Shoemaker Village

Volume 16 - March 1998

MAJOR NEWS STORIES THIS MONTH!

-*Shoemaker Village* files deleted on purpose!
-Fire burns in woods!
-Klaus gets lost!
-PLUS....Find out who this new addition to our neighborhood is!





The Knights of the Square Table travels onward!

1997 Best Article of the Year award voting to be held!
SPECIAL SECTION- *Editorials on High School Education*!
New *Shoemaker Village* web site created!
Short Stories needed! DETAILS INSIDE!

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Editor's Pages

Information you should know

Welcome back after our long break, subscribers! We have now been able to recover 40% of the Shoemaker Village files, enough to bring you this issue. We have also rewritten twenty pages of *The Knights of the Square Table* that were lost in the process. *Shoemaker Village* was also late in publication this month because of problems with the *Village* printer.

If you might not have heard, Christopher Sokolowski, one of our former subscribers and storywriters, last month deleted all of the *Village* files from the *Village* computer with the intent to do so. This incident has held back our publication of this month's issue, and cancelled the February Bonus Issue.

Unfortunately we will not be able to publish Christopher Sokolowski's work in this magazine anymore because of the incident. Therefore, there is a **great shortage of short stories!** Anyone is welcome to send one in anytime. If you would like to contribute a story or article, please send it to the address at the bottom of the page.

Also, we would like to announce the addition of our new web site! This came highly recommended by several of our subscribers. The address is:

http://members.aol.com/shoevill

Through this site you will be able to read past issues of *Shoemaker Village*, E-Mail short stories, download *The Knights of the Square Table*, and more!

Another option we offer is to subscribe to *Shoemaker Village* over the Internet. Every month you can download the issue from there; and since we don't have to print out a paper copy, it's free! This is also available through the web page listed above.

We have decided to include with this issue an editorial section on the changing aspects of high school education. Although we have not included the names of our writers for protection, if you would like to respond or add to this section, mail or E-mail us at the addresses on the next page.

Also this month, we are holding our first annual Best Article of the Year Award. This prestigious award goes to the writer of the most popular story of the last year. The winner will receive a free subscription to the *Village* and a cash prize!

Of course, there is no point in holding this election if you aren't going to vote! Voting will take place primarily over the Internet. Go to the address above, click on the voting link near the bottom of the page, and you can read the nominees, receive background information, and vote! If you cannot gain access to the Internet, send a request to us and we will mail you a voting form.

That's all for this month. Enjoy *Shoemaker Village.* We hope to be hearing from you. And be sure to visit the *Shoemaker Village* web site!

Acknowledgments

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Thank you to all of our contributors of *Editorials on High School Education*!

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All submissions for the next issue must arrive before March 27, 1998 in order to be published.

Coming Next Issue

Volume 17 - April 1998

The Knights of the Square Table continues after recovering from Christopher's deletion! Don't miss a special 10-page insert of the novel as it nears its climax!
The results of the 1997 Best Article of the Year Award will be in! Don't miss it to see who will win the grand prize - it could be you!
We plan to get this new section off the ground FINALLY since the Christopher incident. Read it next month!
See the plans that are underway to celebrate our one-year publishing anniversary in May!

ALL IN THE NEXT ISSUE OF *SHOEMAKER VILLAGE*!

Neighborhood News

March 1998

CHRISTOPHER SOKOLOWSKI DELETES *SHOEMAKER VILLAGE* FILES, MOTIVE IN QUESTION

On Friday, January 2, 1998, Christopher, a former subscriber and story writer to the *Village*, deleted all of the files for *Shoemaker Village* on the *Village* computer.



Christopher Sokolowski

"Oh, my...." neighbor Peggy Reiser exclaimed when she was told of the incident on one Thursday morning during bowling. "Why would he do such a thing?"

It has been confirmed that Christopher deleted the files with the intention of doing so. Fortunately, backup copies of the files created in 1997 were available, but *The Knights of the Square Table* was lost along with the February Bonus issue of *Shoemaker Village,* some comedy sections written by Bret Cohen, and the first editions of the *Shoemaker Village* web pages.

Of course, the major question in this incident is *Why?* In an effort to redeem himself, alleged conspirator Christopher Sokolowski remarked: "I hate that Stephen Sokolowski, editor of the *Shoemaker Village*, always uses my name and pictures of me without asking permission, he makes up things that I never say or do (except for comments in the COMEDY CENTRAL section) and he takes my stories from my bedroom without me knowing and prints them out without my approval. And he never puts his name in any of these magazines and puts my name (mostly) or someone else's name so it looks like he/she did it."

As to this, Stephen Sokolowski, Editor-In-Chief of *Shoemaker Village* rebutted: "Christopher made a deal to write stories for us. He cannot break that contract and go on and on about his complaints of the *Village.* Also, Christopher was not aware of the Acknowledgments page, where everyone was recognized for their contributions. And what's so bad about some credit for your stories, Christopher? As for the other remarks Christopher made, they are completely fabricated to make the *Village* look bad. And even if he didn't like this, he should have told us to help us please him. He had no right to do what he did, and he will be punished for it."

Because of this incident, we will not be publishing any of Christopher's stories in the *Village*. Therefore, short stories are desperately needed for the next issue of *Shoemaker Village*. If you would like to contribute any, please write or E-Mail to the address on the front page.

FIRE BURNS IN WOODS, NEIGHBORS SURPRISED

On Sunday, December 29, 1997, as the Sokolowski family was returning from weekly services, they arrived at the development to find the neighborhood crawling with fire trucks.

The trucks were fighting a fire in the woods behind the development for the second time that week, the first being several days before when neighbor Barbara Sobolefski was awoken by the screaming sirens of the trucks.

"I didn't know what it was, but there were trucks, police cars, and everything imaginable down at the woods!" she said that day.

It turns out that the fire trucks were battling a fire that had enveloped a tree a few hundred feet behind the development. "Fortunately," a witness of the incident said, "the tree wasn't near any others. If it were, this could have turned into a major fire!"

The fire was suspected to be lit by some area kids spotted a few nights before. Although this is not certain, it is the most likely scenario, because there were no major weather events that

occurred the week before.

The charred remains of the tree are still standing in the exact place of the fire, an eerie reminder of the destruction that could have been caused.

SUPER BOWL PARTY GOES WELL

On Sunday, January 26, 1998, the annual Sobolefski family Super Bowl party was held.

"It was the best party they've ever held!" a participant commented to our reporter.

Ironically, Leon Sobolefski also won the final Super Bowl pot, "A questionable piece of maneuvering being likened to President Clinton's Whitewater conspiracy," as neighbor Jean Sokolowski jokes.

EL NIÑO BRINGS UNUSUAL WEATHER TO THE AREA, FORECASTERS PREDICT IT WILL CONTINUE

The El Niño Phenomenon, which formerly was expected to bring the area its worst winter ever, has done just the opposite, bringing the area no measurable snowfall for the first time in 109 years. "It's awful," neighbor Henry Sokolowski commented recently. "I hope Spring comes soon. A winter without snow is boring!"

Experts predict that the weather will continue to be under the influence of the El Niño until early June. Meanwhile, the weather is expected to be cool, with above average precipitation.

As you may recall, last year's Spring also set records for unusual amounts of rainfall, with over 150% above average.

OTHER NEWS TIDBITS

Much happened over our two-month break, but a lot of it was "little news" yet again!

-The Sweet Things Bowling League is reported to be going smoothly at the present time. Peggy Reiser, full-time bowler in other leagues, has now become a sub for the Thursday morning league.

-Upper Moreland Hoops, the basketball league for Upper Moreland children ages 8 to 18, has seen another season off to a great start. Ray Johnston has stepped up to the President position after the former president, Rick Briggs, recently moved to Ohio. Closing Ceremonies and the Championship games will be held later this month.

-The Christmas Holidays were enjoyed by all. On a sad note, the Schrope family, who has been putting on a giant Christmas display on Pioneer Road for the past twenty years, has still not recovered the stolen pieces of their Christmas collection.

-Mr. Jim Peters, a long time Friday night basketball player with Henry Sokolowski at Frankford High School in Philadelphia and recently acquired acquaintance of Scott Curry and Ray Johnston, has recently become ill and required sextuple bypass surgery. Although Mr. Peters has recovered safely, his future on the basketball court is still questionable.

-The Johnston Family held a Christmas party at their suburban residence on December 19, 1997. Although neighbors Jean and Henry Sokolowski were unable to attend because of a sudden illness, it was reported that a good time was enjoyed by all who attended.

-The annual OLGC golf outing will be held on May 5, 1998. If you would like to participate in this event, please call Henry Sokolowski at 674-5056 as soon as possible.

Lost and Found

CHICKENS DISAPPEAR AFTER LONG DESTRUCTIVE SPREE

Einar Rorvik's chickens, which have terrorized the neighborhood for months, have recently disappeared without a trace to the delight of many neighbors.

The chickens began their spree when they escaped from the backyard of the Rorviks in May of last year. The Rorviks still were oblivious to the problem despite numerous complaints, allowing their chickens to eat neighbors Jean Sokolowski's pepper plants and Bob Altimari's weed killer.

The Christmas season found the vagabond chickens spreading their holiday cheer along Shoemaker Road. The chickens were last spotted in the fog on Christmas morning, on a trek through the Schropes' giant Christmas display. Since then, none of the usual Rorvik animals have been seen outside of their yard, including their goat, which scared neighbor Henry Sokolowski when he went out to empty his pool cover one day in early August of last year.

It is hoped that this trend will continue. However, if it doesn't, Henry plans to call the Rorviks to complain about their chickens, in a valiant effort to save his wife's future pepper plants.

Going to the Dogz

KLAUS GETS LOST, OWNERS WORRIED

On Monday, February 2, 1998, Klaus, the Hoffmans' dog, got lost.

The incident began when Klaus became entangled in some bushes near the Hoffmans' pool. As he struggled to get unstuck, his leash broke and he left the house.

Around 10:00 that morning, Mr. Hoffman received a call from Joan Barnes, a neighbor living on Pioneer Road. Although he could not leave Upper Moreland High School, his workplace, immediately, he was able to leave during his lunch period at 10:30 that morning.

Upon arriving home, he found Klaus missing and a squad car parked in front of his driveway. The officer who drove the car was standing down the street with a few fellow policemen, trying to coax Klaus to get into their cars. Mr. Hoffman, having recovered Klaus, then decided to drive him around to calm him down. It all ended only an hour after the incident began.

Ironically, as a thank you to the neighbor that had called to inform Mr. Hoffman of Klaus's disappearance, Mary Sue Hoffman, his wife, accidentally called Jean Sokolowski, her neighbor, during her lunch period, later in the day, while Jean was working at Huntingdon Valley Federal Savings Bank.

"I got home," Jean said recently, "and heard the thank-you message on my answering machine. I later found out from Tony Hoffman what had happened to Klaus."

During a recent interview, Mrs. Hoffman informed us that "It was totally an accident! I thought Jean had called!"

Everything is back to normal at the Hoffman residence, at least until the next Klaus capade.

ALTIMARIS GET NEW DOG

With the death of their beloved dog, Casey, last July, the Altimaris had said that they wouldn't get another. Bob Altimari had undertaken the tedious job of teaching his fish to stay in their fishtank, and that was all he could handle then. However, they finally gave in, and a new golden retriever is romping in the Altimari backyard.

The new addition to the family is named Jake. The Altimaris obtained Jake from a Golden Retriever shelter, where abused or abandoned dogs are cared for. Because of this, his exact age cannot be determined, but experts estimate that Jake is about three years old.

"He's very playful," Bob Altimari recently said. "He loves to be outside."

We will keep you updated as Jake grows and makes news around the neighborhood.

OTHER DOG NEWS

-Max, the Rorviks' dog, has not been seen for some time. It is suggested that Max might have eaten the Rorviks' chickens and then perished because of the weed killer that had been their feast for the last year.

-Buster, the Barnes' dog, has also not had any sightings for some time.

Comedy Central

HENRY'S PROBLEMS CONTINUE

We have recovered from the magnetic pulse caused by Henry last month to bring you this update on Henry's condition.

The Curry family has now mutated into three-legged dogs, being led by Christopher, the mutated mongrel. (You will recall that Christopher the dog was mutated into a six-legged phenomenon and then had three of his legs chewed off by Klaus to make him three-legged.)

Obviously the Currys were unhappy about this turn of events, so they decided to get even with Henry, who had started all this trouble. But upon arriving at his house, they found that Henry had already been injured by an electrical shock caused by the Christmas lights that he had put up in February. Holding him prisoner in the basement of their home, they tortured him until he died.

Of course, the Currys did not have the last say in this story, because Christopher attacked them, killing them all and bringing honor to what was left of his family--chewed limbs, broken legs, and the dead corpse of Henry.

This will be the last installment of Henry written by Stephen Sokolowski, who has entertained us with his humorous articles for the last nine months. If anybody would like to continue this story, send us a letter or E-Mail as soon as possible.



Klaus



Jake

The Math Department at UMHS

High school education is extremely important. It frames the basics for a student's career. Earning good grades through hard work is an important lesson to learn that will serve a high school student well into his or her future endeavors. At the same time, high school should be fun. It is a time to develop friendships that may last a lifetime and to experience new activities that will help develop good social skills.

Upper Moreland High School has been criticized severely by parents. The Math department in particular has bore the brunt of that criticism. Last year, as the parent of an eighth grader about to enter high school, I found it hard to believe that the criticism was justified. Now that I have a ninth grader who recently completed a Geometry class, I can understand what the "Big to-do" was all about.

My experience was that the teacher of my geometry student was tough and a very hard marker. That I could accept. But when, over the Christmas holidays, my son was given a math problem to solve that was worth 20% of his grade and had nothing to do with Geometry, I was angry. In fact, it was an Algebra II problem that required knowledge of the quadratic formula. I wondered why in the world would a Geometry teacher try to stump his students with such a ridiculous assignment and make it worth 20% of his grade. He was learning Geometry, not Algebra II. It was then that I realized that this was the same department that took all the grief by parents about grades and teaching methods. Well, it was well deserved.

The long and short of this story is that my son's problem was solved with some help by myself and a neighbor. However, in the process, my son learned virtually nothing more about geometry.

I know that no matter what the Math department throws his way in the coming years, I have confidence that with my help my son will get it done. But I am not sure that every student has a parent capable of solving problems like that. In late February I attended a parent's scheduling session for 9th

graders and at that time I confronted the math department with this issue and I might have done just as well talking to my 4th grader. . The Head of the math department who heard this had no response. So what's the point? The point is that this department deserves all the criticism that it gets. Until it changes, parents will continue to complain and rightly so. We need teachers who you are tough minded, realistic and willing to challenge our children, not tyrants who insist on frustrating the children and showing how tough they can be.

Tough...Or Extreme?

High School is an important time in a youngster's life, and it is the foundation for many things to come. However, in order to make this an experience that will help someone for the rest of his/her life, many changes need to be made to our schools to make this happen.

In particular, I am talking about teachers who give their students too much work and don't care about their students at all. An example is a biology teacher that teaches at Upper Moreland High School. This teacher could very well be the worst teacher I have ever had (other than a certain math teacher whom I'll comment on later). She gravely threatens the existence of this magazine (and almost halted this month's publication) with the enormous amount of homework she assigns every night. Right now, you may be thinking that I am exaggerating or just saying things to make it sound worse than it is. In reality, as I have been told, what I have experienced is only half as tough as she can get. To help you visualize this picture, imagine that you had to define 58 terms in one night. On top of that, you are also assigned a 20-page lab write- up, due in two days. In addition, you are to study for a quiz the next day and memorize three pages of cell parts in the next two days. To make matters even worse, you also have reports from other classes to worry about, and regular nightly homework from other classes. It adds up.

In short, this is absurd. That night with all of the homework I described above, the clock read 11:30 when I finished the last assignment. Even on a **typical** weekday, she could assign over three hours of homework very easily, without a second thought. And that's on a weekday. She believes that **double** homework should be assigned on weekends. (I spent an entire Saturday one weekend to finish the homework she assigned.)

I know a student at UMHS that once had this unforgiving "witch", as she calls herself. (I agree!). He had a problem with eyesight and required special enlarged copies of books to learn from. On the first day of her class, when he walked into her room and was told to take out his book, the dialogue went

something like this:

Student: Did my other teacher give you my enlarged book?
Teacher: Who are you?
Student: (name protected). I was told to come to this class. Look, it says it on my schedule.
Teacher: Oh, no you aren't. (Walks toward phone, calls office, finds out that he is supposed to be in class, and says:) OK, your teacher's coming right now.

Unlike other teachers, she expects us to call out the answers during class because raising your hand wastes too much time. That isn't bad in itself, but when her students are staying up until the wee hours of the morning to complete her assignments, she still expects them to be lively and talkative at 7:30. She also wonders why her late class is dead tired on a Friday afternoon instead of looking forward to the weekend (and a Saturday spent doing homework). Teachers should be tough, to an extent. My English teacher is tough. He assigns papers and expects us to complete assignments but to a reasonable extent. The Biology teacher is ridiculous. She says that students should be prepared for college. Has it never occurred to anyone that we'll deal with college when we get there? Nobody in middle school tried to prepare their students for high school, and we did just fine. Also, college homework is a sum of **all** the student's subjects, not just one.

It has always been my belief that homework should be assigned to help the student learn but not to overdo it. If someone knows something already, assigning another 50 questions on the subject isn't going to help any more. For example, what do we learn from copying terms from the book to a piece of paper like the Biology teacher assigns every other week? It is a proven fact that when a high school student gets the right amount of sleep every night (some suggest at least seven and a half hours), he or she does 75% better on a test than someone who has stayed up all night to do homework. It also goes to say that the same student would also remember the material better if he/she didn't fall asleep or almost do so in class.

During the first half of this year, I had a teacher who expected us to know Algebra II during Geometry class. He assumed that since half of the class was taking the subject during the same term, everybody should know Algebra backward and forward. This certain teacher also talked about sports way

too often in class, sometimes going on half-hour side trips about the value of extracurricular activities in schools. This teacher also forced his students to come in after school only on days when he was available--in other words, when there wasn't a basketball game being played. (The teacher's contract states that all teachers must stay in the building until 2:45 p.m..) He gave impossible tests, and I know of only three people who got A's in his class during the last marking period. Even less got a decent grade on his excruciating final exam.

Overall, some major changes need to be made about teachers like the ones that I described above. The most likely reason that this still occurs is that nobody has ventured the courage to speak up in the past. Until something is done about this, I guess that students will continue to put up with the Math Department and the Biology teacher, and the future of this magazine will be a very iffy question.

Problems In Today's Schools

I am quite pleased with the condition of the school system right now, for the most part. My problem is with many of the students! I believe I can say it best in this way, THEY STINK!! I don't mean that they're stupid. I'm not talking in that sense. Let me explain.

We go to school to learn. We're not expected to know everything. But some kids make me so angry. They just don't care. They know that they're failing a class and they don't do anything about it. School has become more of a place to see your friends and smoke, than to learn. When did it become uncool to actually pass a subject or do anything above and beyond the absolute minimum requirements? And they're not going to learn any better either because they're getting ideas from the wrong places. It's not necessarily their fault. When I start slipping in school, my parents GET INVOLVED!! Some parents just don't care. It's also the fault of the school. I am currently learning grammar in English class. I'm in 9th grade! I should have learned grammar a long time ago. But when we touched on it before in school, they never nailed us to the wall when we didn't learn it. We just slept through it in class, and we never paid the consequences. I know this to be true, because I'm one of many who are being forced to make up for it now.

Fortunately there are some teachers who are working--not to change bad students, for they are a lost cause, I'm sorry to say--with the students who want to learn. And it's mostly older teachers who remember what school used to be about. My Algebra teacher has been teaching for decades now. She doesn't ask for perfection, but she sized us up very fast. She has no respect for kids who don't try. "If you're an A student, you'll get an A."

And then there is the Biology teacher. Much can be said for a woman like that. She's like an old witch, and she calls herself that! She teaches Level 1 Biology, the most advanced in the school. On the first day of class, she talked to us as if we knew exactly what she was talking about. Just imagine this.

The woman has been doing this for so long, she has everything down to a science. She has dittos in her file cabinet that she made years ago and is just waiting for that particular lesson to come up. You can't fall asleep in her class, literally. One of the ways she gets her point across is to scream at us and bang on the overhead projector with her fist. While we were learning about units of measure, she made us memorize a song about them. And we did memorize it...and we did sing it...as a class...so loudly...that a math teacher at the other end of the hall came down and closed our door. She also gives a lot of homework. I really can't say much more about that. If I tried, it would require 10 thousand sheets of paper that I'm sure you do not care to see. She's an extremely tough teacher. If and when you pass the class, all you have the energy to say is “Thank You”. She's one of the only teachers who actually prepares us for college. Oh, and she always tells it like it is: “If you didn't do your homework, I'm gonna beat you!!"

The president has a plan to be more strict on educational issues. He says, and I agree, that students are being promoted too loosely. Now, every Tom, Dick, and yes, even Bulldog, can graduate high school. Why? If they didn't do the work, don't let 'em graduate. I feel so strongly about this issue because I'm stuck in the same class with a pack of morons. Some don't try, and some just don't know. Ignorance is forgivable, but I too have no respect for people who don't do their best. I realize that I might feel differently if I were one of the people who didn’t care, but you know what, I'm not!! Call me arrogant, even rude, but I want the most out of my education!! We have a problem! What are we going to do about it?

IN CONCLUSION-

About Upper Moreland High School specifically:

Good Things	Bad Things
good teachers	insufficient discipline system[1]
some kids want to learn	some don't[2]
lots of computers	computers being used for wrong purposes and not enough for research
variety of extra-curricular activities	too many and taken too seriously[3]

[1]I think that the good old board of education should be reinstated. That would be motivation!

[2]Teachers should have more of a say what's best for a student. If they're not exceptionally bright or have a passion to learn, don't put them in a level 1 class.

[3]SCHOOL COMES FIRST!! I overheard the football coach talking to the team. He was telling them that they should be more concerned about their game then their studies. I know I wouldn't kill time in the weight room. And on a related subject, most kids sleep through math, and wake up for gym. Something isn't right.

The Knights of the Square Table

Chapter 10

The troll continued pounding on the door for a while and then called to his "friends" to come and help him.

Inside the house, Mike began to panic. "We're going to be captured and all DIE!" he screamed frantically.

"No we won't!" Dave said. "They'll never be able to get the door open!" He leaned back against the wall. To his surprise, a panel of the wall behind him fell out and revealed a small space between the inner and outer walls!

"Quick," Christopher said. "Everybody, in here!" Christopher hurried into the small opening, followed by Mike, Chapin, Katie, and then Dave, who closed the opening to the passage not a moment too soon. They pulled the still unconscious man into the passageway with them before they shut the door.

Two trolls, at that very moment, had brought a large log to the house and attempted to batter down the door. After the fifth loud BANG!, the door splintered, allowing the trolls access to the inside.

The party was very quiet while the trolls ransacked the house, as if they were searching for something. 'Get the Boss!" one of them yelled after several minutes.

From what everybody could tell between the walls of their hiding place, the boss was huge, by the way he commanded his trolls. He was so heavy that there was a low rumble in the ground when he walked into what remained of the house.

"What do you want?" the boss sneered.

"It's not here," one of the lower trolls responded.

The Boss searched around the house for another minute, and presumably not finding what he was looking for, began to roar, "What does Katan think he's doin', sending us here for two hundred or so miles, and we find NOTHING!" I've done enough under his orders! I say we forget Katan and go on our own!"

"YEAH!" a few of the other trolls screamed in unison in response. All of the trolls marched out of the building with heavy feet, singing and cheering. The house was eerily quiet when Mike whispered, "Do you think they're gone?"

Christopher whispered in response, "Maybe, but let's wait a few minutes to be sure." The group waited five minutes before doing anything else.

"Dave," Mike said, "It's been five minutes. Open the door and let's get outta here!" Dave crawled over to the opening and pushed as hard as he could. It wouldn't budge. "It's stuck!" he said, exhausted.

"Push harder!" Mike said, beginning to panic again. Dave pushed himself to the limit and was able to open the panel wide enough to see that there was something blocking it.

"Looks like one of the trolls threw a couch in front of the panel," Dave commented nonchalantly.

"OK," Katie said. "That's great. But now what do we do?"

"Dave, feel around to see if there's another passage," Chapin said calmly. Dave did so, and after about a minute, he exclaimed, "There's no back wall!"

"What do you mean?" Christopher asked.

"The wall...where it was in the house...it's not here! There's stairs instead!"

Everybody began to talk at once in light of their discovery. "QUIET!" Christopher yelled over the racket. "Everybody follow Dave. Be sure to keep up."

Dave began, slowly, down the passage, which at this point was only wide enough for one abreast, and still not tall enough to stand. When Dave reached the stairs, he discovered that it was tall enough to stand, and the others followed slowly down the stairs. By each grabbing onto the shoulder of the person in front of him, they were able to not be separated or fall down the stairs. The stairs went down about

twenty feet, and when the ground leveled, the passage widened.

"WOW!" Katie said in awe. The ceiling seemed to have a light source, similar to an incandescent bulb, except that this one was blue and seemed to have no source. These lights were about every twenty feet along the ceiling of the passageway, giving off enough light to allow the party to see the outline of the walls clearly.

Soon the passage curved left and continued for a few hundred feet until it curved right a little, and then maintained a straight course. Everybody's feet were aching when they spotted a red light in the distance that stood out from the unusual blue lights that lined the passageway.

Dave, being premature in his assumption that this light might signal the entranceway of the tunnel, ran forward as fast as he could. Everybody screamed and yelled and then ran to catch up with him.

Dave stopped short of the red light. When the rest of the group arrived, they saw that they were standing before a great room with a very high ceiling that extended well over the twenty feet that they had thought they were below ground, suggesting that they had traveled downward during their trek.

"What is this?" Dave asked, motioning toward the red light.

"This is very weird," Mike said. "If somebody dug out all these tunnels and built that secret passage in the house, whatever this is must be very valuable..."

"I don't know what this is," Christopher said. "I've never seen it before!"

Chapin walked up to the table. "Look!" she said. "There's some writing on the side!"

Everybody else came to look. Indeed, there were some unintelligible symbols on the side.

"Could be the language of the trolls," Christopher muttered. "Or it could be..."

"What?" Dave asked.

"The language of the ancient wizards that was used many millennia ago. It dropped out of existence shortly after Yavin appeared, gaining power for the first time and destroying the wizards. The common people revolted and overthrew him, but he has regained his power now and is stronger than ever."

"How are we going to find out what this means?" Mike asked.

"Maybe," Dave commented, "the man we found unconscious would know."

"Good guess," Katie cheered. "But he's all the way back upstairs. I wouldn't want to go back through that passageway alone to get him; and if we all go, we could be caught by the trolls."

"We should have two people go and get him," Chapin suggested. "The rest of us can stay here and investigate this further."

"I'll go," Mike volunteered.

"I'll follow. If he's still unconscious, you'll need help trying to wake him. I might try some of my 'elemental powers'," Christopher said.

They left and headed back the way they had come.

Meanwhile, Dave, Katie, and Chapin continued to search the chamber they were in for other clues to the meaning of the script on the side of the table and what the bright red light exactly was.

Dave had searched fruitlessly on the walls for something that might help them when, suddenly, he pushed on the wall near him and a door hidden in the stone fell back into what looked like another tunnel, this one continuing back farther than Dave could see.

"Everybody," Dave yelled in excitement. "Come here! I've found something!"

Katie and Chapin walked briskly toward Dave's location, and upon seeing what Dave had discovered, Katie asked, "Where do you think it goes?"

"Should we go back and find out?" Dave questioned.

Chapin thought a moment, and then said quietly, "We could go, but then what if Christopher comes back with Mike and the man? They won't know where we are."

"Let's just take a quick look," Katie pleaded. "If we have to walk down the passage for more then ten minutes, we'll turn back." Dave and Chapin agreed and began to follow Katie down the passage. This one was narrower than the one they had come from, so they had to travel single file. The same eerie, sourceless lights illuminated the passage.

They traveled down the passage for what seemed like a long time, but everybody knew that it was only a few minutes since they had left the chamber with the strange light.

Suddenly it seemed as if the weird blue lights were brighter ahead. Dave ran forward as fast as he could, hoping that they had discovered something new. He stopped short in wonder when he got there.

There was a large hole in the ceiling - and the river was running over it! There was no apparent support for the water. The three looked at the area for several minutes, but were not able to find why it was held up. "Must be magic," Dave said in wonder.

Katie and Chapin arrived, too, and stopped dead in their tracks. It was another chamber, though smaller than the others. The ceiling was lower, only about eight feet above them. Another weird light, this one yellow, stood on a stone table against the back wall. The table was similar, but smaller than, the one in the last chamber. There was more unintelligible writing on the side.

"What do you think this is, Chapin," Katie asked.

Chapin walked up to the light. "This is strange. This looks like... the Hadar Stone!"

"You're right," Dave said. "It does remind me of it. Except this one's yellow."

"Come on," Dave said. "We walked for fifteen minutes, at least, so Christopher and Mike are probably waiting for us back there."

Chapin decided to take the strange yellow stone in case it might prove valuable in the future. Then they left the chamber, hurrying as fast as they could away from the strange cavern. It seemed to take not as long to come back to the other chamber than it did to get there.

When they reached the rock wall, it was still open, so they passed through. Christopher and Mike hadn't returned yet, so the three examined the stones and sat back against the wall to wait.

Five minutes later, they heard a shout from down the entrance tunnel. It was Mike! A minute later, they - and the old man - were in view. Greetings were exchanged, and the man began to tell the rest of the party what had happened with Christopher and Mike.

"First," he began, "Let me tell that my name is Henry. I was knocked unconscious while the first wave of trolls were searching the town for something. I assume that they attempted to kill me so that I wouldn't tell anyone about the incident."

"Trolls were searching for us, too!" Mike exclaimed. "That's why we brought you behind the secret passage! They would've probably killed you if they had found you. Maybe they were even looking for you!"

"But why would they be looking for me?" Henry asked in surprise. "I have nothing to offer them. I know the ancient wizard language, but Yavin knows that as well as many other people."

"Maybe they want to kill you." Katie said quietly. Everybody turned around, and then looked hard and long at Henry.

"Why?" Henry asked quietly.

"Oh!" Katie cut in before another word could be said. "We forgot to show you what we just found!" Chapin took the strange yellow stone out of her pocket and showed it to the rest of the group. Everybody was startled.

"Do you know what it is?" Christopher asked Katie.

"No. We thought that Henry would be able to help us."

"I certainly can't help you there," Henry said. "I've never seen or heard of a stone like this. There was another one, the Hadar stone, but that one was red..."

"Here it is," Katie said, handing the stone to Henry, who examined the two stones closely.

"You must be pretty important if you have the Hadar Stone," Henry commented. "How'd you get it?"

Katie and Christopher recounted the various events that had led them to their present location. It took him pretty long to tell him, and Mike, Chapin, and Dave jumped up when Christopher asked, "Can you decipher this?" He pointed to the writing on the side of the table.

"I think so...," Henry responded, concentrating hard. "I'll need a few minutes. I haven't read this language in some years."

Those few minutes seemed to pass endlessly. Henry examined the tablet engraved in the side of the table, while everyone else placed the room relentlessly. They had guessed that it was the middle of the night now, and they had been down in the tunnel system for a long time now.

Suddenly Henry cried out, "I know what it says!"

"What?" Christopher asked in anticipation. "Is it good news, or bad?"

"It says," Henry said, "*The one who bears the shining ball is the chosen one.*"

"What could that mean?" Katie asked. "Does it mean the Hadar stone?"

"It might," Henry replied. "But which one?"

"Pardon?" Christopher asked.

"There are two stones - the red one and the yellow one. Which one does it mean?"

"This is VERY weird," Katie said. "And this still doesn't tell us what the shining light means."

"I think I might have an idea," Christopher said. "In my search for a way to defeat Yavin, before I was transformed into the elemental of ice, I heard of the three elements, two of which had been destroyed the year before in a rebellion against Yavin, and the third, Chapin, who had been injured, and if she were killed, the power of the elements would vanish. Fortunately she didn't. But I also heard that the fire element, before he rebelled, built a shrine in a secret location in case they were all killed. This location was hidden and protected from all of Yavin's servants by some secret magic. This might be it."

"So what does the Hadar stone have to do with this shrine?" Katie asked, hesitantly.

"Maybe the person with the Hadar Stone had the power to become one of the lost elementals. But then what is this yellow stone? It probably has something to do with this, too."

"Katie, I think you should take the power. You have been chosen. If the three elements combine their power, we could overthrow Yavin."

"Me?" Katie asked. "I don't belong in this world."

"But if we defeat Yavin, maybe we'll get some answers. It's at least worth a try."

"OK," Katie responded, very hesitantly. "What should I do?"

"I don't know," Christopher said. "Try holding ht Hadar stone in the light."

Katie took a deep breath, then reached in her pocket for the stone. As she tried to remove it from her pocket, it accidentally brushed against her led and she dropped it. It rolled a few feet away, and bounced into the yellow stone that Chapin had carefully set on the ground away from the podium with the strange light.

As Katie bent down to pick up the stone, a low rumble shook the cavern.

"What was that?" Mike asked.

Everybody froze. Suddenly there was another rumble, this one louder, and it shook the ground slightly.

"An earthquake?!" Christopher asked.

There was another loud rumble, and pieces of debris began to fall from the ceiling of the chamber they were in.

"Let's get out of here!" Christopher screamed over all the commotion. Everybody began to run for the entrance to the chamber.

At that moment, several things happened at once. There was a deafening BANG from down the corridor, and the chamber shook like an earthquake. Rocks flew. The eerie blue lights lining the chamber went out.

"Katie, take out the Hadar stone!" Dave yelled over the deafening noise.

Katie did so, and it provided enough light to see that the chamber was collapsing around them, so they began to run as fast as they could to get out of the chamber. After a few minutes, they became aware of a low rumble that was steadily increasing in volume, and causing the tunnel to collapse about them.

This caused everybody to run faster. A minute later, Mike turned around, and was stunned at what he saw.

He froze.

Everyone else turned around to see a solid wall of water racing toward them.

"RUN!!!" Mike screamed hysterically. A support they had just ran past collapsed because of the pounding water, sending wood and rocks into the relentless pounding surf behind them that was growing ever closer.

This made everybody double their efforts. "Katie, do something!" Christopher screamed. Katie wished real hard that the water would stop, just like before. Nothing happened, and the water continued toward them. It was only a few feet away now.

"Look!" Christopher exclaimed, panting for breath. "The exit!" A dim light, presumably from the moon was lighting the stairwell ahead of the party.

At that moment, the water reached them.

"GET DOWN!" Chapin yelled, and then managed to grab onto the bottom of the stairs.

The water surged around them, forcing upward up the stairs. The railing above them splintered and was swept upward by the enormous force of the water. Chapin was only able to hold on for a second or two before she, and the rest of the party that was holding onto her, were swept upward with enormous speed.

The water was at the top of the stairs after another second. It shot out of the stairwell, into the secret passage, and out, utterly destroying the only house left in the ruined village.

Debris flew, bodies flew, some up to a height of twenty feet. Just as quickly as it had surfaced, the water, its pressure released, sank back to the level of a few feet below the top of what remained of the stairwell.

There was no activity for several minutes. Bodies lay scattered about the area surrounding the shack. Debris littered the area, some as far as one hundred feet away. The water frothed and churned below the stairwell, as if trying to claw its way back up to torture its victims.

Ten minutes later, Dave stirred. He got up immediately, thinking that there was water chasing him; but when he saw that he was mistaken, he lay back down for a moment to recover, and then stood up to the best of his ability. There was a large cut on his shoulder, and putting any weight on it caused him immense pain. He decided to just wait for everyone else to get up and sit down, because it would be a big task to walk any distance.

Soon, Christopher, uninjured on the other side of the square, got up and approached Dave.

"Is it over?" Christopher asked, slowly. "What's wrong, Dave?"

Dave showed Christopher the cut on his arm. "Oh," Christopher said. "I'll see if I can find something for it."

Next Mike and Chapin awoke at the same time, both uninjured. After checking their surroundings, they went to see Dave. Katie awoke a minute later, stuck in a bush at the outskirts of the square. "HELP!" she screamed. Mike and Chapin came running over. Katie was clutching her leg. Blood oozed out of the fresh wound. Mike, too squeamish to look, went back to help Dave while Chapin attended to Katie.

Christopher returned a moment later with some strange looking leaves. They were red, but it was the middle of summer. He was about to offer the leaves to Dave when he saw Katie lying injured on the far side of the square. Apologizing to Dave, he went to help Katie instead.

When Dave managed to limp over to where Katie was, Christopher was saying, "Might be broken. There's no way to tell for sure. If it doesn't stop hurting by tomorrow, we should put a cast on it."

Wrapping the leaves on Katie's leg, Christopher told Mike where he had found them and to go get more for Dave. Mike returned a few minutes later, touting a few leaves. Christopher tended Dave's shoulder as best as he could. Then everybody went to the nearby woods for protection in case the trolls returned.

Chapin found a tree that had been knocked over (presumably during a storm) and used it to start a fire. They were careful not to put too much wood on it, lest the trolls see the bright blaze from far away.

Everybody sat down and Christopher started a conversation by saying,

"That was weird!"

"You can say that!" Katie exclaimed. "I thought for a moment there I was going to die! And what about the weird light and the fire elemental?"

"And that leaves us with another question," Dave said. "What do we do about the fire elemental now that the shrine's destroyed?"

"WAIT!" Dave said. "What about Henry?!"

Everybody was silent, as if they were unsure of what to say next.

"He must have been killed in the flood," Katie said quietly. There was silence for a few minutes. Then Mike said, "Let's worry about this tomorrow. I'm tired."

The sky was beginning to get grey, so without another word, they decided to go to sleep. They slept most of the morning and didn't wake until late afternoon.

Everybody was still tired from the unusual events of the night before, but they knew that they should press on as soon as possible. They decided also that it would be better to travel at night so that the trolls or any other watchful eyes would not spot them.

After Chapin caught a few measly fish from the nearby stream (she noticed that the water level was considerably lower), they quickly ate their meager meal, still hungry when they set off around sunset. Christopher deducted from his map that it would take a few days to reach the Dark Forest, a dangerous place that would mark the end to the easy part of their journey.

Leaving the town, they traveled northward along the road, which was degrading in places where it was not repaired, mostly because it was rare that anybody needed to venture beyond the village of Truce for any reason.

The road became worse and worse as the night wore on, and there was no relief from the murky darkness. Fortunately, after midnight, the road leveled, although it was still damaged in places.

They traveled only seven or eight miles that first day, because of the road condition and the hilly terrain. The second day, they made better time, doubling the distance they had traveled the day before. The third day was slow going, because the road was mostly overgrown in spots, and the same occurred the fourth and fifth days. By the sixth day, when they sat down for a midnight "lunch" of rabbit ("EEEEEEW!" Mike screamed, but still ate it.), they could see the outline of the forest to their east.

It was decided at that moment that it would be best to not go into the forest until daybreak. Once Christopher had made it clear that there were many people who had not returned from the forest, they went to sleep and slept until the next afternoon. By then it was too late to begin their journey, so they rested until the next morning, when everybody, full of apprehension, set out toward the Dark Forest.

"It's getting cloudy again," Mike commented, to take everybody's mind off their impending journey.

"Hey!" Dave said. "It's the fourth of July!"

"What's so special about the fourth of July?" Chapin asked.

"It has to do with where we come from," Katie said to Chapin. "You'd never understand."

"Oh," Chapin said.

By that time, the sun had risen enough for it to be safe for the party to enter the Dark Forest. The forest loomed closer. Christopher led the party as they crossed the threshold that marked the division between the forest and the plains. A great despair took hold of them all, except for Katie, who kept skipping ahead of the party. The sky was getting cloudy when they were far enough into the forest that they couldn't see it anymore.

It was dark and dismal while they trekked through the forest, and they continued on until midday when it seemed as if there were a great dread in the air. Katie seemed unaffected by this. It wasn't until they stopped from sheer exhaustion that Dave asked, "Don't you feel it, Katie?"

"Feel what?" she asked.

"This....feeling of despair...It's not natural."

"I feel it, too," Chapin said.

"I don't feel anything wrong," Katie replied. She looked at the ground and saw something shining

brightly in her pocket. The Hadar Stone!

"Maybe the stone has something to do with this," Katie said. She pulled it out of her pocket. It was shining very brightly, brighter than they had ever seen it before.

Christopher let out a minute gasp. "This might be some kind of magic of the forest, probably under Yavin's control. Whatever it is, it seems that the Hadar stone and its bearer are unaffected by it."

"Katie," Dave asked, "Can you transfer some of the power to us without us having to switch the stone between us?"

"Maybe," she replied. She took a step back from the party. "Let me concentrate." Katie concentrated very hard. The light of the Hadar stone grew brighter. It seemed to envelop the party. Everybody's spirits lifted, as if a big load had been taken off their shoulders.

"Wow!" Mike exclaimed. "That thing's powerful!"

"What happened?" Chapin asked. She didn't feel any better. If anything, she felt worse.

Suddenly, Katie had an idea. "Do you still have the strange red stone that we found underground a few nights ago?"

"Yes," Chapin exclaimed. "Maybe that's what's causing it." She put the stone on the ground. The feeling of dread left her for a second. When she picked up the stone again, it returned, as bad as ever.

"Well," Christopher said, "we can't just leave the stone here. It might be a very important part of defeating Yavin."

"Then what should we do?" Chapin asked.

"I suggest," Dave began, "that each of us hold it for only a short while, say about an hour. That way, we won't fall under the strange stone's spell."

Everybody thought that this was a good idea, so Dave volunteered to do so. The rest of the day was uneventful, and they settled down to rest a little to the left of the trail. They asked Mike to guard the camp for the first shift, but again, Mike fell asleep around midnight, leaving the rest of the party undefended against whatever danger might befall them.

Tax Time

by Matthew Care

It's that time of year again, tax time!! Your parents work all week and then on the weekends they're up before the sun hunched over a pile of paperwork which spans the entire kitchen table. They're convinced that they can do it. But we all know that we can't. Some people get others to do their taxes for them. I know that my parents are too proud for that. My uncle is a professional financial management expert but they still insist on poppin' the aspirin and trying to do it themselves.

It's also a big time for propaganda. Companies advertise pain killers to combat tax-time headaches, and companies such as H&R Block come out and shine with all their know-how. We figure anybody who can do this for a living must be doing something right.

But no matter how you do it, do it right. Getting audited is like going to the electric chair. And if you happen to know a good accountant, it's like dating the governor. The annual suicide rate for I.R.S. employees is second only to that of dentists.

Some people get software and let their computers do the work. I can't find anything wrong with this. But be careful who you buy from. Microsoft already has a monopoly on just about everything. I'm terrified that the next time I turn on the news, I'll see Barbara Walters interviewing him under his official title, Lord Gates. He is currently working on a program that does your taxes while exterminating pesky neighbors and SO MUCH MORE!!

But not getting away from the topic at hand, I have but one more piece of advice...RUN!! MOVE TO CANADA...SOMETHING, JUST GET AWAY NOW!!!

A Memorable Experience

By Matthew Care

My sister and I have always been very close. We've never fought like most siblings. I learned from a young age that she was always going to be my older sister, and she wasn't going to go away, so I might as well get used to having her around. I feel I can tell her just about anything. But, when she went away to college, I was not prepared for her absence.

She is currently attending Lehigh University. When there is not much traffic on the road, we can get to the college within an hour. One major factor for her, in deciding where to go to school, was distance from home. But even with its relative closeness, she can't come home every weekend.

During her Freshman year, she wasn't the only one getting adjusted to her not being at home. In ways, she had also always been a second mother to me, this being based on her having always been a responsible person. So, when she left me there all alone, stuck at home, it was crash-course in independence for me, too.

It wasn't all bad. I had always had my own room, but now, I owned the entire second floor of my house. My parents would pay more attention to me, allowing that I would accept it. And of course, there is one less mouth to feed, but that's hardly an issue.

But what I'd like to tell you happened during her Sophomore year. It had been some time since my sister had come home. I wanted to see her, and she had something to give me. As it were, my parents were going out of town for the weekend. We made plans for me to spend the weekend at Lehigh and experience college life first hand. Like I said, she lives in the best dorm. Most of the others on campus were known as "party-drugs-sex" dorms. She applied to a special one set aside for people who actually want to learn! This makes the people there no less crazy than any other college kid, but they just remember why they're there.

I got there on Friday night. My whole family had dinner at University Center before my parents

left. After that, I met some of my sister's friends and basically just watched T.V. for the rest of the night. I slept on the floor in her room. On Saturday, we walked back down to U.C. and had brunch. After we got back, it started to rain and continued to do so for the rest of the day. I occupied myself by doing homework I had brought and messing around on her computer. That evening we were going to use a friend's V.C.R. to watch a movie. But, he wasn't there and we didn't know how to make the V.C.R. work. It ended up eating the tape. I was getting a little bored. A couple of my sister's friends down the hall decided that my experience wouldn't be complete until I went on the all-important midnight road trip. It wasn't really a big deal. We borrowed a van and drove off campus to a small all-night diner. My sister's friends were very nice people, but being years younger than them, it was still kind of awkward. I didn't get anything to eat, but it was still fun.

The next morning we woke up early and went to a special banquet breakfast at a meeting of an on-campus youth fellowship group my sister was trying to join.

It had rained all night, and it was still damp. I did more homework that day. And even though it went by slowly, it came to an end all too quickly. At night, my parents came and took me home.

It had been a unique experience and I enjoyed it very much. I wouldn't mind doing it again. My parents are going to London in several weeks and we are considering dropping me off with my sister again. I just hope I'm not feeling as lethargic next time and I can experience more of college life, first hand.