Shoemaker Village

Volume 25 - February 1999



The Knights of the Square Table moves onward!

Christmas Neighborhood Review: Did you miss the holidays?



PLUS!
Expanded *Humor from the Village Square*! 5 pages this month!
Tough Teachers: Writers voice their opinions!
Exceptional short stories by star writer Matthew Care!

DETAILS INSIDE!

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Editor's Pages

Information you should know

We would like to welcome back all of our subscribers after the Christmas holidays. We hope that we will be able to serve you in the coming year.

What better way to start out this month than with some good news? We are excited to inform you that we now have plans to expand the Neighborhood News section, beginning next month, to include the entire area. The main reason for this is the increased readership in UMHS, as well as around the Willow Grove area. Matthew Care, our assistant editor, along with others, will assist in collecting news to fill the expanded section. We hope to begin publishing this addition beginning in March.

In addition, we are desperately in need of stories and novels. We cannot continue to publish large issues with extra content without your help. If you would like to submit a story, send it to the address on the Editor's page. If you have Internet access, just type the file and attach it to an E-Mail message. Remember, if your work is published, you receive that issue of the *Village* free.

There has been some confusion lately about two things. *The Knights of the Square Table* is now available through the webpages for downloading for those who wish to catch up on what they missed. If you would like a paper copy of the novel, send $3.00 (printing costs only) to our address and we'll make sure you receive one within a week.

Another point where a few of our readers are bewildered is our pricing schedule. We currently charge $10.00 for a one-year subscription (12 issues). A half-year's subscription (six issues) can also be purchased for $5.50. Remember, we do not try to make a profit on our magazine. These funds are used solely for publication costs. This is important as almost a quarter of our registered subscribers will have their subscriptions expiring this month. We are now allowing people to acquire issues of the *Village* by buying them separately. The cost is $1.00 for one issue.

Since so many good things have been mentioned so far, let's mention one more: the *Village* has reached an all-time high in readership! Since it began in May 1997 with just one family, the *Village* has grown to over 30 copies and 73 readers! As you may recall, the state of the *Village* was in jeopardy after the costs of publication became too great to continue publishing for free last May, when it reached an all-time low in readership. We hope that our readers continue to support us in the future.

Now on to our Internet news. The webpages, thanks to webmaster Matthew Care, are back on track and regularly updated. The webpages, as you probably also remember, were also in danger of being dismantled after a slow start last August. Now, however, with updated content, the pages are predicted to score at least a thousand hits in the next few months. Be part of it all, and visit our webpages at **http://come.to/ShoemakerVillage!** Much of the content of the pages is not included in the magazine, and you can access the Neighborhood News a week before it is published! If you would like to take advantage of this, check back at the pages around



Can you guess who this is?

February 20 and you can read the news a week in advance!

After looking through an old photo album, we came across the picture to the left. If you can guess who is in the picture, we'll extend the subscription of the first correct answer out of those submitted by one month. However, in order to be fair, you may only make one guess through the comment form on the *Village* webpages or by contacting us in some other manner.

That's about all for this month. Thank you for supporting the *Village* for its first 25 issues and we hope that you will support us for the next 25. Enjoy this issue and we'll see you in March!

Acknowledgments

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The next issue of *Shoemaker Village* will be published on Friday, February 26, 1999.
All contributions for the next issue must be received by Monday, February 22, 1999.

Upcoming topics in **The Discussion Forum:**
March 1999: Are people becoming lazier?
April 1999: What are your expectations for the upcoming baseball season?

Coming Next Issue

Volume 26 - March 1999

The Neighborhood News is expanding! Read it first as it grows to include the entire area!
Get the latest on the winter weather in the neighborhood!
Laziness takes its place as a Discussion Forum topic! Don't forget to voice your opinion!
The Knights of the Square Table continues! A big surprise is in store for next month's edition! Be sure not to miss it!
Lots of news, stories, articles, and more!

ALL IN THE NEXT ISSUE OF *SHOEMAKER VILLAGE*!

Puzzle Page

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

Words

Arctic
Brisk
Cancel
Chains
Clouds
Cold
Danger
Forecast
Freeze
Frigid
Frost
Gloomy
Ice
Igloo
No school
Northern
Rain
Road
Salt
Scraper
Skating
Skiing
Sled
Sleet
Slippery
Snow
Snowman
Stark
Thermometer
Two hours
Water
White
Windy
Winter

Neighborhood News

February 1999

CHRISTMAS REVIEW

The Christmas holidays were a fun time for many in the neighborhood, and many people are now disappointed that the holidays have come and gone.

The Christmas window display by Rita Wilkowski shown here is only one example of the spirit that pervaded the neighborhood during the month of December. As usual, the Schrope family continued their 22-year tradition of decorating their house and yard. Throughout early December, the "men across the street" were seen furiously scrambling to put up their decorations.



This window display by Rita Wilkowski was only part of the holiday spirit.

"I was really sad to see them take it down," said neighbor Jean Sokolowski. "One day it was there, and the next day, whoosh! It was gone!" Unfortunately, the huge light display lasted only three short weeks before being dismantled on New Year's day in preparation for an incoming snowstorm.

Also, the area experienced its first white Christmas in three years. Although only 3/4 inches of snow fell on the night before Christmas Eve, compared to the 3-4" forecasted, it was more than enough to brighten many a heart.

Neighbor Robert Altimari, organizer of the Christmas Eve Luminaria during past years, voiced his opinion on the snow that day by commenting: "This is the way to have a white Christmas. Not too much, just enough to make it look nice."

Pat Altimari, his wife, to the delight of much of the neighborhood, organized a small Luminaria for the first time in years. Although it consisted of only four houses, the consensus around the neighborhood seemed to be that a good tradition was returning. We sincerely hope that Pat and Bob decide to continue the Luminaria next year.

New Year's Eve was also busier than usual. The neighborhood was the loudest in years. According to Jean, "I've never seen or heard this much activity around here! Wonder what it's going to be like next year?"

Although the area looked nice while being blanketed with snow during the holidays, things quickly turned ugly as bitter cold moved in on New Year's day and neighbors scrambled to remove decorations before ice began to fall on the night of Saturday, January 2. However, another example of weather forecasters "over forecasting", only a small accumulation of ice fell before changing to rain the next morning.

Not everything during the holidays was cheery. On Christmas night, December 25, this car was involved in an accident on Pioneer Road. Reportedly, the person involved was trying to bypass traffic congestion around the Schrope's Christmas bonanza when another car pulled out at the same time, denting the hood. After the accident, police were on the scene immediately and stayed for an hour. Little is known about the proceedings except that the car was left on the side of the street for several days afterward.



This car was temporarily deserted in front of the Sokolowski residence.

SCHOOL STRIKE RESULTS IN MAKE-UP DAYS, STUDENTS UNHAPPY

In the weeks before December 28, 29, and 30, 1998, many students had made plans not to attend school in the Upper Moreland

School District during that week of make-up days. However, nobody knew just how many of those plans would hold true until the days actually arrived.

When students returned to school on Monday, December 28, as part of the six make-up days that the Upper Moreland School Board imposed due to the teachers' strike, attendance was less than stellar. That day, 29% were absent. The numbers didn't get any better, either. On Tuesday, December 29, the absentee rate climbed to 36%, and culminated on Wednesday, December 30, at 51%.

"I'm just as glad to be here as you are," said Mr. Purvins, chemistry teacher at UMHS. "But there is work to get done, and we will get it done." Many teachers felt the same way, continuing even when more than half their classes were absent. This led to frantic make-up work during the following week.

Three other make-up days are still scheduled in the school year, with more expected with the recent snowstorms. The days that are affected are Presidents' Day (February 15) and the Monday and Tuesday before Easter (March 29-30).

WINTER WEATHER REVIEW

Over the next two months, we will be including this special section for the low-down on storms in the area during the winter time.

There were only two major winter storms this month and one minor one mentioned earlier. During this storm, on January 2, a thin sheet of ice fell before changing to rain and washing away a few hours later.

On Friday, January 9, residents of the area were lucky to be coated with a final tally of 4 1/4 inches. Soon, however, the snow changed to dangerous freezing rain and sleet, coating cars with ice. Unfortunately, the storm quickly changed to rain and the rain continued throughout the following day, washing away the snow.

The other, more severe storm, took place throughout four days on January 14-17. Though there was a brief period of rain, it quickly changed to ice and then sleet throughout the next day, canceling most schools in the area for two days. The most severe ice, on the night of January 15, coated roofs and cars, forcing water to leak into many neighbors' houses.

However, to the disappointment of many residents, there have been no "real" snowstorms for the past three years. "I remember how, a few years ago, we built igloos and a huge fort and had snowball fights," said one zealous snow worshipper. "But now, there isn't any snow around here anymore."

The latest predictions for severity of the winter season forecast a winter with little snow, though cold. According to this source, "winters in the northeast are usually harsher in the neutral stage," without El Niño and La Niña. Anyway the winter turns out, we'll keep you updated on the latest winter weather for the next two months.

Lost and Found

NO NEWS TO REPORT THIS MONTH

Recently, things have slowed around the neighborhood in terms of the Rorviks' lost animals and other strange happenings. We sincerely hope that we will be able to abolish this section if the Rorviks' animals do not return.

Going to the Dogz

DOG NEWS AROUND THE NEIGHBORHOOD

(article contributed by Jean Sokolowski)

-Klaus was seen frolicking around the yard in the snow, slipping and sliding on the ice. It was quite a funny sight.

-Aubrey and Klaus were playing in the Hoffman's yard before Aubrey's owner, Matt,

came over to drag her home.

-Madison was last seen working the crowd at his owners' holiday party. Looked quite dapper in his yuletide white!

-Max has not been seen lately. Maybe he's finally "tied up" at home!

-Dutch wormed his way into visitors' hearts during holiday festivities.

-Jake "He da man, I mean, dog!" continues his morning constitutional of barking at Klaus and scaring away that big sissy, Max, on the other side of the fence.

Humor from the Village Square

AIRLINE ATTENDANT COMMENTS

Occasionally, airline attendants make an effort to make the "in-flight safety lecture" a bit more entertaining. Here are some real examples that have been heard or reported:

"There may be 50 ways to leave your lover, but there are only 4 ways out of this airplane..."

"Your seat cushions can be used for floatation, and in the event of an emergency water landing, please take them with our compliments."

"We do feature a smoking section on this flight; if you must smoke, contact a member of the flight crew and we will escort you to the wing of the airplane.

"Smoking in the lavatories is prohibited. Any person caught smoking in the lavatories will be asked to leave the plane immediately."

Pilot: "Folks, we have reached our cruising altitude now, so I am going to switch the seat belt sign off. Feel free to move about as you wish, but please stay inside the plane till we land... it's a bit cold outside, and if you walk on the wings it affects the flight pattern."

And, after landing: "Thank you for flying Delta Business Express. We hope you enjoyed giving us the business as much as we enjoyed taking you for a ride."

As we waited just off the runway for another airliner to cross in front of us, some of the passengers were beginning to retrieve luggage from the overhead bins. The head attendant announced on the intercom, "This aircraft is equipped with a video surveillance system that monitors the cabin during taxiing. Any passengers not remaining in their seats until the aircraft comes to a full and complete stop at the gate will be strip-searched as they leave the aircraft."

Once on a Southwest flight, the pilot said, "We've reached our cruising altitude now, and I'm turning off the seat belt sign. I'm switching to autopilot, too, so I can come back there and visit with all of you for the rest of the flight."

As the plane landed and was coming to a stop at Washington National, a lone voice came over the loudspeaker: "Whoa, big fella..WHOA..!"

"Should the cabin lose pressure, oxygen masks will drop from the overhead area. Please place the bag over your own mouth and nose before assisting children or adults acting like children."

"As you exit the plane, please make sure to gather all of your belongings. Anything left behind will be distributed evenly among the flight attendants. Please do not leave children or spouses."

"Last one off the plane must clean it."

And from the pilot during his welcome message: "We are pleased to have some of the best flight attendants in the industry...

Unfortunately none of them are on this flight...!"

An airline pilot wrote that on this particular flight he had hammered his ship into the runway really hard. The airline had a policy which required the first officer to stand at the door while the passengers exited, give a smile, and a "Thanks for flying XYZ airline." He said that in light of his bad landing, he had a hard time looking the passengers in the eye, thinking that someone would have a smart comment. Finally everyone had gotten off except for this little old lady walking with a cane. She said, "Sonny, mind if I ask you a question?" "Why no Ma'am," said the pilot, "what is it?" The little old lady said, "Did we land or were we shot down?"

Overheard on an American Airlines flight into Amarillo, Texas, on a particularly windy and bumpy day. During the final approach the Captain was really having to fight it. After an extremely hard landing, the Flight Attendant came on the PA and announced, "Ladies and Gentlemen, welcome to Amarillo. Please remain in your seats with your seatbelts fastened while the Captain taxis what's left of our airplane to the gate!"

Another Flight Attendant's comment on a less-than-perfect landing: "We ask you to please remain seated as Captain Kangaroo bounces us to the terminal."

From a Southwest Airlines employee.... "Welcome aboard Southwest Flight XXX to YYY. To operate your seatbelt, insert the metal tab into the buckle, and pull tight. It works just like every other seatbelt, and if you don't know how to operate one, you probably shouldn't be out in public unsupervised. In the event of a sudden loss of cabin pressure, oxygen masks will descend from the ceiling. Stop screaming, grab the mask, and pull it over your face. If you have a small child traveling with you, secure your mask before assisting with theirs. If you are traveling with two small children, decide now which one you love more. Weather at our destination is 50 degrees with some broken clouds, but they'll try to have them fixed before we arrive. Thank you, and remember, nobody loves you, or your money, more than Southwest Airlines."

TWO PRIESTS

Two different priests in two different cars were driving through the countryside, when they get into a car accident. Both cars were wrecked. Amazingly, neither cleric was hurt. After they crawl out of their cars, the first sees the other's collar and says, "So you're a priest. I'm a priest too. Just look at our cars..."

The second priest said, "There's nothing left, but we are unhurt. This must be a sign from God. God must have meant that we should meet and be friends and live together in peace the rest of our days."

The first priest replied, "I agree with you completely. This must be a sign from God." He continued, "And look at this. Here's another miracle. My car is completely demolished but this bottle of wine didn't break. Surely God wants us to drink this wine and celebrate our good fortune."

He passed the bottle to the other priest. The second priest, agreeing with this generous sentiment, took a few big swigs, and handed the bottle back to the first priest. He took back the bottle, immediately put the cap back on, and handed it back to the second priest, who asked, "Aren't you having any?"

The first priest replied, "No, I think I'll wait for the police to join us."

QUOTES FROM FAMOUS PEOPLE

Suppose you were an idiot. And suppose you were a member of Congress. But I repeat myself.

-- Mark Twain

The dumber people think you are, the more surprised they're going to be when you kill them.

-- William Clayton

Bigamy is having one wife too many. Monogamy is the same.

I still miss my ex-husband, but my aim is getting better.

I think animal testing is a terrible idea; they get all nervous and give the wrong answers.
-- A Bit of Fry and Laurie

A Freudian slip is when you say one thing but mean your mother.

What is a committee? A group of the unwilling, picked from the unfit, to do the unnecessary.
-- Richard Harkness, The New York Times, 1960

Madness takes its toll. Please have exact change.

Applying computer technology is simply finding the right wrench to pound in the correct screw.

The graduate with a Science degree asks, "Why does it work?"
The graduate with an Engineering degree asks, "How does it work?"
The graduate with an Accounting degree asks, "How much will it cost?"
The graduate with a Liberal Arts degree asks, "Do you want fries with that?"

Never underestimate the bandwidth of a station wagon full of tapes hurtling down the highway.
-- Andrew Tannenbaum

If a woman has to choose between catching a fly ball and saving an infant's life, she will choose to save the infant's life without even considering if there are men on base.
-- Dave Barry

Some mornings, it's just not worth chewing through the leather straps.
-- Emo Phillips

Experience is that marvelous thing that enables you to recognize a mistake when you make it again.
-- F. P. Jones

As your attorney, it is my duty to inform you that it is not important that you understand what I'm doing or why you're paying me so much money. What's important is that you continue to do so.
-- Hunter S. Thompson's Samoan Attorney

May the forces of evil become confused on the way to your house.
-- George Carlin

Sorry, but my karma just ran over your dogma.

Life may have no meaning. Or even worse, it may have a meaning of which I disapprove.
-- Ashleigh Brilliant

Based on what you know about him in history books, what do you think Abraham Lincoln would be doing if he were alive today?
1. Writing his memoirs of the Civil War.
2. Advising the President.
3. Desperately clawing at the inside of his coffin.
-- David Letterman

Calvin: People think it must be fun to be a super genius, but they don't realize how hard it is to put up with all the idiots in the world.
Hobbes: Isn't your pants' zipper supposed to be in the front?

On one occasion a student burst into his office. "Professor Stigler, I don't believe I deserve this F you've given me." To which Stigler replied, "I agree, but unfortunately it is the lowest grade the University will allow me to award."

Don't worry about temptation--as you grow older, it starts avoiding you.
-- Old Farmer's Almanac

G: "If we do happen to step on a mine, Sir, what do we do?"
EB: "Normal procedure, Lieutenant, is to jump

200 feet in the air and scatter oneself over a wide area."

I hate to advocate drugs, alcohol, violence, or insanity to anyone, but they've always worked for me.

-- Hunter S. Thompson

Sacred cows make the best hamburger.

-- Mark Twain

Sometimes I lie awake at night, and I ask, "Where have I gone wrong?" Then a voice says to me, "This is going to take more than one night."

-- Charlie Brown, "Peanuts" [Charles Schulz]

MORE STEVEN WRIGHT JOKES

(Because of the popularity of last month's Comedy article, "The Wit of Steven Wright", we have decided to publish the remainder of the article below and next month.)

Right now I'm having amnesia and deja vu at the same time. I think I've forgotten this before.

Lots of comedians have people they try to mimic. I mimic my shadow.

I got a new shadow. I had to get rid of the other one . . . It wasn't doing what I was doing.

I tried to draw my shadow once, but I couldn't... My arm kept moving.

I wrote a song, but I can't read music so I don't know what it is. Every once in a while I'll be listening to the radio and I say, "I think I might have written that."

He asked me if I knew what time it was. I said, "Yes, but not right now."

I put tape on the mirrors in my house so I don't accidentally walk through into another dimension.

I didn't know it then, but looking back, in hindsight, I realize that when I was younger I could see into the future. Now I'm getting all my premonitions as flashbacks!

I've been doing a lot of abstract painting lately, extremely abstract. No brush, no paint, no canvas, I just think about it.

My watch is three hours fast, and I can't fix it. So I'm going to move to New York.

I like to reminisce with people I don't know. Granted, it takes longer.

If you can't hear me, it's because I'm in parentheses.

Four years ago... No, it was yesterday. Today I... No, that wasn't me. Sometimes I... No, I don't.
Is it weird in here, or is it just me?

A friend of mine once sent me a post card with a picture of the entire planet Earth taken from space. On the back it said, "Wish you were here."

Every so often, I like to stick my head out the window, look up, and smile for a satellite picture.

I'm moving to Mars next week, so if you have any boxes...

Sorry, my mind was wandering. One time my mind went all the way to Venus on mail order and I couldn't pay for it.

I have a map of the United States... Actual size. It says, "Scale: 1 mile = 1 mile." I spent last summer folding it. I also have a full-size map of the world. I hardly ever unroll it. People ask me where I live, and I say, "E6".

It's a small world, but I wouldn't want to have to paint it.

Cross country skiing is great if you live in a small country.

Everywhere is walking distance if you have the time.

You can't have everything. Where would you put it?

I have the world's largest collection of seashells. I keep it on all the beaches of the world... Perhaps you've seen it.

It's a good thing we have gravity, or else when birds died they'd just stay right up there. Hunters would be all confused.

When I die, I'm leaving my body to science fiction.

I went to the bank and asked to borrow a cup of money. They said, "What for?" I said, "I'm going to buy some sugar."

I saw a bank that said "24 Hour Banking", but I don't have that much time.

I went to the museum where they had all the heads and arms from the statues that are in all the other museums.

I like to go to art museums and name the untitled paintings... Boy With Pail... Kitten On Fire.

One time I went to a museum where all the work in the museum had been done by children. They had all the paintings up on refrigerators.

Tough Teachers- Detrimental to Students

Excessively tough teachers do not help their students at all. Having had an extremely tough teacher for one semester last year, I know wholeheartedly what it is like to go through one of these classes, and to tell you the truth, it did not help me one bit except to remind me to watch out for teachers like that in the future.

Some teachers use the excuse of preparing their students for college for being tough. But that's all that is – an excuse. Back in the middle school, none of the teachers prepared me for high school. Most, in fact, did little more than sign the course selection sheet and say good-bye at the end of the year, having no clue what to expect at the high school. Of course, these teachers were certified for grades K-8 and not secondary schools, but are high school teachers certified to be full-time college professors, either?

Another thing that bothers me is that maybe students shouldn't be prepared for college as of yet. Who, in the beginning of their ninth grade year, is thinking of college on their high list of priorities? Of course, there are always exceptions, but most of the students don't really begin considering colleges and universities until 11th grade. Therefore, why should teachers prepare us for college in ninth grade when they could be expanding our knowledge in the subject matter? As I stated before, in middle school, there was no preparation save for a few assemblies and everyone was fine.

Some teachers are ruined by too much involvement in the extracurricular aspects of their jobs. For example, the Geometry teacher who I had last year, could probably not have cared less about what his teaching duties were. One other teacher even told me that the Geometry teacher was "only here for sports". Sometimes, when I entered the classroom, he was drawing basketball diagrams on the blackboard, explaining to a student. Occasionally, he took five extra minutes of class time to finish his explanation. He also went into long side trips that could last upwards of a half-hour, on a topic related to sports.

Most teachers and parents put too much emphasis on extracurricular activities too. Ever hear of the so-called "soccer moms" that are constantly on the move during the time that there isn't school? I savor the rare time on the weekends and holidays where there isn't a thing to worry about doing, after I've gotten all the homework done and the activities over with. I overhear many students talking about how they don't get home until 9 or 10 o'clock each night because of the numerous sports and activities that they are involved in. My first reaction is "When do they do their homework?"

Giving a heavy load of homework doesn't help things either. One pet peeve I have is that teachers assigning terms to define doesn't help at all. All we had to do in these, assigned by one teacher last year, was to look the terms up in the glossary and copy them to a piece of paper, sometimes using a dictionary to locate elusive definitions. Students got very little from this useless copying. By the next day, I had forgotten most of the terms assigned during one of these assignments. However, at the end of the unit, before the test, I had learned them all by listening in class.

This comes to another important point. Homework is not necessary unless the students in school do not pay attention. It may be that I am different from most people, but I learn best by practicing concepts and facts in class. There are some subjects that require homework, such as math, but in some, such as in social studies, it really doesn't help anything. Nobody likes it when all the teachers seem to "gang up" by assigning so much homework on one night that it is not possible in the time allowed to finish it, let alone do other activities.

Although many teachers are just plain tough, there is a distinct difference between tough teachers and teachers who are just doing their job. For example, my algebra teacher assigns about a half-hour of homework a night. During her class, she goes over concepts, reviews things we learned before, gives tests (not overly difficult) and other things, but I wouldn't consider her tough because she tries to be fair. One day, we drew pictures of trees (which I hope to submit to the *Village* for publication sometime soon) to see what you can find out about yourself, which was a nice break on a Monday morning when everybody is tired.

I've been writing about tough teachers in this essay, but I'd also like to acknowledge the teachers who try to make life a little easier while teaching something at the same time. By *Village* policy, I can't publish any names in this, but the social studies teacher who receives the magazine really did a good job when I had her in ninth grade. Though many people complained about the notes and papers, I found the class rather interesting compared to other subjects. The SAT Prep teacher also makes an effort to make class informative, not a sports training camp.

In conclusion, tough teachers never help their students with their excessive work and poor attitudes. Teachers like this must change their ways to be more successful in educating our children, and less emphasis should be placed on sports and extracurricular activities.

Tough Teachers

I have a mixed opinion on tough teachers. If a teacher is being tough, they could also be trying to be fair. Another time, I could have a tough teacher, and they could be extremely tough. It all depends on the teacher. My French teacher won't let my class have a pleasant conversation without telling us to be quiet. My global studies teacher from last year was a lot of fun to be around. One time he and I got into an argument. I know that he was like that just to keep peace in the classroom and I respect him for that. In general, I think teachers aren't really that tough. Once in while, you might have a teacher that will drive you up a wall. That is going to happen with any student. The only thing you can do, without changing schools, is to put up with it. You won't have the same teacher for life. It's only going to be for one semester. On the other hand, I'm sure everybody has had a teacher that they really enjoyed; a teacher that you couldn't wait to arrive in their class. My English teacher this year is this way. He brings a lot of humor to the classroom. We have a Vocabulary book, and he won't do the synonym and antonym drills because the definitions they give are incorrect.

You have to understand, teachers have their own style of teaching that they have developed over the years, and nobody can change their style. If there is a style you don't care for, don't tell him/her what to do and what not to do. If you feel so strongly about something, become a teacher yourself. The department head rated my English teacher a few days ago, and he got some comments that were terribly incorrect. If our class is doing a grammar exercise, he should say he is going to collect it, even though he isn't going to collect it. That will allow more people to do the work better. Our class tries very hard to get every number right. A department head doesn't know the way we work. She has my English teacher all wrong. It is almost like my English teacher is teaching the way the department head wants him to. It is his class and nobody else's.

My Horse Racing Summer

By Steven Conway

If I haven't mentioned it before, I'm a big fan of horse racing. My mom gets two weeks off from her job in July, so we decided to take two of those days and go to Ladbroke at The Meadows in Pittsburgh and Penn National near Harrisburg. On Tuesday, we went to Ladbroke at The Meadows. It is a harness racing track, which means the driver sits behind the horse in a bike called a sulky and drives the horse around the track. With very few exceptions, all races are at a length of one mile and they usually take two minutes. The gaps between races are only about seventeen minutes, and they had thirteen races on their card. It was the first time I had ever been to a harness racing track. I had a lot of fun, probably because I won the last three races on the card. I don't bet on all the races. I pick a few races to bet on and I only bet the minimum amount - $2. When we got to the tenth race, I kept hearing a guy yell, "Go number four!" It didn't matter if number four was winning or in dead last. Obviously, he was pretty drunk. The card began at 8:30 P.M. and ended around 11:15 P.M.

On Wednesday, my mom and I visited Penn National in Grantville, Pennsylvania. Grantville is a few miles east of Harrisburg. We had to drive on Interstate 81 to get to the racetrack. Penn National offers thoroughbred racing. Thoroughbred racing is when a jockey sits on top of the horse and rides him. Along with harness racing, the jockeys use a whip. For some reason, I didn't do as well at Penn National as I did at The Meadows. I think I only won two races. For a lot of people, driving on an Interstate is pretty mundane. However, when you are driving at eleven o'clock at night surrounded by truckers, and you aren't familiar with the area, it can be exciting.

On a Saturday in August, my mom and I went to a third track. The track was Pocono Downs, or The Downs at Pocono. Pocono Downs is a harness racing track. At all harness racing tracks, there is a car that is used as a gate. The car has "wings" that unfold so the horses can line up. When the car reaches the start point, the wings fold up, and the race begins. Usually, the announcers at the harness racing tracks are a little crazy. Pocono Downs is no exception. The announcer's name is Rich

Harbaugh. He starts off every race with, “There they goooooooooooo!” He really likes to drag out the word go. Pocono Downs had twelve races on their card. I had a lot of fun that night. Of course I won six races including three straight.

Horse racing is an excellent sport and a great hobby. My dad thought that I would be addicted to it, but that’s not the case. I don’t go to the track every chance I get; I only go once a month. There are people I know who do go to the track several times a month who spend thousands of dollars. If they lose, they can’t get it back. I spend $10 a visit. If I win, that’s fine. If I don’t win, I don’t try to spend more money to get the old money back.

School Violence

by Stephen Sokolowski

(The following essay was originally written in response to a college essay prompt in an assignment from one of the writer's classes.)

One issue that is of personal, local, and national concern is violence in schools. With the recent shootings in schools around the country, it is clear that something needs to be done about this important issue. Schools must be made safer, and quality education has to continue in the safe environment that is created.

In order to provide a good education, a school must be safe. One change that should be made is stricter discipline standards in schools. Most criminals who are adults started back when they were children with minor infringements. Although most teachers would not bother with small things, seemingly "little" infractions must not be ignored. This is also of personal concern to me because I have been teased for years and am afraid that someday somebody may go too far and hurt someone. Not only will discipline shape a better person when they are older, but it will make the school environment a safer place.

After the violence problems have been resolved, quality education must continue. Quality education cannot happen when students are afraid that they will be harmed when they are coming out of a class; therefore, distractions and bad influences must be eliminated to ensure a safer learning environment. Furthermore, schools could become safer if parents are involved in their children's activities in school. Since children with good parents generally lead better lives when they grow older, this positive influence would help decrease school violence.

In conclusion, school violence is a major problem in today's schools. Schools must be made safe and education continued afterward. With the help of teachers and students, schools can be made safer and violence eliminated, but only with genuine concern can the problem be resolved completely.

Inside Information

contributed by the *Village* staff

Most people who read *Shoemaker Village* don't seem to understand the amount of energy that goes into a publication of this size. For the past few months, I had been planning to write an article on this, because placing all this information on the Editor's Pages would take several more pages a month. This article was not meant to be a plea for more subscriptions; on the contrary, readership is at an all-time high. But though readership is high, contributions are low to nonexistent.

Many of our readers mistakenly believe that the *Village* was begun in May 1997 to give news to the neighborhood. The truth, in fact, is completely different. *Shoemaker Village* had its origins back near the beginning of the decade. Stephen Sokolowski, the editor, ventured to work with his mom one day, and becoming bored, began to write a story entitled *The Biggest Adventure in History*. During the next three years, the story was left and forgotten about. However, in 1993, Jean Sokolowski, current proofreader, resurrected the story. It then became part of *The Curry Courier*, 7 issues of which were sent to the Curries during those four years, sporadically. *The Biggest Adventure in History* starred the same characters in *The Knights of the Square Table* and was the cornerstone for the magazine. The Neighborhood News did not spring up until 1995 or the next year. When publication shifted from the old Mac to the new IBM computer we acquired in April 1997, the rest was history. But what happened to *The Biggest Adventure in History*? Being sloppily written and wanting to make room for a new story, the Editor made a quick ending to it that June.

Each month, the publication of the *Village* is estimated to take over 30 man-hours, all writing, publishing, and collating involved. Some people still believe, after numerous clarifications, that we are trying to make a profit. We began charging last May, on our one-year anniversary, because the costs of publication were becoming too high for the publisher to bear alone. To give you an idea of the actual cost of one issue, consider the following figures: The paper the magazine is printed on costs $0.15. Since two cartridges of ink incurs about $40 on the bill, and an average of about 20 copies can be

printed out of these, that makes about $2.00 in ink costs per copy. Staples, bags to protect damage, and other miscellaneous charges add about $0.25 to the cost. Added up, that equals about $2.35. And: $1.35 X 30 copies = **$40.50 per month** expense on the part of the editors! Therefore, it is extremely important that if you have a renewal notice attached to the cover of your copy, you renew now! As you can see, your donations are greatly needed to keep the *Village* going.

But more greatly needed than your donations are your contributions. This month, due to a combination of reasons, our page count the day before publication was only 18! Fortunately, thanks to Matthew Care, who came through with a last-minute story even though he was swamped with homework (the last week of the semester is always brutal), we were able to almost double that amount. Unfortunately, many of our normal contributors, other than Matthew, were unable to write articles for various reasons. That's where we need <u>your</u> help. Anyone's contributions would be appreciated. At your request, we will also publish your pieces anonymously. Remember, all articles contributed to The Discussion Forum are published without your name to protect your privacy. Most people have already written stories or compositions in recent times and simply forgotten about them. Articles submitted do not have to be fiction. They can be any type of writing.

Another way that you can greatly help the *Village* is to submit comments to us. We do not receive many comments, a lacking part of our publications. No magazine or newspaper can thrive without its readers' suggestions, so send in your comments. Right now, on our webpages, there is a comment form that you can submit for general comments, along with a specialized survey we will be posting shortly. On the webpages, *The Knights of the Square Table* is also available, since many readers have asked what they can do to acquire a full copy. Jean Sokolowski,our proofreader, right now expects to have the entire novel (55,619 words as of right now) proofread within the next month!

We are also looking for staff writers. These people would write at least one news article, story, Discussion Forum, or other work each month. (As an incentive, you would receive the *Village* free for life, but that's hardly an issue. If you want to do it is what's important. You would receive exposure to

an audience of 75+ readers, growing every day.) Another part that is lacking is the webpages. Because we are so caught up in the publication of the magazine, we cannot devote nearly enough time to the webpages to make them as successful as they should be. Anyone who knows HTML should E-Mail shoevill@aol.com as soon as possible.

Thank you for reading this article, and we hope that you will support the *Village* in the many ways described above. Hopefully, with your contributions, we will be able to make the *Village* a better magazine as it enters into its third year in the coming months.

“And What Did You Do For Christmas?”

by Matthew Care

This was the first Christmas that my family has ever spent at home. When we lived in Baltimore, we would always go to my grandmother’s house. The whole family would come for Christmas morning. When we moved up here, for 7 years we went back to Baltimore on Christmas Eve. Two years ago my grandmother moved out of her house and into an apartment in a retirement community. I’ve been there lots of times, and it’s very nice, but simply not big enough for our traditional family Christmas gathering. This was the first year of my life that I slept in my own bed on December 24. My sister was, of course, home, and we had a very nice time. After breakfast, which we modeled after the one we traditionally have on that day of the year, we packed some things and drove to...somewhere in south-*centralish* PA to my uncle’s house. My grandmother was already there. When we arrived, it was apparent that we had some serious drinking to do if we were going to catch up to everyone else. I demolished some JUMBO shrimp for dinner. Then I found out my cousin got N64 for Christmas. On this particular branch of the family tree I have 3 weeds, I mean cousins. The oldest one (the one with the N64) is, I believe, nine. I guess I’m a glutton for punishment because I purposely put myself in positions to spend time with him. This occasion was the same way. He had a new toy that I wanted to play with, and the adults were too smashed to lavish attention on him--a match made in heaven. We spent the night and had breakfast as a big happy family. Some things never change. My sister had been ready to leave since the sun came up that morning. Our next destination was Harrisburg to see my Dad’s side of the family. Meeting us there would be my sister’s...I’m going to say boyfriend. (She can’t accuse me of anything because it’s head-splittingly obvious that that’s what he is.) I held up the whole process and gave her numerous ulcers. I wanted to get a shower before I met my future brother-in-law, which everyone was quick to reply with, “It’s your own fault you didn’t get one earlier.” Maybe they were right, but that’s not the point. I didn’t want to leave at all. Everyone but the three members of my immediate family was sympathetic.

We arrived at exactly the same time as Eben, the man of the hour. This posed a predicament for me. I didn't get any time with my sister and I could forget about it for the rest of the day. As I've matured, I've gotten used to my relatives and enjoy being around them for the most part, but I've always needed my sister there as a buffer. When everything else got really weird I could go bother her, thus isolating myself from the weirdness. My buffer zone completely disappeared. I was stranded in the desert, surrounded by buzzards that could smell fear. I should have had a nervous breakdown.

I'm one of the young'ins on my Dad's side of the family. My closest elder is two years older than I am. He and two of my other cousins (both college-age) have always kind of stuck together. I'd always figured it was a matter of time before I got in on it. Now I guess I've matured enough to bridge the age gap. So with my sister busy I wasn't totally lost. I had a good time hanging out with cousins. We're a close family and we get together for lots of occasions. I can't recall even a birthday that I've enjoyed as much as that Christmas gathering. It put a whole new face on going to see our relatives.

I had school the next day, December 27. But I got sick that night and when I woke up I felt too bad to go to school. So I finished out with a two day extension on my Christmas break. Looking at the big picture, it was a very happy and eventful Christmas. Oh yeah, and I got some gifts too.

The Knights of the Square Table

Chapter 15, Part I

It was dark now. Through the whole day, the party had followed the trolls. Since they were taller, their longer legs seemed to carry them faster than the group, and they had fallen slightly behind. Chapin estimated that they were at least a mile behind the trolls. Although they could no longer see them, they knew that they were on the right trail because of the footprints and the tracks of the few horses that they had with them.

The next day was just as difficult. The party continued to trudge to the west. They fell even farther behind. As a result, Christopher recommended that they eat from their backpacks while they were walking, so as to make up lost time.

This proved to be almost impossible at the pace they were walking. So with meager snacks, they continued onward, conserving as many of their two-week rations as they could and trying to walk fast at the same time. Since it had been six days since they had left the castle, they were concerned about how much longer the trek would continue. If tomorrow wasn't the end of the chase, the long walk back would be hard unless they could find some better transportation.

Near sunset, they spotted the troll camp on the horizon. They had traveled at least thirty miles that day at the brisk pace they were walking. Since the camp was so close, however, one of them was forced to stay up in shifts to keep watch.

Fortunately there was no activity during the night and therefore no problems for the party. The trolls slept late as they usually did. That gave the party some well-needed rest, but it was short-lived. Before 10:00, the trolls were on the move again.

The trolls continued onward through the day at top speed, much faster than the day before. As a result, the party fell behind again even though they had caught up to the trolls the day before. That night, they were so tired that they did not even attempt to catch up. They were now past the limit that their supplies would last if they returned to the city, so they began a strict rationing that would stretch their supplies at least twice as long. Unfortunately this had debilitating effects on them, and they were no longer able to travel at full speed.

By the next day, they were almost a full day behind the trolls if they had continued on their path. Dave had suggested turning back, but the party decided against it, warning him that in the two and a half weeks that it would take them to get back here, Mike might already be dead. Dave became silent and trudged along with the rest of the party.

The night before had brought a terrible rainstorm. Luckily the tracks that the trolls left behind in the muddy earth became more distinct, and before long, on the tenth day, they came upon a strange structure. It was built over the river, which Christopher surmised was the Hidden Forest River, the same one they had passed a while ago.

"The trolls might be in there," Dave suggested.

"They may," Christopher replied. "We need to think of what we'll do if there are."

"What if there aren't?" Katie questioned wearily. "I don't know how long I can hold out on these rations."

"Now look," Christopher said, ignoring her comment, "if this is a troll stronghold, we need to sneak in. It would be much easier to get away undetected for a while than to trek for a week with the trolls right on our heels."

"Exactly," Matt, who had been quiet from the lack of energy lately, said. Everybody turned toward him, waiting for him to continue.

"If I may, I've had a few years of military strategy when I was in school."

"Go ahead," Christopher said. "You know better than I do." He stepped away so Matt could speak.

"See? The...thing is built over the river so that boats can go under it and dock. There must be a door there. All we have to do is somehow get under that structure and sneak in. The trolls probably think that nobody can get under there when there's not a shipment coming."

"How do you propose we do that without a boat?" Katie said. "There's no way that we can get under. The structure is huge!"

"That would be a problem," Matt commented. "But why do we need an entire ship when we can just use a small raft?"

"He's right," Dave said in awe. "Look!" He pointed at the stream. Bobbing in it were small pieces of debris, from what looked like the remains of a town destroyed by the trolls. Occasionally a piece of driftwood floated by. "We can collect the wood and build a raft."

"When we get inside, we'll have to figure out where Mike is," Matt continued. "There is probably a dungeon under that thing. Let's hope he's there so we don't have to go searching the entire place."

"We'd better get started collecting wood," Christopher suggested. "It'll take a lot to build a raft. We'll run out of food and worse will probably happen to Mike if we tarry."

"Come on," Dave said, walking toward the river. Even the map that Christopher possessed did not show its source, though. Judging by the breadth of the river, they expected that it wound north for a while, shrinking and expanding with the seasons as the snow melted. Right now, since it hadn't rained in a while, the river was low. They spent the rest of the afternoon gathering logs. A chill was in the air, and the days were becoming short. The sparse deciduous trees were beginning to show a bit of color around them, and the night was cold enough that they were forced to use the blankets that were in their packs.

When the sun rose on September 15, an unnatural stillness permeated the camp. Dave was the first up and hurried to the others to awaken them. They, too, felt it but could not determine its source. Not an animal stirred, not a bird chirped. Although Matt suggested that the birds might simply already have migrated southward, his suspicion was proven wrong just a few minutes later when eerie reddish clouds began moving in.

"What's happening?" Katie fearfully asked.

"Hurry! We need to finish the raft and get Mike out of there!" Dave had never worked so hard before in his life. With all of them helping, they soon bound the wood together with some branches and pieces of cloth and then hurried to the river. It took at least a half-hour to drag the raft to the water's edge, and by then, the strange clouds had overtaken the party, obscuring the sky.

"Get the raft into the water," Christopher yelled as the wind began to blow. The group struggled as hard as they could and finally managed to pull the heavy raft into the river. It took all their strength to hold it against the current, which was now very brisk. Finally they jumped on and let go.

It didn't take them long to get under the troll complex, which was at least several hundred feet wide. As they were floating by, they saw a metal door, with what looked like security devices, on their right. A small ledge about two feet higher from the water was their only way of reaching the door.

"What do we do?" Dave said, getting ready to jump.

"We have to try," Christopher said. "Hurry, before we pass!"

"How will we get back on the raft?" Katie asked as Matt made the leap, almost missing the overhang and falling into the water. He stumbled forward. Dave jumped next. Christopher replied as he jumped, "We'll worry about that later!"

Fortunately they all made it across the water in one piece and not a moment too soon. The raft continued on its journey, and a few seconds later, smashed into the wall. The group watched as its remains floated downstream.

Meanwhile, outside the structure, unknown to the party, the strange clouds were slowly enveloping the sky. A dark figure approached the building, gave a special knock, and entered mysteriously when the door opened.

Under the structure, Christopher and Dave struggled with the door as Matt watched a few feet down on the narrow ledge. To their despair, they found the door locked. ("What do you expect?" Katie asked, angry at bruising her knee jumping off the raft.)

"Use the Stones," Mike suggested.

"Good idea," Christopher replied, ashamed that he had not thought of that sooner. Katie held the Hadar Stone up in front of her, and the metal door burst open, flying off the hinges and back into the wall with a loud BANG! Christopher and Katie quickly rushed back from the door and waited to see if anyone had heard. When it appeared that they had not, the five sneaked in quietly.

They were in what seemed to be a large storage room. All around them, huge wooden crates were piled up. To their right, another metal door was present. The room was made of metal, which to Dave seemed slightly out of place with their time. Although Katie also thought it strange, she said nothing.

As they were walking toward the far door, a crack of thunder sounded, reminding the group of the impending storm outside. Everyone proceeded in total silence. This door was also locked. Katie reminded Christopher of the strange clouds outside, and they agreed that it might signify an evil presence. Matt warned them not to use the Stones to open the door, and they were forced to resort to old-fashioned means. Ripping the tops off of several crates, they formed a battering ram and crashed into the door. It bent inward but didn't budge. Luckily it only took only one more try until the door gave way. This time, it simply fell forward without much noise.

In front of them was a large hall. To their left was a stone stairwell leading upward. Wooden doors lined the sides of the hall. At the end of the hall was another door. Torches provided some dim light for the explorers. They stepped back into the cargo hold, where they were now sure there was no one present, and debated what to do next.

"Which way should we go?" Matt asked Christopher. "Mike could be anywhere."

"If we go up, we might find the purpose of this whole structure," Chapin replied. "But Mike might be locked in the dungeon, if there is one."

"The dungeon would most likely be below ground," Dave said, staring downward, his eyes temporarily fixed on the sacred sword he carried.

"Here's an idea," Katie suggested. "Let's split up. It's very unlikely that the trolls know that we're here anyway, and maybe we'll find both things we're looking for."

"I think we should stay together," Chapin said. "It would be dangerous if we separated in this eerie place." Thunder with a pitch they had never heard before rumbled in the distance. It couldn't be natural was the thought in everybody's minds. But everyone was silent.

"No," Dave said resolutely. "We have a better chance splitting up. We'll make less noise, and if one group gets caught, the other will be free to find them."

"I agree," Matt said. "Let's press on."

"OK," Chapin said hesitantly. "I'll go with Katie. Is that all right with you?" Katie and Dave nodded their agreement. Christopher and Matt made no comment.

"It's settled. We'll go forward through the hall. You guys go upstairs. We'll meet back here at noon."

Quickly they departed to the routes that they had planned. Dave, Matt, and Christopher headed up the stairwell. After climbing one level, they noticed that the stairwell rose a few more stories. On the floor of the fortress that they were in, which still appeared to be below ground due to the lack of windows, there was another hallway, but there was no door on the end. Suddenly, a troll walked out from one of the side doors. Quickly, the three hid beneath the staircase. There were only inches to spare.

After a few tense moments, the troll went down the stairs. After waiting another minute to make sure that it did not return, Christopher, Dave, and Matt crawled out from under the stairs and ascended to the next floor.

The next level had even more rooms, but they knew that they were above ground because a

window at the far end of the hall looked out on the plains. Continuing upward, they came to the top of the stairs. A long, bare, windowless hall that was poorly lit stretched in front of them. This hall contained no doors, just a sole portrait of what looked like a troll on the far wall.

"If we continue through this hall, we won't have any cover," Matt whispered. "The trolls could capture us at any moment."

"We have to," Dave said. "Let's get to the bottom of this."

Christopher counted with his hand, and with the count of three the group dashed across the hall to the other side. When they were closer, they discovered that there actually was a door on that wall, hidden by the portrait.

Slipping in the door, Dave heard voices and motioned to the others to be quiet.

"What's wrong?" Christopher asked Dave, puzzled.

"Don't you hear the voices?" he replied. But listening again, he heard nothing. "Never mind. Let's go on."

With a shrug, Christopher led the party into the next room, which seemed to be a torture chamber. "Explains the long hall," Matt muttered. Inside the chamber were all sorts of devices, ranging from a guillotine on the far end of the room to an assortment of locks and chains close to where they stood.

"Just be thankful that the trolls aren't using these on us," Christopher commented.

"This is eerie," Christopher said, stopping.

"What?" Dave inquired.

"Where are the trolls? The only one we've seen so far is the one that ran downstairs past us." He stopped. There was total silence. Not a single drop of water was heard. Suddenly, there was a loud crash and Dave jumped. It was thunder from outside. Again, the pitch of the thunder was strangely warped.

"Keep moving," Matt said uneasily. Thunder continued to boom in the distance. Moving through the chamber, they noticed that everything seemed to be arranged meticulously. There wasn't a drop of blood (a comforting sign to Dave), a single tool out of place, or a single candle (of the few that there were in the room) that was unlit. Hurrying, they passed through the far door just in time to hear it slam behind them.

Trying the doorknob, a grave look overcame Christopher that, without any verbal communication, seemed to say the same thing to both Matt and Dave: *the door was locked*. Thunder continued to rumble in the background.

The room they were now in seemed even stranger. There wasn't an object, save the door and stairs leading upward to the left, in the entire room! It measured at least thirty or forty feet from end to end.

Scurrying through that room, the party continued on their trek. It had now been at least an hour since they had entered the fortress. When they reached the top of the stairs, they gasped in astonishment. The room looked like a church! There were several rows of pews on the sides, with a large, bare, stone altar in the front. A black cape was draped on some sort of chair behind the altar. Around it were candles, all red. The candles were not lit, the only light weakly shining in from the drab windows behind them. There was not a troll in sight.

"This is something I've never seen before," Christopher commented, astounded. "What could this be used for?"

"It looks like some sort of place for worship," Matt replied, looking around and inspecting the strange objects in the area.

"Worship of what?"

All three of them realized it at the same time and blurted out, "Yavin!"

"I just thought that the trolls were loyal to Yavin to fight for him," Christopher said. "But this means they have some deeper drive for their actions."

"Is Yavin's power that great that the trolls, his servants, have to worship him?" Dave asked.

"It very well might be," Christopher replied, continuing his inspection.

A chill went down Dave's spine. "Let's get out of here and continue on," Matt suggested, and the other two were none too slow to follow. They attempted to leave through a door in front of them, but upon closer inspection, they found it locked.

"Stones?" Dave asked.

"Too risky," Christopher replied. "Let's just ram it open. Look, the pews are pretty small and aren't nailed to the ground."

The three of them got behind one of the back pews, and, with a running start, slammed it into the

wooden door, which crumpled on impact. Brushing themselves off, Christopher and Matt, with another push, slid the object back to where it was, in case any trolls should come by. Afterward, Dave pointed out the fact that the broken door was a giveaway, and Christopher laughed rather sheepishly.

They ascended the staircase and came to a halt. In front of them stretched a great hall. It was adorned with robes and decorations, each bearing the symbol that they had seen three months ago during their journey through the Calhorn foothills.

The group sprinted through the hall, but there was still not a troll to be found. At the far end was a window, which looked out on the plains far below, and yet another wooden door. Fortunately this one was open, and they walked in. Inside was a large bed, with a wooden cabinet containing robes bearing the same seal as in the hall. There was another door on the far end. A voice seemed to be emanating from it, and they followed, opening the door slowly.

They were amazed at what they saw. It was a large auditorium, with perhaps at least a thousand stone seats rounding a stage in the middle. Someone was speaking on stage while several hundred trolls listened attentively. The door opened onto what appeared to be a balcony overlooking the events. They slipped quietly onto the balcony and hid behind some robes on the wall. The speaker continued.

"Our Master has become angry with us," the troll was saying. "The elementals have been at large for too long. He threatens to disband us and suspend our rewards!" An extremely low-pitched murmur echoed through the crowd.

When the trolls were quiet, he continued. "The raid on our friends to the east has failed miserably. There are even reports that their knights may have infiltrated this fortress!" The crowd let out another angry murmur, but it ceased quickly. Another boom of thunder sounded outside.

"We must not let this happen!" the troll roared. "If the elementals are allowed to reach the castle, we risk losing everything!" The trolls near the front roared with anger. "That is why we will not be defeated again!"

"What will we do?" one of the trolls roared.

"Tomorrow, we attack the town again, but this time we will bring three times the men and utterly destroy those humans once and for all! If we can take the town, the world is next!" More noise followed.

"We will leave at dawn," the troll continued, now with a more subdued tone. "Get prepared. Our master has shipped us only the best supplies for dinner tonight. GET MOVING!" The back rows immediately began to file out of the auditorium through the lone door below them. Christopher, Dave, and Matt were careful to stay concealed in the garments until most had gone past.

"The knights...," Matt whispered. "They're all going to be killed! There's no way we can withstand three times the attack they made last time!"

"We have to warn them," Dave said urgently.

"How?" Christopher suggested, almost sarcastically. "It would take us weeks to get back."

"Quiet," Matt suddenly shushed. "Listen!"

Surely enough, they heard voices. One was that of the speaker they had heard just a few minutes ago. It was coming from the room behind them where they had entered the balcony. They also heard a second voice that struck fear into their hearts.

"Has everything been prepared?" the unknown voice asked in a low, eerie tone.

"Yes, my Master," the speaker replied. "This time we will crush them and put an end to our resistance."

"You had better not fail this time," the voice warned sternly.

"Of...course, Master. We will emerge victorious."

"What has become of the boy?"

"He's still being detained in the dungeon. What should I do with him?"

"He is a danger to us and our plans. Eliminate him."

"If I may, Master, I think it is better that we keep him and torture him. He may divulge valuable information to us."

"That is none of your concern. He is a threat."

"But Master..."

"Wait. I may have a use for him after all. We can make a trade. One of the others for him. They won't want to see him suffer. But we must make them see that we mean what we say. Take him to the torture chamber until I arrive."

"Certainly, Master. And one more thing..."

"My time is limited!" the voice shrieked, taking an angry tone. "Hurry up!"

"We have been discovering shipping crates that have been destroyed. We suspect that Kaham and his cronies did it."

"Very well. Take them to the dungeon until I can question them personally. And that may be a VERY long time..." The voice laughed maliciously.

"Yes, Master. I'll go and take the boy to the torture chamber."

Christopher heard footsteps moving away. The voices ceased. They were about to reveal themselves and find Mike when they heard footsteps in the bedroom.

The voice was that of the 'Master' that they had heard before. But this time, there was nobody around to hear him, even though he was talking.

"Yes," he declared with a sinister laugh to his supposedly empty chamber. "I will destroy those idiots and finally receive my reward!" A strange tapping emanated from the chamber. Presently the voice continued.

"Oh, yes, Master. I am on my way."

"Who's he talking to?" Matt whispered. "And who's he calling Master?"

"Did you hear them? They just went to torture Mike! We have to do something!" Dave hysterically whispered.

The voice continued. "Yes, sir. I am the great Yavin!" This sentence struck fear into their hearts. "Wait! I sense that they are already here!"

"Yavin's in that room?" Christopher whispered in fear. "Don't make a sound!"

Before anyone could reply, a loud trumpet call sounded from below. Footsteps reverberated in the hall. Thunder sounded outside. Soon shouts broke out, though one voice blared above all the others. "The captives have escaped! Everyone search the fortress immediately!" The racket continued as trolls poured into the auditorium below.

"Let's get out of here!" Christopher yelled, no longer worried that he would be overheard. He ran toward the bedroom where Yavin had just been, but there was nobody in sight. They could feel the aura of his power retreating.

"Chapin and Katie, they're going after Mike!" Dave exclaimed.

"Hurry! What should we do?" Christopher hastily asked Matt.

"We need to save them, but we can't risk being caught. Maybe they've already escaped. We can't go downstairs. Let's head up and get out of here!"

"We can't! What about them?" Christopher yelled.

"We have to save ourselves! If we're captured with them, the power of the elementals will vanish!"

"Fine!" Dave said. "Stop talking. Let's go!"

They hurried out the bedroom door and into the hall. Making sure there were no trolls around, they turned right and entered the auditorium. The trolls that had been there only a few seconds ago were now gone, searching in other areas. The trio hurried toward the stage, where they were sure there would be more stairs.

They were right. The trumpets continued to blare as they ascended a wooden ladder to a trap door above. They hastily scurried through and closed the door. Looking around, they were stunned.

"We're on the roof!" Dave said. All around them stretched countryside for miles and miles. Not a thing moved. Lightening flashed from the strange red clouds. They turned just in time to see a black, cloaked figure moving toward them. Trolls surged onto the roof. "Nobody move!" one of them shouted. Christopher realized in horror that they had been captured.