Shoemaker Village

Volume 36 - March 2000



VANDALISM RETURNS IN MIDST OF WINTER STORMS!



Religion's Effects on Children Takes Center Stage in *The Discussion Forum!*

PLUS!

-*Evan's Quest* continues - 7 pages included this month!

-*The Knights of the Square Table* moves on as the knights try to survive the ravages of the trolls!

-Matthew Care to step down - details on the Editor's Pages!

-Amanda Dilks and Steve Conway contribute to The Discussion Forum!

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*This article has been left uncensored. See the Editor's Pages before reading this inclusion.

Editor's Pages

Information you should know

Welcome to the March edition of *Shoemaker Village*! Throughout the past month, we have labored long and hard to bring you this issue of the *Village*, and we hope you'll submit comments to let us know if our work is appreciated.

To begin this month, a long-time *Village* staff member has decided to relinquish his responsibilities, at least for the current time. Effective February 29, 2000, Matthew Care stepped down from his position as Assistant Editor. Matthew, due to unforeseen circumstances, had been unable to contribute any articles to the *Village* over the past few months. However, Matthew has hinted to us before that he may, in the future, return to his former position. Currently, however, Matthew will remain on *Village* staff as a story contributor.

You can find Matt's letter printed on the next page. We would like to warn you that this article is completely uncensored. Because of his complaints about *Village* censorship, our proofreader, **against the Editor's suggestions**, decided to publish his article in its entirety. In it, he explains the reasons for his sudden change of heart and his future plans. Amanda Dilks, one of our current storywriters, has volunteered to step up to fill Matt's position. We would like to welcome Amanda to her new position beginning next month. I'm sure you will find many great additions to the *Village* over the next few months.

Daniel Burgess, who joined the *Village* staff last month with the addition of *Evan's Quest*, has again continued his tradition of excellence with the inclusion of two new chapters this month. When the novel began last month, it received rave reviews from many of our readers. For those who missed last month's installment, you can now find it on our website, located at **http://members.aol.com/shoevill.** If you have any new comments on this story, please submit them through our webpages or by dropping a note in our mailbox.

On the topic of comments on the *Village,* it is impossible to determine the popularity of certain sections of the magazine without readers submitting their views on our publication. Every comments is always read, considered, and answered. With the failure of last month's survey attempt, we were unable to gauge our readers' reactions to key inclusions such as *Chicky Run* and The Discussion Forum. Again, it is extremely important that you tell us your views, because we cannot exist without hearing what you think. We hope to be hearing from you in the next month.

Our website, mentioned numerous times in recent issues, has again grown with the addition of several new sections to the pages. Besides being updated biweekly with the latest news and most recent issues of the *Village*, the site also features things

that are not able to be published in the *Village*. We hope that you decide to check out our website to stay in touch with *Village* staff. Additionally, you can submit articles by emailing us at **ShoemakerVillage@aol.com**.

Because we received no comments on last month's edition of the puzzle page, we were unable to determine how it was received among our readers. We have included a different type of puzzle for this month's issue. To challenge all the mathematically gifted, we have included a "number square". Instructions are provided on the Puzzle Page.

In other news this month, *The Knights of the Square Table* continues. Throughout the past two years, we have brought you this story in its entirety, beginning with the June 1997 issue. (Of course, if you weren't a subscriber back then, you can download the most recent copy of the novel from our website.) This 101,614-word novel is still in development for each issue of the *Village*! This month's edition features how the knights attempt to survive a battle in the arctic region of the world. Be sure not to miss out; it's never too late to start reading!

That's all for this month! We hope you'll stay active in the *Village* thoughout the month and hope you'll still be reading in April!

A Letter from the Assistant Editor

by Matthew Care

A question. To be, or not to be: that is the question. Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, or to take arms against a sea of troubles, and by opposing end them? Do you understand?

My outrageous fortune is this role that I have voluntarily taken on and can no longer live up to. The slings and arrows are quivered on the tip of Steve's tounge waiting for me to screw up, not pull my weight. And honestly, do I blame him for it? Yes. But should I? Of course not. I learned something very interesting in Global Studies yesterday. Mr. Touchton, who is a truly incredible teacher by the way, emphasized that, economically, people are resources. If you manufacture something, and the wood or the steel breaks, you replace it. It's not doing its job so you replace it with something that will. Steve takes the *Village* very seriously. He is a precise and calculating person who starts and ends with the bottom line. As far as I know, he has no emotions to appeal to, but I know I can count on him to do his part, no less, and no more. Here is the bottom line. In the last three months I've contributed only one story, which, while mildly successful, I'm not proud to put my name to in its current stage. In short, I've been dragging everyone down with me. I'm not doing my job, and so Steve wanted to replace me. Giving me the boot is a viable solution, but I am not ready to go.

Many of you will chalk this up to avarice and selfishness. "You won't contribute, but you don't want to let a more competent person do your job. Well, that's just tough!" Folks, it hasn't always been this way. I've given a lot in my time. And pound for pound my stories have more entertainment value than *The Knights of the Square Table*--not to make it personal or start a war. I think that's just a fact. But there's been a lot *stuff* going on in my life recently. Some good and joyous, and some not. I'm not disclosing details, and I do NOT hereby permit Steve to do so either. But there's a number of factors, not all of which are identifiable, that have caused me to neglect my duties and produce a very poor quantity of stories (and Steve is more concerned with quantity than quality–and I don't care if that sounds like a personal attack; we fight about that constantly). But people, making an example of me is not the answer!

Yes, we COULD crucify me, point and say, "Look at the shame he has brought on himself," and get someone new to be the Assistant Editor, but, regardless of how it may seem, I do like the *Village*, and when I know people are reading something that I wrote, that's a good feeling. What I have is a sort of confused love, like an abusive parent. There are times when I wish Steve and his damn *Village* and his

damn deadlines and his damn scornful tone would go straight to hell. (What a world we live in, where we, in the interest of the people, must naively assume that you, the competent, mature reader would rather not be subjected to foul language. Some of the best words in English are profane! But that's a whole different article...). But at the heart of the matter, I know there would be something missing in my life if not for, at the very least, the *stress* caused by my obligations! And what's more, should the time come that I *want* to express myself to a relatively large body of people in an unassuming platform, what am I going to do without even the OPTION of having Steve print it! The *Village* really isn't such a bad thing. I neglect it. I occasionally denounce it. But I love it. I like the idea that my words can go somewhere. They need not remain stagnant in a computer file. YOU can read them.

That was all vital background information. It brings me to the read point of this address. I'm tired. I'm very tired–of Steve, of being called a bum, of being second-guessed, misunderstood, and undermined. I'm tired of people asking me, "why?" And I'm tired of explain my actions, or inactions, in heartfelt, but misconstrued little compositions like this every month I drop the ball. Personal propaganda–that's all this is. I am ready to admit that someone else could do my job better. But I am suggesting that rather than get an entirely new person, we just get a new *me*. When I approached Steve with my proposal, I used the word "hiatus" repeatedly. Hiatus–that's just what I need. I am going to get away from the *Village* for a while. I don't want to be consulted on how much of this story we should publish per month. I don't to give input on pricing, and I don't want the frustration of seeing my articles edited and censored, which will never go away, because I despise censorship. I want to take a break from it all! So, I am leaving. I will, at least theoretically, be recognized as a staff member, but I will be inactive. I will pay for every issue that I do not contribute to, like a regular subscriber. Furthermore, I will not return until such time as I have my life defragmented and I am certain that I can deliver a quantity and quality of writing becoming of my position. I don't know how long it will take. Two months from now. Three. Five. I don't know. In my absence I will be quietly working on the many pieces that I have been inspired to write, but never get around to. I will amass a body of writing that I can be proud of, and guarantee that my first months back will be grand in caliber. But until these are certainties in my mind, I will do nothing. The next time you see my name signed to a *Village* article, it will be on the day of my triumphant return. This is not an excuse to quietly pass into history. I am not trying to pull one over on anybody. I have intent to resume my duties, and I will follow through. Until then, I leave you.

Thank you for your tolerance. Thank you for your compliments. Thank you for your criticism. They are all appreciated, particularly the first two. Most of all, thank

you for supporting the *Village*. Continue to read! I hope that all of you will still be subscribing when I contribute my next article.

Matthew Care
Assistant Editor, *Shoemaker Village*

Gone Fishin'

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The April issue of Shoemaker Village will be published on Friday, March 31, 2000.
All contributions for the next issue must be received by Monday, March 27, 2000.

Upcoming topics in **The Discussion Forum:**
April 2000: [To be determined]

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Puzzle Page

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1			11	4		10	8	52
10		2		1	7	10	9	56
10			9	5	7		11	55
2		9	4		7	8	5	52
	9			7	10	5	9	63
4		6	9	5	1	12	8	47
46	51	46	68	36	52	63	60	48

Try to fill in the missing numbers.
The missing numbers are integers between 1 and 12.
The numbers in each row add up to totals to the right.
The numbers in each column add up to the totals along the bottom.
The diagonal lines also add up the totals to the right.

Neighborhood News

March 2000

WINTER ARRIVES AFTER FOUR-YEAR BREAK

During the 1995-1996 winter, the region received its largest snowfall totals ever, at over sixty inches of snow, most coming from an enormous blizzard that dumped 29" of snow in one night. Since then, however, the area has experienced a reprieve from winter weather, until this January.



Though the area hadn't experienced a major snowstorm in years, this scene appeared four times this winter.

On January 1, 2000, the temperature soared to over 60 degrees, leaving many to speculate on the possibility of yet another winter without ice or snow. Fortunately, however, their luck was about to change with the first snowstorm of the year on January 20.

That storm dumped four inches of snow on the area and closed schools. Combined with a major blizzard that arrived four days later, over a week of vacation was had by most residents of the region. Just as the temperature inched above freezing, another storm hit, recoating the area in white.

The storm total for this year has reached almost fourteen inches. However, despite the copious amounts of snowfall, the recorded total remains just short of the average winter snowfall of 22.4 inches at Philadelphia International Airport.

As if the large January snows weren't enough, winter broke on February 20 as temperatures climbed near 70 degrees. Since then, the cold weather hasn't returned, and the temperature has yet to fall below freezing.

We'll be sure to keep you updated on the effects of winter's last stand in April's issue.

VANDALS HAVEN'T DISAPPEARED YET

Since the major acts of vandalism stopped at the end of last year, scattered incidents have led us to believe that the vandals are still among us. The picture below now proves this fact.

The mound of snow below that lay in ruins was an igloo, built by neighbor Christopher Sokolowski. After the major snowstorm on January 25, Christopher had built the igloo and the connecting tunnel visible in the upper photo.



This close-up shows the devastation that could not have been caused by a mere collapse.

The incident occurred sometime during the day of February 15, almost three weeks after the structure was constructed. Fortunately, temperatures rose as high as forty degrees the next day. This, however, did not lessen Christopher's anger at the incident.



The footprints visible in this picture clearly show that this incident was an act of vandalism.

"I spent a lot of time building that igloo. Stupid vandals!" he exclaimed, disgusted, during a recent interview.

The most recent act of vandalism before

the igloo was destroyed was when the Hoffman family's car had been egged in the mornings. Shortly after the incidents occurred, the vandals vanished without a trace.

Humor from the Village Square

ADVENTURE PRANK BACKFIRES

ATHENS (Reuters) **-** Greek police arrested a busload of Swedish tourists Thursday after two tour guides staged a mock armed abduction that was mistaken for the real thing. Police said that the coach, taking employees of Swedish telecoms giant Ericsson on an excursion to the coastal resort of Loutraki, had been the subject of a staged abduction, set up as an "adventure"for the Swedes.

The prank misfired when a passerby notified the police that a car with two hooded men brandishing sawed-off shotguns had hijacked the bus and abducted a female passenger.

Crack police units rushed to the scene and apprehended the supposed hijackers, who explained to authorities that the abduction was part of a mock adventure exercise and the abductee and tour group leaders were in on the joke.

All concerned were taken to a Corinth police station for questioning and prosecutors were considering whether to press firearms or other charges.

WRONG NUMBER SPURS COCAINE BUST

GEORGE TOWN, Cayman Islands (Reuters) **-** Two Canadians looking to buy cocaine in the Cayman Islands got a dramatically wrong number and ended up talking to a top anti-drug officer. They also got busted.

Jason Robertson, 26, and Thomas Valliere, 24, pleaded guilty on Wednesday to trying to buy cocaine from an undercover police officer.

Jeff Jackson, deputy chief of the combined Police and Customs Drugs Task Force for the Cayman Islands, testified in court that he got a call on his cellular phone on Dec. 22 from someone asking for "Kennedy."

He told the caller he had the wrong number and hung up, but a few seconds later, the phone rang again with the same caller on the line.

When Jackson repeated that the caller had the wrong number, a man he identified as Robertson insisted it was right and asked to buy cocaine.

An undercover policeman telephoned back to set up the sale. When he met the pair and handed over the cocaine -- actually nondairy coffee creamer -- police swooped in.

Robertson said in court that he was drunk when he made the calls. He and Valliere were fined $1,000; but since they had failed to actually buy cocaine, they were not charged with possession.

A MUSTACHE CAN COST YOU BEER

LONDON (Reuters) - The sight of British men in pubs wiping the froth from their mustaches after drinking a pint may soon be a thing of the past. According to brewer Guinness, they are wasting nearly half a million pounds of their stout a year.

New scientific research commissioned by Guinness (DGE.L) showed that among them, an estimated 92,370 mustachioed Guinness drinkers lose up to 162,719 pints of the black stuff each year -- worth some 423,070 pounds ($675,900).

"A genuine mustache has been proven to contribute to a significant Guinness wastage, as a result of inter-fiber retention at every sip," the company said in a statement.

For those trying to count the cost of their mustache, the average Guinness drinker with a mustache like sports presenter Des Lynam is losing over 12 pounds a year, while those with a goatee like pop singer George Michael are nine

pounds out of pocket.

A full beard could cost you around 23 pounds in lost Guinness -- although the research showed that the amount varies according to the thickness of the facial hair.

DIVER WHO FAKED DEATH MUST REPAY SEARCHERS

MIAMI (Reuters) - A scuba diver who admitted faking his death to collect on an insurance policy was ordered on Thursday to reimburse rescue crews who searched in vain for him in the seas off Florida.

Kerry Stephen Scheele went diving for lobster from a boat off Key West on August 8, 1998. When he failed to return, friends called the Coast Guard, which joined divers from the Monroe County Sheriff's Office in a search that lasted several days.

Scheele later admitted he had swum ashore, ditched his scuba gear in a mangrove stand, and hitchhiked to Wisconsin to see his girlfriend, knowing he would be presumed to have drowned.

Scheele's girlfriend and father were beneficiaries of his $1 million life insurance policy and Scheele persuaded the girlfriend to file an insurance claim for the money.

He pleaded guilty earlier this month to insurance fraud and grand theft. At his sentencing on Thursday, he was ordered to serve two years on probation, undergo psychiatric counseling and pay $55,000 in restitution to the Coast Guard, sheriff's office and insurance investigators.

He was also ordered to pay $1,000 to cover the cost of extraditing him to Florida from Wisconsin, where he was discovered alive and well 18 days after his disappearance. Scheele told authorities he was in the midst of a divorce and had staged his death "because he needed time to think," Florida Insurance Commissioner Bill Nelson said.

Coast Guard spokesman Scott Carr said diverting resources to investigate hoaxes puts lives at risk in real emergencies.

"This case sends a message that neither insurance fraud nor such blatant disregard for emergency resources will be tolerated," Nelson said.

IF YOU'VE GOT TO GO, START EARLY

This story is about a rather strange reply for a campground reservation. It is said to be true, but you be the judge.

A woman who was rather old-fashioned, delicate, and elegant - especially in her language - was planning a week's vacation in Florida so she wrote to a particular campground and asked for a reservation.

She wanted to make sure the campground was fully equipped, but didn't quite know how to ask about the toilet facilities. She just couldn't bring herself to write the word "TOILET" in her letter. After much deliberation, she finally came up with the old-fashioned term "BATHROOM COMMODE." But when she wrote that down, she still thought she was being too forward. So, she started all over again, rewrote the letter and referred to the bathroom commode merely as the B.C. "Does the campground have it's own B.C.?" is what she actually wrote.

Well, the campground owner wasn't old-fashioned at all and when he got the letter, he just couldn't figure out what the woman was talking about. That B.C. business really stumped him.

After worrying about it for a while, he showed the letter to several campers, but they couldn't imagine what the lady meant either. So the campground owner, finally coming to the conclusion that the lady must be asking about the location of the local Baptist Church, sat down and wrote the following reply:

"Dear Madam: I regret very much for the delay in answering your letter. I now take the pleasure in informing you that a B.C. is located nine miles north of the campground and is capable of seating 250 people at one time. I admit it is quite a distance away if you are in the habit of going regularly, but no doubt you will be pleased to know that a great number of people

usually take their lunches along and make a day of it. They usually arrive early and stay late."

"The last time my wife and I went was six years ago and it was so crowded that we had to stand up the whole time we were there. It may interest you to know that right now, there is a supper being planned to raise money to buy more seats. They're going to hold it in the basement of the B.C."

"I would like to say it pains me very much not to be able to go more regularly but it is sure no lack of desire on my part. As we grow older, it seems to be more of an effort, particularly in cold weather."

"If you do decide to come down to our campground, perhaps I could go with you the first time you go, sit with you, and introduce you to all the other folks."

"Remember, this is a friendly community."

FBI

Three men were at the FBI Building for a job interview. The first man walked into the office. The interviewing FBI agent said: "To be in the FBI you must be loyal, dedicated, and give us your all. Your wife is in the next room. I want you to go in there and shoot her with this gun." The man took the gun, hesitated, and said: "Sorry, I can't do it."

The next interviewee came into the office. The Agent said: "To be in the FBI you must be loyal, dedicated, and give us your all. Your wife is in the next room. I want you to go in there and shoot her with this gun." The man took the gun, walked into the room, then walked out. "Sorry," he said.

The last man came into the office. The interviewer said: "To be in the FBI you must be loyal, dedicated, and give us your all. Your wife is in the next room. I want you to go in there and shoot her with this gun." The man took the gun and went into the room. The Agent heard six shots, silence, then a lot of screaming. The man came out of the room and said: "Someone loaded the gun with blanks, so I beat her to death with the curtain railing!"

ENEMY OF STATE

The phone rings at KGB headquarters. They answer : "Hello?"

"Hello. Is this the KGB?"

"Yes. What do you want?'

"I'm calling to report my neighbor Y. Rabinotov as an enemy of the state. He is hiding diamonds in his firewood."

"This will be noted."

Next day, the KGB goons come over to Rabinotov's house. They search the shed where the firewood is kept, break every piece of wood, find no diamonds, swear at Rabinotov and leave.

The phone rings at Rabinotov's house. He answers, "Hello."

"Hello, Rabinotov! Did the KGB come?
Did they chop your firewood?"

"Yes, they did."

"O.K., now it's your turn to call. I need my vegetable patch plowed."

THINGS NOT TO SAY TO A COP

1. I can't reach my license unless you hold my beer.

2. Sorry, I didn't realize that my radar detector wasn't on.

3. Aren't you the guy from the Village People?

4. Hey, you must have been going 125mph just to keep up with me.

5. I thought you had to be in good physical condition to be a cop.

6. Bad cop! No donut!

7. You're gonna check the trunk, aren't you?

8. I was going to be a cop, really, but I decided to finish high school.

9. I pay your salary.

10. That's terrific. The last guy only gave me a warning also.

11. Is that a 9mm? It's nothing compared to this .44 magnum!

12. What do you mean, have I been drinking? You're a trained specialist.

13. Do you know why you pulled me over? Good, at least one of us does.

14. That gut doesn't inspire too much confidence. Bet I can outrun you.

15. Didn't I see you get your butt kicked on "Cops"?

16. Is it true people become cops because they are too dumb to work at McDonalds?

17. I was trying to keep up with traffic.

18. Yes, I know there are no other cars around - that's how far they are ahead of me.

19. Well, when I reached down to pick up my bag of crack, my gun fell off my lap and got lodged between the brake pedal and gas pedal, forcing me to speed out of control.

HELICOPTER FLIGHT INTO SEATTLE

A helicopter was flying around above Seattle when an electrical malfunction disabled all of the aircraft's electronic navigation and communications equipment. Due to the clouds and haze, the pilot could not determine the helicopter's position and course to steer to the airport.

The pilot saw a tall building, flew toward it, circled, drew a handwritten sign, and held it in the helicopter's window. The pilot's sign said 'WHERE AM I?' in large letters.

People in the tall building quickly responded to the aircraft, drew a large sign, and held it in a building window. Their sign said, 'YOU ARE IN A HELICOPTER.'

The pilot smiled, waved, looked at his map, determined the course to steer to SEATAC airport, and landed safely.

After they were on the ground, the copilot asked the pilot how the 'YOU ARE IN A HELICOPTER' sign helped determine their position.

The pilot responded: "I knew that had to be the MICROSOFT building because they gave me a technically correct, but completely useless, answer."

StReSS

Here's some signs that you're under stress:

1.You can achieve a "Runner's High" by sitting up.

2.You say the same sentence over and over again, not realizing that you have said it before...

3.You can see individual air molecules vibrating.

4.You begin to explore the possibility of setting up an I.V. drip solution of espresso.

5.You wonder if brewing is really a necessary step for the consumption of coffee.

6.You believe that if you think hard enough, you can fly.

7.Things become "Very Clear."

2.You say the same sentence over and over again, not realizing that you have said it before...

3.You ask the drive-thru attendant if you can get your order to go.

4.The less sense matter and matter is more than sense.

5.Your heart beats in 7/8 time.

6.You and Reality file for divorce.

7.You can skip without a rope.

8.It appears that people are speaking to you in binary code.

9.You have great revelations concerning: Life, the Universe, and Everything else, but can't quite find the words for them before the white glow disappears, leaving you more confused than before.

2.You say the same sentence over and over again, not realizing that you have said it before...

3.Antacid tablets become your sole source of nutrition.

4.You have an irresistible urge to bite the noses of the people you are talking to.

2.You say the same sentence over and over again, not realizing that you have said it before...

3.Losing your mind was okay, but when the voices in your head quieted, it was like losing your best friend.

4.You listen to your relaxation tapes on high speed.

5.You call your voicemail from your car using your cell-phone while driving to work to remind
yourself of tasks to do during the day.

6.Your e-mail notification tune is Taps.

7.You tap your foot impatiently at the amount of time your microwave popcorn takes.

8.You call the Time & Weather because that lady "really understands you."

9.You take the "Don't Walk" sign personally.

10.You get lost on your way home....from the driveway.

11.Your pager is set to stun.

12.Your In-Box now has its own office.

Teenagers and Religion

Usually people know which Discussion Forum is mine because it is the shortest and has the least amount of information and thought put into it. Hopefully, I will put that theory to rest this month.

I think that teenagers are affected by religion to a certain extent. When teenagers were little, they were forced to go to church every Sunday morning, whether they wanted to or not. The kids would go to Sunday School and get a little packet and make a little craft thing to put on the refrigerator or the Christmas tree for years to come. When a first or second grader would go to Sunday School, there would be about fifteen to twenty of his classmates there. I am not sure why but, year after year, the amount of Sunday School participants dwindles to five or six Sunday School students by fifth or sixth grade. I remember one time when I was in sixth grade where the entire class was two people! The other boy there had to leave before the end of the hour! By the end of class, it was me and the teacher (whom I didn't like). By that time, students have started to make their own opinions and will tell their parents, "I'm not going to church and you can't make me!" The parents can't pick their kids up anymore and tell them that they are going. So, they sit home in their jammies and watch television.

When somebody gets to be thirteen and there is no Sunday School anymore, then the kids get a better idea of what church is really like. At most churches, you either go to the church service or you stay home. Luckily, at my church there is a Youth Room with soda and munchkins. In the Youth Room, teenagers talk about life in today's society which is occasionally interrupted by a game of pool (if we can find all the balls). I am in church every Sunday. I am not a big fan of the Youth Program.

Getting back to the reason why I am writing this, I think that being raised in a religious family has no effect on children as they grow up. As I said before, when a child is little, they are at the mercy of their parents. When the parents say, "Jump!" the kids usually respond with "How high?" When that child becomes a teenager and the parents say, "Jump!" the response is not "How high?" It usually is "Make

me!" If that child wants to pass on their atheistic ways to their children, let them. Sooner or later, nobody will be going to church anymore.

I hope my long windedness has made this entry my longest ever in the Discussion Forum. I may just keep talking on and on like this until it happens. Usually my Forum entries don't get a second page. Hopefully, this will be the first month of that happening. If not, why should I stop tradition?

The Most Important Influence a Parent Has on His or Her Child

I was surprised to learn the views of one of the contributors who wrote this month about religion's effect on children as they grow older. The article I am referring to blatantly stated that religion had no effect whatsoever on the development and maturity of our youth. I had originally thought that the answer to this question would be obvious – religion is very important in a young child's life.

I would go so far as to even say that, besides the example their parents set for them, being brought up in a religious family is one of the most important things that a parent can do for their child. It doesn't matter which religion is "correct", or what beliefs your group believes in; it's still important for good morals to be taught to our children. Of course, if what you term to be a church is a building where the KKK assembles and preaches hate to its members, then perhaps your children aren't receiving the right idea.

Most religions today teach values of hard work, honesty, and high morals. Coming from a religious family, I can say first-handedly that this is true. I know several classmates who are atheists or do not practice their beliefs. One, whom I cannot name, is grounded about 90% of the time, is always mean to his parents despite what they do for him, receives poor grades in school, and is so obnoxious I can't imagine why some of my friends would want to hang around him.

Do you think that his parents force him to go to church every Sunday? Certainly not. The author of the other article writes that, when kids grow to be teenagers, their parents can't force them to do anything. This is far from the case. In the case of this person, it has made his life into a disaster.

I realize that I am different than most people who are my age. My parents brought me up religiously from when I was a toddler. I attended eight years of religious education, assisted teaching a class a year after that, participate in church events, and attend church every Sunday. It's astounding when you go to church on Sundays and look at the number of parents there. However, despite the number of parents, there are very few high-school age children in attendance.

Have you ever met a high-school age person who attends religious services and causes trouble in school? Since parents are the most important influence on their children as they grow up, it makes sense that anything they do will affect them for better or for worse. Installing good moral values by practicing some type of beliefs in their household is one of the most important things that can be done to help them succeed as they mature.

Religion and Kids (Little Humans, not Little Goats)

I think that religion in a child's life has some kind of effect on the child, whether it be good or bad. Most people probably think that religion gives a kid good values and makes him or her turn out better in the grand scheme of things. That's a good idea. It makes sense and in a lot of cases it's true. But sometimes kids are forced into a religion and it leaves a bad taste in their mouth. They try to rebel and then it seems like the exposure to religion was a bad thing.

Then there are the kids who aren't raised in religious families. Some of them turn out just fine. Some find out from their friends about religion and start going to church or to a synagogue or to a mosque. Some kids who aren't raised in religious families do turn out to be trouble makers, but then again, so do some kids who were raised with religion.

Any way you look at it, there are good kids and bad kids. Being raised in a religious family should make better kids, but sometimes it doesn't make any difference. Still, I think being raised in a religious family is good for children. Of course I'm biased since I have been fortunate enough to be raised in a religious family. My family is United Methodist. I've been through the whole deal. I was baptized when I was just two weeks old. I was raised going to church and Sunday school every Sunday. When I was old enough I joined the children's and youth choirs. I went through confirmation classes and was confirmed into the church when I was 13. I go to youth group on Sunday nights. I'm just an all around church girl. But that doesn't mean that I can't have fun, too. I think that the influence of the church has been a good thing for me. It gives guidelines to handle the difficult situations that teenagers are faced with. I'm not writing this article to sell religion though, just to discuss that I think being raised in a religious family is a good thing. So there you have it.

Self-Defense or Assault?

I can still remember back three years ago when the UMMS eighth grade traveled to the High School for an orientation. After viewing the school musical, a question and answer session was held. The part of that session that stands out most in my mind was when Mr. DeLaurentis responded to a question that someone had asked about their fighting policy. When I heard about the penalties – a $122.50 fine, several days of suspensions, and ten days of detentions, I came away with the impression that the school was overly strict in discipline.

That impression was wrong. Many of the little things that go on in the school go overlooked, such as the abuse of certain facilities, the always present babyish teasing and picking on, and the language used in the library. However, the administrators appear to feel that they can make up for this by their super-strict policy against fighting, which is supposed to eliminate the problem from UMHS.

If that is the goal of the policy, then it has succeeded. According to the principals, there were only three fights during the 1998-1999 school year. However, the policy is not at all fair because of the way fights are handled.

At the Upper Moreland High School, if you participate in a fight, whether you knock out a person by bashing them over the head with a metal grate, or simply push your adversary away to defend yourself, you receive the same punishment. Furthermore, it is implied that, since both the instigator and the defender receive the same degree of punishment, if you are attacked, you are supposed to curl up into a ball on the floor and take the abuse.

This is the case with one student, who was present in school in the evening because of a sports activity. He had known that a group of people who were at the school at the time had a grudge against him. When he entered the boys' locker room's bathroom in order to use the facilities, he was cornered by a member of this gang who blocked the door and threatened to start a fight with him. The student, afraid that

others would trap him in the bathroom, pushed past the student in the doorway and rushed out into the gym, where he was attacked, and a fight ensued where he tried his best to defend himself.

The result of this was catastrophic. The student who was in the bathroom at the time received several days' suspension. Although the fight occurred in mid-January, by the middle of February, he was still serving detentions.

This is just plain wrong. In the instance above, the administrators should have looked at the facts and been sympathetic to the student's cause to prevent himself from harm. This was a severe overreaction to a policy which was flawed in the first place. Obviously, self-defense can't be characterized as beating the other person until they are lying on the floor bleeding and unconscious, but pushing the person away in an attempt to escape harm is entirely acceptable. The student had gone to school that night for a harmless extracurricular activity, hoping to return home just as if it were any other night; instead, he found himself serving detentions on and off for the next four weeks and having to make up work he missed during his suspension.

In addition, if another student was to come to the first student's aid and attempted to break up the fight by pushing the fighters away from each other, he would receive the same punishment as the first under this policy, because anyone involved in a fight is punished the same, regardless of their degree of involvement.

How many people do you know who would lie down and take the abuse if someone began to attack them? Even the laws of the nation agree that a person has the right to defend himself if he is attacked. If you've ever seen a police chase on TV, this fact is clear. While the officers will attempt to arrest an offender peacefully for as long as possible, once the criminal attempts to shoot or run over a police officer, they are then authorized to use force to bring down the criminal. Why, then, should this not hold true to a lesser degree in this school, which is under the jurisdiction of our nation?

In this instance, the administrators at UMHS severely overreacted. Some, however, say that

changing the policy to allow someone to defend himself would increase the number of fights in the school. In that case, the best alternative would be to make a punishment such as one detention, which is not as outrageous as ten detentions, a fine, and several suspensions, but would still deter students from starting a fight on the assumption that they can justify their actions as self-defense. However it is done, however, the current policy is an outrage for rule-abiding students and needs to be changed immediately before any others fall victim to this unfair practice.

Evan's Quest

by Daniel Burgess

Chapter 3 - Training of All Kind

Evan talked to the King before he set off.

"Before you leave, I must kit you up," the King said to Evan.

"Follow me!" The King led Evan through some corridors and out into a courtyard. The midday sunlight beamed onto the grass of the courtyard and there wasn't a cloud in the sky. Evan could feel the warmth on his skin. Evan could now see what Aiesha was talking about. The far wall was crumbling and Evan could see the remains of buildings that had been destroyed.

The King pointed over to a wall to their left. There were four doors.

"That's the armoury, the weaponry, the stables and the training ground. This is Rowan." The King clicked his fingers and a youngish man came running up behind them. Rowan was older than Evan but younger than Isaac. He had a kind face, freckles and short ginger hair.

"He will get you ready for your adventure. Good luck. I dearly do hope you succeed. If you are not back in four weeks, your father will be unfrozen and left to die. If you come back with the dragon's heart to prove you have killed him, my sorcerer will heal your father. Again, good luck and good day to you, Evan." With that, the King went back into the tremendous castle with his majestic robes trailing behind him. Evan did not see the King again for quite a time.

"Hello Evan. My name is Rowan." Evan turned to see the man standing with his hand out. Evan shook Rowan's hand and felt that he had a strong, firm handshake.

"I will be helping you for your big quest. For the rest of today I will prepare you and then you can get a good nights sleep, ready for your big day tomorrow. If you are ready to start, come this way!" Evan listened intently and did as Rowan said.

They walked over to the four doors. The warm breeze blew all around them.

"Now, where do you want to start?" Rowan asked Evan.

"Er, how about armoury?" Evan replied.

"Fine, let's go."

The two of them went through the door. There was a short corridor and then they were in a small room. All the walls, floor and ceiling were made of a dark wood. In the centre of the room there was what looked like a counter. Rowan walked into the centre of the counter and looked at Evan. There were all kinds of armour hanging on the wall–shields, helmets, and body armour.

"Right, what are you looking for?" Rowan said to Evan.

"Well, I want something that is light but that will protect my body quite well. I don't think I want a shield or a helmet," Evan replied as the thoughts came into his head.

"Ah, I think I have just the thing." Rowan pointed over to a wall. There was a garment, and Evan went into a small side room and put it on.

"Well?" Rowan said as Evan walked back out.

"It's a bit heavy! Haven't you got something that is more like normal clothing?" Rowan pointed to another uniform. This went on for quite a while, over and over. Rowan was becoming quite annoyed. He had his head on the counter. But Evan then walked back in and said, "It's perfect!" The one Evan had chosen was very light and was just like a shirt.

“Okay, at last. Let’s go.” They went back out into the courtyard.

“Can we do the weaponry next?” Evan asked.

“We certainly can. That’s my favourite.” The weaponry was a large room, with weapons all round the walls. Swords, daggers, bows, arrows, crossbows, maces, spears, axes and anything else Evan could think of was there.

“Wow, amazing!” Evan said as he looked around.

“It certainly is!” Rowan replied smiling. There were two doors as well, one with a sign saying archery range and the other saying attack training.

“I think you need one kind of sword and one kind of archery,” Rowan said.

“Can it be a small sword?” Evan asked at the thought of carrying a big, heavy sword around.

“Yes, I suppose.” Rowan went over and picked up a sword. It was just the right size, and he handed it over to Evan.

“Come on.” He took Evan through the door that said attack training. The room behind the door was very small and bare. The floor was made of straw. In the centre of the room there was a dummy. It looked as though the dummy was sack stuffed with hay.

“Go on. Have a swing at it.” Evan was a bit worried but he walked up to the dummy and raised his sword. He swung with all his might and hit the dummy on the shoulder with a thump.

“Yes, that’s good. But try to take smaller hits so as not to open yourself to attack, and also you can make more blows if they are smaller. Try again.” Evan was getting quite into this now. He hit to the left of the body.

“Quick to the right.” Evan did as he said and swung the small sword to the right-hand side of the dummy. Evan took one last swing and the blade cut through the air like a bird gliding through the sky. The last swing took the dummy’s head clean off.

“Excellent! You are quite a swordsman.” Evan felt pleased with himself that Rowan had said that. “Thank you!” Evan said in gratitude.

“Now I think you are ready for a live opponent.” These words made Evan a bit wary, but he had to learn.

“Just wait here.” Rowan went through a door and shut it behind him. Evan stood in the room on his own. He looked around and got a bit bored so he took another slash at the decapitated dummy.

“Ha, take that, you brute!” Evan giggled to himself.

The door opened and a figure walked in.

“You! I’m fighting you?” Evan said to Rowan.

“Yes!” Rowan now had a lot of armour on.

“Are you ready?” Rowan asked. Evan’s heart was racing. Evan nodded.

They both moved closer and began. Evan took the first swing but Rowan blocked it with his sword. Rowan’s sword hit Evan on his weak chest plate.

“Remember to block the attack as well as make it!” Rowan said. Evan nodded. The fighting went on for quite a while.

“Well done. Good fight!” Rowan shook Evan's hand.

“You are a very skilled fighter!” Evan said to Rowan.

Back in the main weaponry room, Rowan said to Evan, “Do you like that weapon, then?”

Evan replied, “Yes, I'll take this one.”

“Right. Here’s your bow.” Rowan handed Evan a bow and a pack of arrows.

In the room marked archery range, there was no ceiling. The sunlight beamed in. The floor was grass and at the other side of the room, there were two targets.

"Right. Take your shot," Rowan said, pointing to the targets. Evan lined himself up and raised his bow. The arrow hit the red colour on the target with a thud.

"Very impressive! Have you done this before?" Rowan asked Evan.

"Yes, I go hunting a lot," Evan answered.

"Good. We can zoom through this part, then." Rowan raised his bow and did the same, but Rowan hit the bull's-eye dead in the centre.

"No! That is impressive!" Evan said, amazed at Rowan's shot. The evening light was blazing through the roof.

"As you've done this before, I think you need something more powerful." Rowan handed him a crossbow. The crossbow made Evan excited, as he would have lots more power.

"I'm tired. Are you? Let's take a short break!" Rowan said.

The two of them went into the castle and Rowan lead Evan into the main hall. The main hall was a huge room with a tall ceiling. There were gigantic tapestries hanging from the wall and there were broad beams on the ceiling. High up near the ceiling, there were a few small windows. These were stained ones with tiny coloured pieces of glass. The floor of the hall was stone slabs and in the centre there was a long table set out with polished cutlery. They drank a cool, refreshing drink and had cold venison and vegetables to eat.

Back out in the courtyard, Evan looked up and saw the red and orange sky. The few clouds that had formed near the setting sun had orange outlines.

"I fancy some nice vigorous training! Do you?" Rowan asked.

"Well, not really, but if I have to!" Evan said.

"That's the spirit!"

The training ground looked daunting as they walked through the archway. There were jumps and ropes, streams and swings. Evan had to climb ropes and run and jump across large gaps, all while Rowan watched. The training ground was also outside. Evan's body was aching after about an hour and he couldn't do anymore.

"Okay, that'll do. Come on down," Rowan shouted up to Evan who was high up on a rope. The evening chill was starting to blow.

The only door left in the courtyard was the stable. The stable was a long corridor with pens along it. In each pen there was a horse. The horses were all different colours and sizes. As they walked down the stable with the hay covered floor, Rowan asked, "Have you ever ridden before?" Evan hadn't, ever! So he shook his head.

"Well, now is the time to learn. I have just the horse for you." They stopped at a stable and looked inside. There was a horse standing in the corner. On the gate the name Crystal was painted in fancy gold writing.

"Crystal," Evan said.

"Yes, she's the perfect horse for you."

Evan and Crystal got saddled up and rode well into the night. They were getting to know each other, and Evan was learning to ride. Crystal was a speckled grey colour. Evan felt her soft hair with his hands. Rowan left them to ride for a while but came out when it was quite dark.

"Come on, Evan. It's getting late." Evan left Crystal for the morning.

Evan got into his bed that night, thinking about all the things he had learned that day. He fell asleep very soon and had a good night's rest.

The next morning, the sun beamed through the large window onto Evan's bed. The light woke Evan up. He was really comfortable and didn't want to get up. But Rowan came in five minutes later and made him get up.

"Come on. Get up. You've got a long day ahead of you and you want an early start," Rowan said to Evan. Evan did as Rowan said and got up and dressed in his clothes and the leather armour he got the day before. He looked out of his window as he was getting his boots on. It was a beautiful morning outside and looked as though Evan's first day was going to be a warm one.

He gathered all his belongings and went out of his room into the corridor. There was a knight in gleaming armour guarding his door.

"Can you tell me where Chloe's room is?" Evan asked the gallant knight.

"Yes, Sir Evan. She is at the end of the corridor to the left," the knight replied.

"Thank you," Evan said back and headed down the corridor. Evan giggled to himself at the thought of the knight calling him Sir Evan. He reached the end of the corridor and went to the door on the right. He knocked and went in.

"Can I help you, Evan?" Aiesha asked. Aiesha was sitting on a chair in front of a large mirror with a brush in her hand. Evan blushed and said, "Oh, er, I'm sorry. I think I'm in the wrong room! I was looking for Chloe's room," Evan said in an embarrassed voice.

"It's okay. She's across the corridor. Anyway, I'm glad you caught me. It looks like you're ready to go," Aiesha said, which made Evan feel more comfortable.

"Yes, I'm ready, but I just wanted to talk to my mother, I mean Chloe." That was the first time Evan had called Chloe his mother.

"Yes. You go and talk to her and I'll meet you downstairs." Evan left Aiesha's room and stood in the corridor thinking to himself.

He was kind of glad that he made that mistake now. Evan had a soft spot for Aiesha. She had a beautiful face, long golden hair and she was a kind person. Evan then knocked on Chloe's door and this time waited for an answer. He heard the familiar voice of Chloe and went in.

Evan and Chloe talked for quite a while about what had happened.

"I have to go now," Evan said to her.

"Yes, I'll come down with you." Evan and Chloe went down all the corridors and staircases and met up with Rowan and Aiesha.

The huge portcullis slowly raised and the hulking drawbridge fell to the ground. As this happened, the rays of light shone brightly into their eyes.

"Well, this is it," Evan said as he stared out into the countryside.

"Good luck, son. Do it for your father," Chloe said to him, which brought a tear to his eye.

"Yes, good luck, Evan. Remember the things I have taught you and use your weapons wisely," Rowan said to him.

Evan looked at Aiesha for her farewell, but she just smiled and said, "Good luck." She kissed him on the cheek and he blushed.

"I'll try my best." Evan and Rowan walked over the wooden drawbridge with the clunking of their feet. They walked on the soft grass over to a willow tree where Rowan had already tied Crystal up.

Evan got up and walked over to the grass banking. Rowan went back to the others and waved. Evan raised his arm and waved back to the three of them. He looked up and saw all the knights waving from their arrow slots and all the guards waving high above him from over the moss-covered battlements. Evan could hear all the knights and guards shouting down to him, "Good luck, Sir Evan!" Evan laughed to himself, raised his arm higher and waved faster. He turned Crystal toward the town and galloped off. He thought to himself that that was a good way to leave and he smiled.

He knew he wasn't going far. He was heading to Elgan's shop, which was just over the hill. He came to the top of the hill and slowed Crystal down. He could see Elgan's shop from where he was and he bounded down the hillside to outside the shop on the cobbled path. He tied Crystal up and went inside.

The door made that ringing bell sound that he had heard that time ago. Elgan was standing with his back turned, sorting a shelf out.

"Elgan! My good friend," Evan said at the top of his voice.

"I know that voice. Evan, I knew you'd be back." He turned to look at Evan.

"Oh, who's the young soldier boy?" Elgan said in a comical voice.

"Elgan, I need your help!" Evan continued to tell Elgan all about what had happened to him and what he had to do. He finished with, "I want you to help me become a sorcerer!"

"Well, I'll try my best!" Evan was surprised and pleased that Elgan had agreed.

Evan and Elgan went into the familiar back room and Elgan said,

"Right. So you want to be a wizard. Not an easy task, especially for a wizard like me. You see, there are different ranks of wizards based on how much they know. I am not very high ranking. But I'll try."

Evan nodded and waited for Elgan to continue,

"I have also never taught magic before. Anyway, I'll do a spell and you try to copy it. Do not worry if it goes wrong the first time." Elgan did the spell, which Evan recognised. It was the spell that Elgan had done when Evan had first come to Elgan's shop. Elgan did the same movements and the same words he had last time and the flame appeared again. Even after seeing it for the second time it still startled Evan. The flame flew across the room exactly as it had before.

"Your turn!" Elgan said as he faced Evan. Evan's heart started beating at an alarmingly fast rate. Evan got ready and copied the movements and words that Elgan had done. Evan felt a tingling feeling in his arms and hands like pins and needles but much worse. A purple glow came around Evan's hand and a giant flame burst at the end of his finger. Just like Elgan's had, but Evan's flame was massive.

Evan screamed and shook his arms around frantically trying to put out the fire. This was not because of pain, because there was no pain. Evan couldn't feel a thing. It was just instinct.

"Calm down!" Elgan shouted over the top of Evan's screaming. Evan didn't listen and carried on shaking his arms. Because of this the flame released from Evan's hand and flew across the room.

Elgan saw the flying flame and shouted, "NO!" As Elgan thought, the flame landed directly on his bed.

The bed burst into flames with a roaring fire. Smoke bellowed into the room and Evan and Elgan were coughing their lungs out. Through the smoke, Elgan struggled to do a spell. He mumbled some funny words and a spray of water burst from Elgan's outspread hands. The flame was out in a second. "Oh, I'm so sorry, Elgan! I didn't mean to!" Evan pleaded for Elgan's forgiveness.

"Its okay, not too much damage caused." Evan realised that what Elgan had just said was totally

wrong, as he looked at the blackened, steaming bed.

The two tried for quite bit longer but all the spells Evan tried went utterly wrong.

“I am afraid to say,” Elgan continued after Evan had just made a vine sprout up through the floorboards, “I am not a skilled enough sorcerer to teach you the art of magic!” Evan looked down at the floor gloomily.

“I'm never going to be a wizard!” Evan said slowly,

“Ah, my friend. Don’t lose all hope as quickly as a snap of the fingers. There may still be hope for you yet!” Evan, hearing these words, snapped his head up in surprise.

“I have a friend who is a much more skilled magician than me, and I think he has taught the most amateur of wizards to be very skilled sorcerers! I think he may be able to help you!”

Evan looked very pleased at what Elgan was saying. “Oh good, where is he?” Evan asked intriguingly.

“Ah, well, that’s the problem you see. He does live quite a long way away from this place, and there are many dangers in between us! Do you think you can manage?”

“Oh yes. I'm sure I can!” Evan boasted.

“Yes, I'm sure you can, but still I must help you a bit. I will give you some potions.” As Elgan was saying these words he walked over to a shelf and picked up three small bottles with an orange, murky solution swirling about inside them. The bottles made a quiet clinking noise as they tapped against each other,

“Now these potions are a blend of very powerful herbs and lotions. They are quite dangerous if used incorrectly. But I will show you how to use them accurately. If you encounter any hostile creatures out there, throw one of these at them. Now, don’t waste them. They are not toys. They are hazardous weapons. Now I think I can trust you with them!” Elgan handed over the three bottles and Evan put them in his backpack.

“Thank you, I will be careful!”

“Well, you must be on your way before the night falls upon us! I will give you a map to help you find him. His name is Ry.”

Elgan pointed on the map to the top of a hill. “That is where he lives. He will be expecting you. Now go quickly.” Elgan was pushing Evan through the door and out into the street before Evan could even say anything. Elgan then waved and closed the door.

Evan stood outside for a second staring at the door, He looked around and felt the difference of the warmth. It was very warm inside, and a cool breeze blew around Evan.

He looked at the map and saw he had to go north, so he got up on Crystal and started her at a gentle walk through the town street. It was not market day and there were not very many people about. A little boy waved up to him as he rode past. Evan smiled back. He reached the edge of the town and looked back at the towering castle.

It was about mid day as Evan rode down the familiar trail, which led all the way to his house. He went along it into the quite open wood. He finally reached his house and knew nobody would be inside. So he went straight past it and carried on down the road. He was a bit away from the house when he remembered Adela. He quickly turned Crystal and she made a neighing noise. He trotted back to the house and got down.

“Oh well, Adela, all this trouble I’ve got my self into, and it was here where it all started! I'm off on my big journey now.” He rubbed his hand on the top of her head and smiled. “Chloe should be back

to feed you soon, but I'll get some grass for you." Evan walked over to some tall grass and clasped his hand around it. The wet morning dew was still on the blades. He handed Adela the grass and she slowly munched it. Evan then shook the dew off his hand and waved goodbye to Adela.

The Knights of the Square Table

by Stephen Sokolowski

Chapter 11

"Everybody down!" Christopher ordered. The clang of swords clashing echoed across the plain in front of them. Trolls swarmed ahead of them like ants on top of an anthill. The distance between the group of knights hidden on the ground and the furious battle in front of them was rapidly growing larger. It threatened to engulf the knights in its fury.

"Retreat," Christopher yelled as loudly as he could so that the knights could hear him. He didn't worry about the trolls and humans who were battling it out in front of him; if they didn't hear him now, they would discover their presence in a few seconds anyway.

The party had stumbled right into the middle of a war. Just a few minutes ago, a courier who had been delivering news to villages and towns spread out over the north had almost met with disaster when he had attempted to do the same thing that the knights were doing now. Unfortunately, when Christopher informed him of their true objective, he had lied, and they had fallen for it miserably. Now they were in the middle of a raging battle with their survival becoming more and more unlikely.

From scattered reports during their travels in the past week, Christopher was able to piece together that a resistance had set itself up in several villages clustered around the foot of the Blackhorse mountains. Yavin, who was irritated that a settlement of those not on his side was so close to his territory, had sent various lifeforms to seek out and eliminate all opposition to his rule. So far, they had not succeeded. Looking around, however, Christopher took note that the trolls outnumbered the men almost two to one, impossible odds to overcome, especially against powerful trolls, unless there was something of which he was unaware.

The knights scattered immediately when the order to retreat was delivered. Christopher was one of the first to realize the grave danger involved. He did not wish to drag his army into a war. However, it might be their only way to actively resist Yavin's power and still live to tell about it. He made plans to visit the leaders of the resistance as soon as the battle was over, if they were still alive.

The trolls took little notice of the knights as they scampered away. The humans, who stood on the battlements of a stone wall that surrounded the village, did, however. Katie noticed several of these knights looking at the escaping army in wonder. One of them turned and rushed back down the ladder, as if to inform his superiors.

The battle raged on, with neither side showing any sign of their presence on the battlefield outside the fortified area. After the knights had retreated to a safe distance, they were able to watch the proceedings relatively safely. In a few minutes, it became clear from their vantage point that the humans were desperately in need of reinforcements. The battle was quickly turning into a bloodbath, and whoever could escape was attempting to scale the castle walls. Many times, these attempts to reach safety did not succeed, and the soldiers were cut down before they would meet their comrades again.

"We have to do something," Chapin pleaded to the others. "They're on our side, and they're being slaughtered!"

"There's nothing we can do," Christopher responded stubbornly. "We'd only succeed in getting ourselves killed."

"There must be a way," Dave added, pain evident in his voice.

"Look at the trolls," Christopher maintained. "They're all over. Even if they knew we were here, we would probably be dead in a matter of seconds, let alone having to enter into a battlefield."

"And if we don't help," Mike said, now joining the argument, "the members of the resistance and the innocent townspeople of the village will be killed!"

"Or they could emerge victorious, with no help from us, and our intervention would look foolish," Christopher said pointedly.

"We have to try," Mike said.

"Excuse me," came a voice from behind Christopher. One of the knights was tapping him on the shoulder. "Maybe you should come over here," he said.

Christopher did as the knight suggested. The knight led Christopher through the snow that was growing deeper every day. He climbed to the top of a small hill, from where they could see relatively far on a clear day. Unfortunately, another storm was brewing, and snow was just beginning to fall, obstructing their view. It was clear, however, what the knight had meant to show Christopher--a column of calks, trolls, and other creatures that the group had never seen before, marching toward the battle, cutting off their escape.

Christopher froze for a moment in amazement at the army, who appeared not to have spotted them in the worsening storm. Hurrying back over the crest of the small hill, he returned to the party. The trolls were now surrounding them on all sides; the only potential escape was to seek refuge inside the fortified town.

"We have to get out of here," Christopher said urgently to Katie and Chapin, who were standing around watching the battle in progress above them. The trolls had by now either annihilated or scared off all of the knights outside the village and were now attacking the outer walls. One after another, they began to scale the great walls. Above them, defenders threw boulders down, but for every troll that was knocked off the battlements, three others began the ascent.

"Trolls are behind us," Christopher explained hurriedly as he gathered his belongings. On all sides. Our only alternative is to seek shelter."

"See, I told you we should help them out!" Dave exclaimed, grinning at Christopher. "Let's go!"

The others, just as enthusiastic (with the exception of Chapin), followed in close proximity behind him. Christopher started to run as quickly as he could. As they rose up the hill toward the battlefield, the field below opened up before them. The troll army was much larger than they had imagined. The formerly white field was obscured by the march of trolls. It had now begun to snow. The snow was becoming more heavy, obscuring their view. Fortunately, it also obscured the views of the trolls up above, some of whom were obviously watching the hill below them for reinforcements.

"We need to reach the gates as quickly as possible," Christopher said. "We don't stand a chance out here."

"That might present a problem," Dave pointed out as they ran at top speed up the hill.

"We'll have to find another way then," Christopher shouted above the combined noise of the stampeding knights, battle in front of them, and the wind howling. Snow pelted their clothing, making it almost impossible to continue in the direction in which they were traveling because the wind was blowing downhill into their faces.

"The trolls seem to have concentrated their attack on this section of the wall," Chapin pointed out, finally venturing a comment. "Perhaps if we traveled around to the other side of the town, we will be met with less resistance."

"You're right," Christopher agreed, holding up his hand to slow the knights behind him. "Let's move north and turn back east after we're clear of the battle."

"We have to hurry," Katie pointed out, motioning behind her, where the angry trolls were stampeding toward them.

"Move out," Christopher yelled to the knights after quickly explaining his plan. The knights and friendly trolls set off at a breakneck page, causing Christopher and the others to struggle to keep up. When Christopher and Chapin had caught up and settled into a relatively even pace, Chapin yelled to Christopher.

"Did you ever consider what the trolls' reactions will be to fighting some of their own kind?" she asked.

"Let's hope it doesn't come to that," Christopher replied.

"But if it does," Chapin pointed out, "the trolls may change sides quickly, leaving us all badly outnumbered."

"Or, as I would like to think," Christopher said, "the trolls on the other side will realize what they're doing and join *our* cause."

"There's not much chance of that happening," Chapin said grimly.

"We can hope for it," Christopher said, and with that they fell silent. They had traveled far enough so that they were now directly across from the northern wall of the town. Christopher gave the command to turn east, and the trolls did so immediately, without any questions.

The weather was approaching white-out conditions and seemed to worsen considerably as the party rounded the corner. It was now impossible to determine how far to their south the trolls that were attacking the town were or whether reinforcements had arrived. It was quite possible that the reinforcements were only a few feet behind them. They would never know until it was too late, but at least they were traveling away from them as fast as they could.

The roar of the battle began to fade as the walls of the city blocked the noise from reaching them. From within the howling storm, it was impossible to determine from which direction any noise came; it was as if it were all around them.

There was a human cry that echoed throughout the area. Someone must have spotted the trolls' reinforcements, Christopher thought.

When they had traveled what Christopher estimated was half the length of the side wall of the town, the cries of battle grew loud again, and this time, he knew that the odds were not in their favor.

"We've got to go in now," he decided. "Toward the walls! We'll have to take our chances."

Abruptly, the obedient knights and trolls changed their course so that they were now headed toward the stone walls. After what seemed like years had passed, the grey forms of the walls loomed in front of them as they approached.

"What are we going to do now?" Christopher yelled above the hubbub. There was not a door or any opening in sight.

"All this way for nothing!" Chapin said, exasperated.

"We're going to be overwhelmed any minute," Mike warned as the noise of the battle grew louder. "Does anyone have ideas?"

"Can we climb?" one of the knights shouted, obviously too far back in the crowd to see through the snowstorm.

"The wall's perfectly smooth," Christopher yelled back.

"It almost doesn't look natural," Dave commented nonchalantly.'

"He's right," Mike said, moving toward the wall to feel it. There was hardly a hole for a pebble to fit into. There was an unnatural smoothness to it.

"There must be some kind of magic acting on it," Christopher deducted.

"Even if there is, there's no way to determine where it originates," Dave shouted as the noise grew louder. Cries of wounded soldiers filled the air.

"In fact, there is a way," Chapin said. "With the stones, the three of us might be able to remove a magical field, given enough time."

"How much time is enough?" Dave asked, half afraid to discover the answer.

"A few minutes. We don't have any other options that I can see, so we'd better get started," Christopher said.

Before anybody could reply, he, Chapin, and Katie had moved to form a circle. Each was holding their magical stone. The stones, because they had been severely depleted several weeks earlier, were desperately low on energy. Christopher hoped that they would hold out in this situation. Unfortunately, he could not even guess at how long the stones would require to recharge.

They began to chant in voices that became louder and louder. At the same time, the volume of the battle sounds increased until it was impossible to determine how close the battle was to them. Around their current position, as Mike took notice while he waited anxiously for the three to finish their chanting, the snow was stained red from a squirmish that had occurred on this side of the castle.

Strangely, despite the presence of the huge army and the spell that was being cast, none of the warriors participating in the battle just a short distance away seemed to take notice of the knights and trolls. Mike wondered if the weather was causing this almost impossible occurrence.

Mike's thoughts were interrupted by a flash of light that lit up the wintry scene around them. Christopher and the others had stopped chanting, and the walls seemed to be transforming in front of their eyes.

At first, a few rocks shone through, but as they watched in awe, a ladder appeared just off in the direction of the battle. Another appeared in front of them and another to their left. The entire wall was lined with ladders and walkways. However, it only seemed that the spell had worked on the portion of the wall in their immediate vicinity; the area on the fringes of their visual perception seemed unaffected.

"They were so confident in their magical abilities, they made the wall scalable in case allies needed to gain entrance quickly," Christopher said.

"Hurry! Up the walls," Chapin said, and the knights didn't hesitate. The trolls, who were in front, began the climb first.

As the first wave reached the top, it was evident that they were not the only people aware of their presence. Guards, wearing uniforms similar to the ones they had spotted before on the walls in front, brandished their swords and threatened to slash at the trolls.

"Stop!" Christopher shouted. For a split second, the defenders stopped in their attack, long enough for the humans to ascend high enough on the walls so that they were visible from above.

"What is this?" one of the guards shouted. "You must be some of Yavin's men!"

"We're not Yavin's men. These trolls hate Yavin!" Christopher tried to explain.

"I've never encountered a troll that hated Yavin," one of the guards said. "You're lying. Prepare to die!"

"Wait! If we were Yavin's servants, we could have killed you in seconds already. But since we aren't, we don't wish to do that. However, if you force us, three hundred to five is pretty good odds,"

Christopher pleaded.

"I see what you mean," one of the guards said after a brief hesitation. "Let them up, and signal the Master Guard that reinforcements have arrived."

"Thank you," Christopher said, not forgetting what had been done for them.

"The trolls have sent in reinforcements and are attacking a section of the front wall. We don't know how long we'll be able to hold them."

"Yes, I saw them on their approach," Christopher said. "There were at least a thousand of them, possibly more."

"That's not going to help our effort at all," the guard said to Christopher as the trolls and knights scrambled up the wall onto the small walkway that lined the top for defense.

"Fortunately, we have five thousand men on standby in case our condition worsens," the guard said.

"Five thousand?" Christopher said, astonished. "Where did you find all of this support?"

"This is the only friendly town for miles," the guard replied. "Everyone flocks here for protection and many wish to serve in our army."

"That's incredible," Christopher said. "Let's talk later. Right now, however, we must be getting to our defense."

Chapin realized that she had been standing behind Christopher and the guard, listening to their conversation. The trolls and knights had gone on ahead, leaving her painfully obvious where she was standing. Apologizing, she headed off in the direction of the battle, and Christopher and the guard followed not far behind.

As they approached, the full extent of the calamity in front of them was finally revealed. There weren't just a thousand trolls as Christopher had estimated; at least two or three thousand were immediately attacking the front walls, while more seemed to be in waiting beyond.

Despite all their efforts, troll after troll fell as they attempted to scale the smooth walls. On top, guards threw rocks and heavy objects down as rapidly as they could to keep up with the onslaught.

"Get that hole in the field repaired," someone shouted to the guards. Looking over, Christopher saw that this person was protected with a different type of armor than the other guards. He was clearly their superior.

"Yes, sir!" three guards screamed, rushing past Christopher and Chapin, who had to back up against the rail behind them in order to avoid being run over. The three stopped a short distance away, at what appeared to be a door that Christopher and Chapin had not previously noticed. The wall jutted into the town slightly at this point; probably housing some kind of magic machine that protected the town by masking its walls.

No sooner had the three guards disappeared inside than there was a loud bang that shook the wall down to its foundation.

"What was that?" one of the guards who were in command shouted.

"They're hauling boulders at us, sir," one of the guards stated plainly to his commander.

There was another loud bang, and the wall shook beneath. When the shaking had stopped, everything was, fortunately, still intact, at least for the time being.

Christopher and Chapin continued moving forward to where the guard who appeared to be the commander was stationed. Katie, Mike, and Dave were right beside him, conversing. Christopher noticed that many of the trolls in their army were now fighting alongside the knights against the evil trolls. As of yet, there hadn't been any talk about going back on their pledge to rise up against Yavin.

"You must be Christopher," the commander stated, remaining calm in the face of pressure. "I heard a lot about you and your knights before you arrived."

"Yes, word travels quickly, I'm afraid," Christopher replied. "If you could have found out so quickly in the middle of winter, the news could have easily reached Yavin's fortress by now."

"Perhaps it has," the commander said and motioned to the battle.

"Sir, the trolls are redirecting some of their attack to the north wall," a guard suddenly said, rushing toward his commander.

"Divert some of our reserves to help," he ordered. "Sound the alarm." Without waiting for another word, the guard rushed away to see that the orders were carried out.

After the guard had left them, Christopher spoke up once again. "What do you mean?" he asked the commander of the forces, afraid to be told the answer.

"I believe that these trolls expect to find you here," he said. "In fact, I would go so far as even to venture that they wish to eliminate their friends who are on your side."

"This happened less than a week ago!" Christopher exclaimed. "How is it possible that the news has reached Yavin's ears that quickly, especially with the weather the region's been experiencing recently?"

"Calks, perhaps, who stalked you while you slept," the commander suggested. "Or perhaps the trolls involved in the revolt reported back to Yavin after the incident."

"There's still the time issue," Christopher said. "Is it possible for calks to reach Yavin's fortress in that short amount of time?"

"Calks can travel faster than the fastest horse," the commander replied. "And they hardly ever tire. I would be surprised if Yavin was *not* aware of our presence."

"We should leave then," Mike said. "Our being here will only bring trouble to your town."

"No, that won't help," the commander replied. "The trolls attacked when you weren't here, anyway. What good would leaving do if they weren't aware of your departure? We can't just go up to one of them and tell them you left. They wouldn't believe us."

"So, then, what do you propose we do?" Christopher asked the commander.

"Help us defeat the trolls with your powers," he responded. "If we are victorious, we will assist you in your efforts."

"That's easier said than done," Christopher remarked, taking a minute to consider the suggestion. While he didn't want his army annihilated, the potential gains far outweighed the losses - as many as five thousand helping them to defeat Yavin. That would be a force to be reckoned with. After a minute while the battle raged around him, Christopher spoke up.

"I agree. Let's get started." Without waiting for the commander to reply, Christopher turned toward his knights, who were standing along the wall further down. He signaled to join the others. "Follow, Sir. I don't believe I know your name," Christopher said.

"Sir Anthony," the commander said. Katie gasped when she recognized the name, but the sound went unheard as another loud crash shook the wall down to its foundation. Mike peered over the wall. The others followed his lead.

"They're trying to batter down the very stones we're standing on!" Christopher exclaimed.

"Squad four. Relocate to the attack point!" Sir Anthony ordered, and a rush of knights surged past them to help reinforce the point where the trolls were attacking.

"Tony?" Katie asked.

“Yes?” Sir Anthony answered.

“I thought . . . maybe this isn’t true . . . .” She was cut off suddenly by the shouts of allies. They pointed to the horizon. A dark cloud loomed over the white landscape. Even in the whiteout conditions, it was clearly visible what was happening.

“Calks!” Chapin exclaimed. “Thousands of them! They’re headed straight for us!”