Blake as though he were anxious to renew the informal conversation.

Blake glanced at the clock. “0920, Sir. Ninety minutes into the present - er- exercise.” Blake did not actually know what to call it. It was certainly not a war, not even an open confrontation, but it did demand the military “know how” of instant action based upon informed but amazingly fast decision making. At this point it was like waiting for the opponent to make the next move in a chess game. Wondering if The General were still in the mood for personal conversation he said, “I trust The General is not disturbed over my brief case, Sir.”

“Not at all. I’m sure you’re not a spy. I see by your ring that you’re an Academy Man.”

“Yes, Sir. I graduated just before ‘Nam and went into Staff School several years later. That’s how I ended up here.” Blake looked again at The General, who still seemed lonely and as though he were searching for a way to continue the personal contact which he had admittedly sought before. Blake decided to try to make it easy. “If I may be so bold, how about yourself, Sir. Where do you live?”

“I started out in the suburbs of this city, as you did, and I’ve spent all my life in and around it.”

“May I ask if The General has any relatives?”

“Yes, a very distant cousin. I’m not even sure he’s alive. I last heard about him several years ago. He was in Central Europe at the time. But I prefer to hear about you and your career. Did they give you much training in computer-assisted decision making at Staff School?”

“As a matter of fact, one of the most interesting things we did was obtain several hours real time experience with the D.A.C. series 2000. The staff introduced the subject by giving us six inter-related known variables and asked for our prediction of the enemy’s next move without the electronic aid. We all got headaches from trying to keep all the factors and their inter-relations in mind at one time. Not only that, but after eight hours of work, there was a different answer from each student, and none of them was correct! The amusing part was that the

problem had been ‘lifted’ from the details of the Battle of Waterloo, and if any of us had been the Duke of Wellington, Napoleon would have conquered all of Europe!”

“The other fascinating subject we explored was the study and discussion of anthropomorphic electronic decision makers. You’ve probably heard of the concept, Sir. A sort of robot commander who combined the data banks and real time information, and actually made the command decision, but was disguised, so that the machine appeared to be a man. We never actually saw one, but the concept stimulated lots of discussion.”

The general leaned further forward, obviously interested and stimulated by this new topic. “What were your own thoughts on the ‘robot commander’, or as you put it, anthropomorphic electronic decision maker?”

“Well, Sir, the biggest problem is actually the high degree of security required to prevent the men from realizing that essential command decisions were being made by a machine. Human nature is such that the men in the field would not realize that the networks of decision making, although physically electronic, represented the distilled opinion and experience of literally hundreds of the best military leaders from Alexander the Great onward. They would still consider it a machine and resent its commands. Making it anthropomorphic or having the appearance of a man is an added technical difficulty and would need even tighter security in the long run. Even so, there was a strong rumor in the class that at least two such anthropomorphic electronic decision makers were under construction.”

“Is that the only difficulty you saw?”

“No. There was one other area. No matter how vast an electronic network was, it would always lack certain valuable human characteristics, flashes of inspiration and compassion, stimulated by unique situations or desperation. Even though all previously known brilliant military maneuvers would be available in the data banks, new situations which could be solved by a stroke of genius or old situations which could be handled by unusual or desperate measures

would tend to be overlooked. But, most troublesome of all, is the real danger of having two opposing robot commanders, who could fight on, without compassion, resulting in the complete destruction of both nations and perhaps even the whole world. There has to be an assurance that this cannot happen. Some degree of the finer human element must be imposed."

"That is a rather thoughtful analysis of the problem. There can be no question that in a war with a powerful enemy, human beings must be in command! But you do agree that electronic assisted decision making is useful?"

"No question about that either, Sir. The decisions which you are able to make here are unquestionably far faster and based on a wider range of data than could be made by any other means."

The pleasant theoretical and somewhat formal conversation was interrupted by a sudden whirring of the tapes behind The General, a soft but insistent buzzer and the flashing of three coded numbers on the Big Board.

"Sir, report from satellite. Three U. D. missile units are now on ready firing status."

The General blinked again, and ignoring Blake's somewhat superfluous observation, began to rap out orders. "Go to Triple Yellow alert; arm all U. D. targeted missiles; authorize Central Intelligence to blow the contact's cover to find the name of the U. D. Situation Room commander; and get 'The Chief' on the phone."

Blake again was busy with his console and after a moment, "The President is coming to Line One, Sir."

"Mr. President, this is Commanding General, Situation Room. We have gone to Triple Yellow alert at 0946. My current assessment is that the U. D. message in question was a command signal. I now make that with a probability of point niner niner eight because of the ready for firing status of three of their missile units. ...Yes, Sir...Yes, Sir...Thank you, Sir."

At this moment, the doors again opened and several more technicians entered followed by two very tall, muscular Marines. The Marines immediately went to opposite sides of the door and assumed their statue-like poses, at parade rest. Following the Marines, another technician came in carrying a large box, containing automatic pistols, each in a holster with an attached pistol belt. He went from person to person giving everyone in the room one of the pistol belts and then buckled on his own ad sat at his console.

The General leaned back and closed his eyes, the data tapes behind him whirring around furiously. Then, he leaned forward, drew his pistol, cocked it, and took careful aim at the technician who had distributed the pistols. Then, he said, quite calmly but loud enough for all to hear, “Sergeant, do not make any movement or I will be forced to shoot you. Marines, arrest that man and bring his pistol belt to me.”

The Sergeant-technician looked up with a startled expression, clamped his jaws tightly shut and slumped over at his console before the wooden-faced Marines could even approach. Blake rushed over and pulled the man’s head up, and then looked up in utter astonishment at The General. “He’s dead, Sir!”

“I am not surprised. Please bring his pistol here.”

“But, I don’t understand, Sir.”

“Let me explain. You remember our discussing the contact we have in the U. D. Situation Room. Well, if we could accomplish that, so could they, and the fact that we did it shows that we thought it was desirable to do so and so would they. It was easy to predict even twenty years ago that the U. D. would be our most likely enemy and we, theirs. Therefore, I calculated the probability of there being a U. D. ‘contact’ in our Situation room. The answer approached so close to one point zero that it merely remained to determine who was the spy. There was no one else who brought anything into the room which was under his control while outside the room and

which could have concealed the radio necessary for contact with the outside. Therefore, he had to be the U. D. contact."

"But, Sir, my brief case..."

"Please recall that I had examined it! In any event, the spy has really convicted himself. I realized that the probability of him having a suicide capsule and using it was very high. But there were too many human variables to be sure." Opening the pistol, he continued, "As you see, this is not a pistol but a radio!"

Sensing the confusion in the room, The General looked up and around the room. His steely blue eyes ordered everyone back to their assignments without words. For a moment all was static and quiet. Then the silence was broken by the soft chime at Blake's console, followed by the "plop" of a cylinder from the pneumatic tube. "The dossier from Central Intelligence on the U. D. Situation Room Commander, Sir," he said as he handed a small folder to the General.

The General rapidly scanned the contents and leaned back with eyes closed in the now familiar attitude while the data tapes spun behind him. "Well, Blake, it looks as though you may get an opportunity to see how a human, with 'flashes of inspiration born of desperation', may compete against an anthropomorphic 'robot commander'. It seems as though the U. D. has an electronic decision maker in charge of their Situation Room, although it is one which has been designed to appear to be a man. You know, you were right in many of the things you concluded in your discussions on anthropomorphic decision makers. They have their limitations. But, they're not all so inflexibly programmed as you think."

"I don't understand what you mean, Sir. What are our chances of averting war, dealing with the computer, and what are our chances of winning the war if we are unable to avert it?"

"I cannot estimate our chances at the moment, but within one minute, if all occurs as I have now planned it, our chances of averting war will be point niner niner zero; and if we do not avert, our chances of winning decisively within twenty-four hours, without significant loss of

human life, will be point niner niner eight. So you can see we will be in a very good position. Goodbye, Blake. You are most capable."

"Sir, I still don't understand. What do you mean?"

The General made no reply but merely stood up and thereby broke the massive connections between himself and the back of the chair in which he sat, which was, after all, just another part of the anthropomorphic computer which was "The General."

Evan's Quest

By Daniel Burgess

Chapter 10 - Part III

Later that day, Evan and Ry sat at a table in the tavern.

"And I saved the mines, and they gave me this," Evan continued in a mad rush to tell Ry everything.

"I know, I know, I've been watching you. Well done. I knew you could do it. That means there's only one more task, then you are a sorcerer!" Evan smiled and he was very pleased with himself.

The next morning Evan slowly opened his eyes as the beam of sun through the gap in the curtains shone on Evan's eyelid. He yawned and sat up in his bed. Evan looked over to Ry's bed. It was empty.

Evan got out of his bed and put on his clothes, then he put his thin, cloth armour on. Evan looked around the room. Ry was no where to be seen. He put his hand on the edge of the brown curtain and pulled it across. The sun shone in and lit the room up brightly.

Evan walked out of the room and downstairs into the tavern. The tavern was empty apart from the innkeeper who stood behind the bar, cleaning a glass with a dirty, brown rag.

Evan walked up to the chubby man and asked, "Good morning. Have you seen my friend, Ry?"

The man turned his head to look at Evan and replied, "Good morning. Yes, he was up early. I think he said he was going to see a friend."

Evan thanked the innkeeper and walked out of the tavern. Outside the sun was still shining brightly and there wasn't a cloud in the sky. Evan only knew of one friend of Ry's that lived nearby--the female wizard friend of his.

The courtyard was empty apart from one old woman slowly hobbling across towards a cottage. Evan walked over to the thatched roof cottage that he had seen Ry go into the day before. He walked up to the door and looked at it for a few brief seconds. It was made of old wood and had a coat of green paint which was cracking slightly. Evan knocked on the door twice and waited.

A few seconds later the door opened with a creak. The woman that Evan had seen the day before appeared at the door and smiled.

"Hello. Can I help you?" she asked.

"Um, hello. I'm looking for my friend, Ry?" Evan asked.

"Evan! I'm sorry. I must have lost track of time. I was going to come back before you woke," Ry said from inside the cottage. Evan looked behind the woman and saw Ry walking towards the door.

"Ah, so this is the Evan you have been telling me about, Ry," the woman said to Ry.

"Come on in, Evan," the woman said to Evan.

Evan walked through the doorway into the dimly lit home. He was in a corridor with four doors leading off it, two at each side. Ry and the woman walked through the first door on the left. Evan followed them and they walked into what looked like a lounge area. The ceiling was

quite low and the floor was pale wood. The room was quite large. In one corner there were some wooden seats and all around the room the little green, paned windows let the green glow of the sunlight into the room.

"Evan, I'd like you to meet Sophia. She's a good friend of mine. She is a magician, but she makes spells and potions from herbs and natural elements," Ry said to Evan as they all sat down.

"Hello," Evan said across to Sophia.

For most of the morning Sophia showed Evan her potions. She taught him how to make a sleeping potion from only grass, spring water and oak bark.

"That's amazing. Does it really work?" Evan asked Sophia,

"Yes, I assure you. Do you want to try some?" Sophia replied. Evan laughed.

"No thanks," Evan said smiling.

Mid day came, and the sun was high in the blue sky. Evan and Ry were now in the tavern, eating lunch.

"Sophia is a very clever woman," Evan said to Ry, biting into a piece of bread.

"Yes, yes she is," Ry agreed.

"We need to hurry, because I want you to complete your final task before the sun goes down," Ry said.

Suddenly a young woman burst through the door of the tavern and shouted, "Help! Thief!"

"Ah, Evan, here is your final task," Ry whispered to Evan.

"What?" Evan replied in a confused voice.

"Just go!" Ry said, pushing Evan to his feet.

The young woman grabbed Evan by the arm and pulled him outside. She had long blonde hair down to her waist and she had bright blue eyes.

"Please help me. My ring has been stolen."

"Do you know who it was?" Evan asked.

"Yes, I know who he is. He lives over on the other side of the wood. He just burst into my house and grabbed the ring from on the table, then ran back out again! Oh, please help me! That ring has been in my family for generations!" the woman sobbed.

"Can you take me there?" Evan asked.

"Yes, but I'm not going in!"

The woman's name was Jasmine, which Evan learned on the way. Jasmine led Evan through the dark, lonely wood. Evan saw that she was very jumpy and looked frightened. "Everything is going to be fine," Evan reassured her. They came to the edge of the wood and they peered through the bushes. There was a small log cabin a few metres away from where they were standing. There was white, puffy smoke gently floating out of the chimney and the window was flickering with light, as though the room was only lit by a flame.

"Is that where he lives?" Evan whispered.

"Yes, and I'm not staying here. He's dangerous. Good luck. Please bring my ring back!" Jasmine said while running off back towards the village.

Evan stepped out from the bushes and slowly walked up to the window. He stared in. inside he saw the room had a dark, wooden floor with a large rug on it and walls were a cream

colour. Evan saw the thief sitting on an armchair facing the open wood fire. The armchair was facing away from Evan, so he could only see the back of the thief. Evan looked around the rest of the room and saw a small table next to the armchair. On it he saw a glass which was half full of water and next to that Evan saw a ring. The ring had a red band and a sparkling diamond on it.

Evan thought to himself, “He looks quite old. I might be able to get in and take the ring and get out before he even has time to do anything!” Evan looked around his feet, looking for something heavy he could break the window with.

Evan saw a perfect rock. It was just the right size to pick up and it was quite heavy and had smooth edges. He picked it up and held it in his hand for a few seconds while it warmed up to his body temperature. Evan looked back at the window. It was a bit too high to jump through. He looked for something he could stand on. There weren’t many rocks left, and they were all small. He wandered into the wood looking for something, then he spotted a log. It was just the right size, so he picked it up and it slipped a little because of the green, hairy moss on the surface of the rotting wood.

Evan placed the log under the window and looked through it just one more time to check that the thief was still in the same place. Evan stood back and took a deep breath. “There is no way this can go wrong!” Evan thought to himself.

He took another deep breath. His heart was beating madly. Evan pulled the rock over his shoulder and was about to throw it but froze. His heart was beating faster all the time he was waiting. Eventually he took another deep breath and threw the rock forward. It lunged through the window and seemed to go through before the glass even shattered. The bigger shards of glass fell to the ground and the small ones all fell for seconds after. After the rock had landed on the wooden floor inside, Evan put his arm over his head and put one foot on the log and pushed himself through the window. The glass that was still in the frame was pulled through with Evan. He put one foot on the wooden floor then took the other off the log and pulled himself inside.

Inside there seemed to be a silence about the room. The man didn’t even turn around. Evan stared at the man who just sat there in his chair. He seemed to be ignoring Evan who had just burst though the window. Evan stood there, waiting for something to happen; but nothing did. For a few seconds Evan just stood there, but then his eyes glanced onto the ring. Evan walked forward and slowly moved his hard towards the ring, which was next to the man. Evan was beginning to get worried, as the man hadn’t moved the whole time Evan had burst through the window.

Evan’s hand moved closer to the ring. Just as his fingers touched it, the man’s arm flung out and grabbed Evan’s wrist. Evan froze, his hold body tensed. The man’s grip on Evan’s wrist was immense. Evan tried to struggle out of the man’s grip, but the more he struggled, the tighter the grip became.

“Let go!” Evan shouted. The man turned his head to look at Evan. Evan got a look at his face. He had wrinkled skin and deep, dark brown eyes. Evan was starting to get worried, so with his other hand he slowly gripped the handle of his sword. With a blast of energy he pulled it out and thrust it towards the man. It stabbed into the man’s side and he closed his eyes.

The grip on Evan’s wrist slowly slackened and then let go. The man slouched down in his chair, then fell to the ground with a thud. Evan sighed with relief. Evan took the ring from the table and slipped it into his pocket. He looked at the corpse once more, then turned and

walked to the door. He wiped his red, stained sword on his sleeve. Suddenly Evan was hit from behind and he flew to the wooden floor. Evan turned his head and saw it was the armchair. The man was standing up straight and walking towards him as though he had not been injured at all.

The man bent down and grabbed Evan by the neck, and he lifted him up. He felt himself flying through the air. He hit the wall and fell to the ground. Evan struggled to his feet. He was shaking with pain and terror.

"Stop it. Leave me alone!" Evan begged. The thief still walked towards him. Evan grabbed the sword from his belt again and swung it at the man. It hit him on the waist and he crouched with pain, but a few seconds and it seemed like the pain was gone. He carried on walking towards Evan as normal. Evan was trembling. His sword wasn't working and the man had so much strength. The man picked up Evan by the arm like a rag doll. Evan was flung across the room and landed by the open fire.

The man was heading for Evan again. Evan quickly grabbed a log from the fire. One end was burning and the flames flickered on it as Evan swung it in the air. Evan threw the burning log at the man and it hit his left leg. The flames danced up the man's trouser leg. The brown cloth burned away and the black smoke began to rise to the ceiling. The flames seemed not to be causing any pain to the man.

"What are you?" Evan whimpered. Evan realised the only weapons aren't just objects. He had the art of magic on his side. Evan held out his hand and concentrated all his thoughts. The fireball that Evan was getting quite good at creating grew in his hand. The fireball flickered and bulged as it grew. When Evan thought it was about a good size, he threw it at the man who was getting quite close to him now. The fire ball flew at the man but he flung his arm forward and hit the fireball away from him. It seemed to cause a bit of pain on his arm.

For the first time, the man spoke. "You think you can kill me with your simple magic? Watch this then." His voice was rough and it was quite loud. Evan gulped.

The man stopped walking towards Evan and put his arms in the air. Evan stood up slowly. The man swung his arms about in the air quickly and grabbed at the air above him, as though trying to pull something down. Suddenly some black mist appeared above him and started moving down. As the mist reached his hands, there was a flash of lightning and Evan jumped back with fright.

Evan stared at the man's eyes. His eyes went bright red and his face started shaking. There was an ear-splitting bang and a flash of light and the black mist flew towards Evan. It flew across the room with amazing speed and hit Evan in the chest. Evan was flung to the wall and he coughed as it felt like a horse had kicked him in the chest. The man laughed evilly. Then the man pointed all his fingers out straight and thrust his arms forward. Out of each finger came a spark which darted through the air in a zigzag motion and each hit Evan in the head one after the other. Each felt like a splitting headache.

"Stop, stop it! You're going to kill me!" Evan pleaded.

"Exactly!" the man laughed.

Suddenly, as Evan was about to lose hope, the door of the house burst open. In the doorway stood Ry.

"Ry! Help me!" Evan screamed. The man turned to Ry. Ry thrust his arm up straight and a beam of yellow light appeared and hit the man in the chest. Then the man retaliated and cast some of the sparks he had used on Evan.

For quite a while Ry and the thief battled, each spell getting more powerful. Evan could

see Ry was struggling so Evan made a powerball, like he did with the fairies. He left it in his hand a long time and concentrated on it as hard as he could. He made it as big as he could, then placed it behind the thief at his feet.

Evan signalled to Ry to move back, and Evan stuck his sword in the man's back to distract him while Ry and Evan moved back. A few seconds later the powerball exploded with light and energy. The man screamed with pain and looked up in the air. As the mist cleared, the man vanished.

"Ry!" Evan said, running up to him.

"What was he?" Evan continued.

"He was a necromancer. He is a magician that uses death and dead people to gain his power. That's why he was so strong and was very difficult to kill."

That evening Ry and Evan were back in the tavern.

"Evan, you've done it. Even though I helped you, you actually killed him and brought the ring back. If you could do all those three tasks, I think you are a good wizard, and you did," Ry said while sipping a drink. Evan smiled. "So, my job's done. Tomorrow morning we'll head back to my home, then you can set on your way to finish your quest."

"Thank you, Ry. You've helped me so much!"

Later on, up in their room, Ry was asleep. Evan was sitting on the windowsill looking up at the night sky. He stared up at the stars. A cloud gently drifted past. As Evan stared up at the night sky, he thought about Isaac and a tear emerged and ran down his cheek. He wiped it away with his hand.

The next morning, as the bright sun slowly appeared over the rooftops of the houses, Evan packed his things into his rucksack.

"Are you nearly ready?" Ry asked while he placed his last few things into his bag.

"Yes, I'm ready."

Ry said goodbye and thank you to the innkeeper and they set out on their way back to Ry's home. Ry and Evan spent the rest of the morning and most of the afternoon travelling. Eventually they reached Ry's house before the sun disappeared. Inside Ry and Evan sat down. "I'm tired from all the travelling. I think I'll get an early night, then I'll be ready for tomorrow," Evan said to Ry and yawned.

"Good idea. I think I might do the same." They both had a drink, then Evan went into his room.

Evan sat down on his bed. His legs were aching and his eyelids were almost closed. He couldn't help thinking about how much Ry had done for him. He wanted to repay him some way. Evan lay down and, still thinking about Ry, gently drifted to sleep.