Shoemaker Village

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Volume 38 - June 2000

Now serving the community for over 3 years

a *shoemaker village* special report

bank robbery closes justa farm shopping center for 3 hours and threatens residents

the end is near

the knights of the square table to conclude before the end of summer





on the inside

largest neighborhood news month ever
humor from the village square blowout
three chapters included in expanded *evan's quest*
shoemaker village enters fourth year with new additions

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Editor's Pages

Information you should know

Welcome to the June issue of *Shoemaker Village*!

The biggest news by far this month is the bank robbery that took place at the Huntingdon Valley Bank on Friday, May 5. In our three-year history, the editors have never encountered as busy a news day as Friday, May 5. Therefore, we strongly suggest that you flip over to page 9 and take a look at this feature story.

You may have noticed that we have printed two different covers this month. While most subscribers received the forest path cover, a few received the rare crabapple snow tree cover.

We would like to update you on the status of our publication throughout the past few months. As you may recall, several of April's issues were lost in publication mishaps. The affected parties included about half of the teachers on our subscription list. In addition, after the problems with delivery were discovered, we found that we had lost the necessary font files to reprint those issues. However, those problems have now been solved, and those subscribers who did not receive issues will find the April issue bundled behind the June issue.

Also, the May issue, as you may recall, was canceled due to an excess of schoolwork that was assigned right around the publication date. If we had decided to go through with the publication, we would have had to publish a sub-standard issue because of the urgency of the work that was assigned. We felt that the best course of action was to simply cancel that issue of the *Village*. We have extended all subscribers' subscriptions by an additional month. We are sorry if this caused you any inconvenience.

You may have noticed the page numbering errors throughout this month's publication. We had not expected to have the incredible amount of news that we were able to gather. Because of this month's unusual publication schedule, we were forced to publish the black-and-white pages a full week earlier than the colored ones; thus, the page numbers are slightly off. To compensate, we have used Roman numerals on certain pages. Look at the table of contents if you are unsure of what this means. We are sorry for any inconvenience this may have caused you.

Last month marked a major landmark in *Village* publication history. May 2000 was our three-year anniversary of professional publication. When the *Village* began back in May 1997, we had never guessed that three years and one hundred subscribers later, we would still be able to bring the *Village* to you. We hope that you will continue to support us as the *Village* moves into its fourth year.

You may have also noticed the new design of the *Village* this month. In an effort to design a magazine that looks as if it belongs in the 21st century (even though contrary to popular belief, the 21st century doesn't begin until *next* year), we

have redesigned the entire colored part of the magazine. We are interested in hearing how you feel about this new design. Please submit comments on what you think at our webpages (as soon as they are finally operational), or E-Mail or regular mail us with this information as soon as possible.

In addition, we feel that we should update our subscribers on the status of our webpages. As you probably already know, throughout the month of April, we experienced many problems in developing the website and they seemed to multiply as the month progressed. Though most of the website is now operational, we are still unable to create a functional CGI script that handles subscriptions and voting. Though we had expected to be able to make the website operational quickly, this highly technical problem was over our heads. If anyone experienced in web design can help us, we encourage you to contact us as soon as possible so we can remedy the situation. Of course, anyone who can help us resolve these technical difficulties will receive free issues of the *Village* for the rest of the summer.

However, though several sections of the website are currently non-operational, most of the site is up and running. The novels pages for each novel have been redesigned, and the Neighborhood News and other sections are posted online right now, as well as a new staff page you won't find in the *Village*! Beginning this month, in addition, you will be able to find an exact duplicate copy of the *Village* on the web. Therefore, for those people who cannot afford to continue their paper subscription to the *Village*, we encourage you to check out our website. Every piece of information on the website is completely free! Also, the website finally solves the problem of printing enlarged issues of the *Village* that we were attempting to produce over the past few years. Using a computer, it is possible to change the screen resolution so that the text size is enlarged many times above what the paper copy can offer. We hope to have details on how to do this posted on our site as soon as possible. In related news, the *1999: Best Article of the Year* award has been canceled due to these technical problems. If you had planned on voting, please email the authors of each article with your comments.

Speaking of the summer, the summer is (unfortunately) rapidly approaching. It is hard to believe that there are only three weeks of school remaining as of the day of publication! Therefore, as we have during the past two years, it will be necessary for us to collect UMHS teachers' and students' addresses to continue subscriptions over the summer. For subscribers who have been with us since last May, we currently have twelve teacher addresses in our database. Before you received this issue, you were probably asked for your address so that we could mail you the July, August, and September issues of the *Village*. Unfortunately, as was required last year, it may be necessary to charge those who will need the *Village* mailed to them an additional $4.00 for the summer to defray the cost of these mailings. We are sorry for any inconvenience this may have caused you.

However, what was once a time of relaxation and pure bliss is now reserved

for hard decisions like college-hunting, career decisions, and summer jobs, causing a shortage of free time. Please be aware that during the summer it may not be possible for us to maintain our regular publication schedule for the July, August, or September issues. Though we will try our best to continue the publication of the *Village* to the heights of our abilities, these sort of engagements severely limit opportunity to maintain the *Village*. Of course, if an issue of the *Village* is canceled or postponed, you will be notified immediately, and your subscription will be extended to make up for the lost issue.

Also, you may remember that last month we mentioned Kyle Daigle as contributing to the *Village*. Though he submitted an article for publication, an error during the production of April's issue led to his article not being published in that issue. Therefore, we attempted to republish April's article in this month's issue; however, Kyle was unable to send us the article for republication. We apologize to Kyle for the mistake and are sorry for any mishap this may have caused our readers.

As always, if you have any comments on the *Village*, please visit our website or email them to us through the email addresses on the Acknowledgments page. Thank you for reading this issue, and we hope to be hearing from you in the next month. Until then…

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All contributions for the next issue must be received by Monday, June 26, 2000.

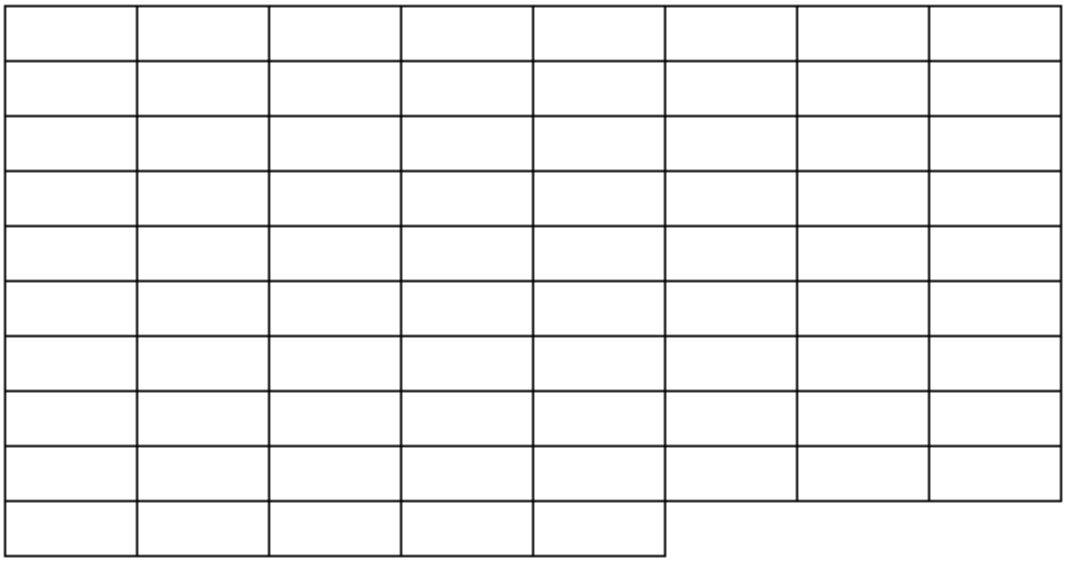
Upcoming topics in **The Discussion Forum:**
July 2000: How fair are standardized tests as an indicator of a student's progress?

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Puzzle Pages

Puzzle 1

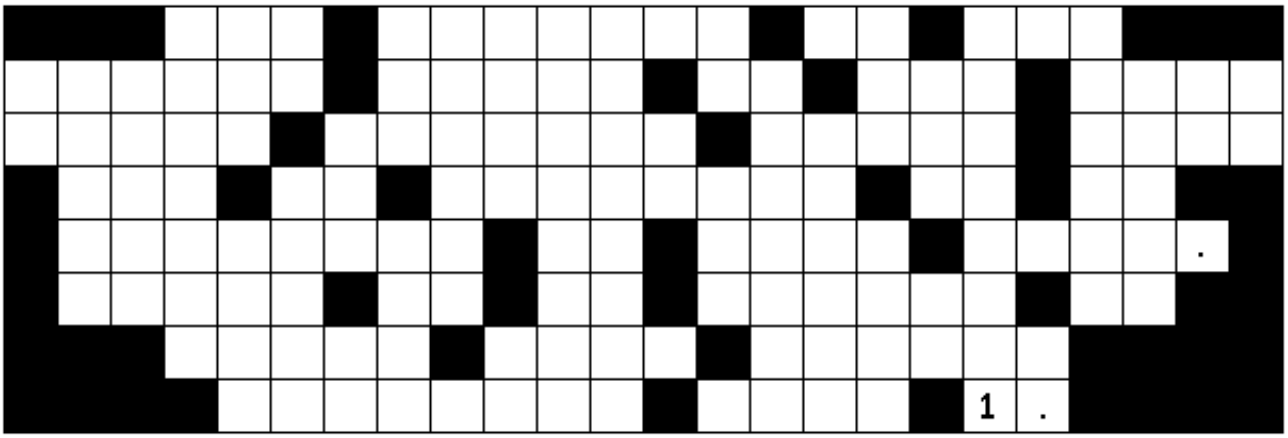
TOR	WE	AS	MAL	MA	ETY	THE	CE
RO	TH	WAS	RE	WH	.	D H	LLA
CO	VI	NY	VA	ILE	SAF	MAN	IR
HIS	Y O	FRI	LER	EST	M A	DAY	IDE
RED	NTS	LL	THE	NTR	C O	MA	NEI
R S	NFI	NE	S .	ANK	DEN	EAT	20
IN	USI	Y .	ENT	TH	Y 5	TED	WS
COR	OK	ORS	0 0	AS	NGE	LIS	THE
GE	RY	IBU	EV	GHB	NDA	RES	E B
IN	E B	DAY	BBE	SHO			



Unscramble the tiles (using the bottom blanks to write in) to reveal a message.

Puzzle Pages

Puzzle 2



P E

D T E Y S R E P O F N

T I S K N C I N J A T E S L

E I A R L L U E I A O T B D G O O N V

A M E I R S R D D O H C S S N E T R B N

Q R N A I U U A D T Y T O E E N E W E E O

S F N E H H H T N X G P D I B T A I J U O E N R

T H U A E E H E S B L E Y L U A F O T H A E E G

Each of the letters below the puzzle fits into one box in that column of the puzzle. Place the correct letters in each box to reveal a hidden message!

Bank Robbery Shakes Neighborhood

A *Shoemaker Village* Special Report

Friday, May 5 began as just another day at the Huntingdon Valley Bank at the intersection of County Line and Shoemaker Roads in the Justa Farm Shopping Center. Little did the tellers and customers who entered the bank that morning know the unforseen earthshattering event that would occur later that day, an event that would change their lives.

According to a teller who has worked at the bank for two years, the morning progressed without incident. It was almost boring as she left for lunch and returned to the bank at around 2:45 that afternoon.

That was all about to change as a man came into the bank at around 3:10pm that afternoon, carrying a shotgun. Announcing that he was executing a robbery, the man, who was without disguise except for large sunglasses that covered much of his face, walked up to a teller's window and ordered the employees to hand over the cash.

Although a teller was not at the first window at the time, one of the customer service representatives (CSRs) was at the the teller's window to handle the "transaction". Cash from the three teller drawers was quickly stuffed into a plastic shopping bag and pushed under the window to the robber.

The man left, but not before placing a strange box on the floor of the bank's lobby (again covered with a shopping bag) and informing the CSR that the box was a bomb. The robber then fled, leaving the employees and three customers who had witnessed the robbery in complete shock.

One of the tellers, who had been partially hidden by a door, recalls, "All I saw was the shotgun. I kept thinking about my children. I knew I was supposed to concentrate on getting a good description of the burglar, but I didn't want to draw attention to myself."

While the robber was in the bank, one of the employees notified the police that a robbery was in progress. As a result, the Upper Moreland Police arrived in the bank's parking lot before the robber left the bank. However, for unknown reasons, the police department was unable to apprehend the individual.

Immediately after the robber left, the bank's door was locked to prevent the criminal from returning. The three customers who had been unlucky enough to be in the bank at the time of the robbery were forced to stay with the authorities and other bank personnel for several more hours.

It wasn't until after the bank's door had been locked and the customers told to come into the back room than one of the tellers drew attention to the box that had been almost haphazardly left in the lobby of the bank. Fearing that it was a bomb, the bank was evacuated shortly after the FBI arrived a few minutes later. It was then that the Upper Moreland Police were also allowed to enter the bank.

During the next few minutes, there was a flurry of activity as the entire Justa Farm Shopping Center was barricaded and blocked off to traffic because of the bomb threat. The shopping center was closed to all traffic for two hours while the bomb was defused.

Meanwhile, the people who had been present at the time of the robbery were taken to the Driver's License Center across the street in The Marketplace shopping center. As a teller reports, the police chose this location only because "they needed a room where they wouldn't be disturbed during their questioning." The bank employees and other witnesses had been instructed, as

stated in bank protocol, to not talk to each other until the police had questioned them, lest they forget important information.

In the Driver's License Center, the witnesses were questioned to determine a profile for use by the police in chasing the robber. What emerged was a description that was published in papers around the area on the following Sunday.

While the tellers and other witnesses were giving information to aid the police, business owners in the Justa Farm Shopping Center complained about the delay and the lack of business they were getting. Angry store owners stood outside their shops and watched the police proceedings at the bank.

The center had been closed while the police and FBI waited for the Montgomery County Bomb Squad to arrive. However, the truck that was to carry equipment to aid in diffusing the bomb broke down while traveling to the scene, causing a further delay as the police were forced to drive to the broken-down truck to retrieve the supplies.

At around 4:30, when the police finally returned, one of the officers, wearing heavy body armor and a large metal helmet, carried the package out of the bank into the middle of the parking lot. After making sure that nobody was in close proximity to the bomb, the officer attached wires to the bomb and detonated it shortly after. Though there was a loud bang and a flash, the package turned out to be little more than an expensive and time-consuming hoax.

At around 5:00pm, the shopping center was reopened and shoppers were allowed to return. During the bomb incident, however, there seemed to be little disruption in the services of those stores located in the shopping center. People ignored the barriers and entered the shopping center, taking their lives into their own hands.

It was then that the bank employees returned from the Driver's License Center to go back to the bank. The FBI had been investigating the scene before the employees returned, but a teller was about to discover a crucial piece of evidence. While searching through crumpled papers around the workspace, one of the tellers found a crumpled sheet of looseleaf paper. Opening it up, she was surprised to discover a note that said, among other things, that "this is a robbery".

Handing over the note to the FBI, the teller was fingerprinted so that the authorities wouldn't be confused as to whose fingerprints were on the note.

After the flurry of activity after the note was discovered, the tellers went to "settle", or to ensure that the amount of money at the beginning of the day matched the amount of money at the end of the day plus or minus any transactions that were made. In this case, the tellers were trying to determine how much money had been stolen. However, that figure was never released to the public.

The robbery had been the first in any one of the four branches of the 128-year old bank. Lawyers and bank personnel arrived to survey the damage. The bank's president expressed his concern to the branch employees and commended them on their composure and cooperation during the robbery.

In the aftermath of the incident, the Huntingdon Valley Bank was reopened the following day, with nervous staff going about their normal business. The robber was on the loose, and everyone wondered where he would strike next.

A break came on Tuesday, May 16, when a man was arrested in connection to several bank robberies throughout the area, the robbery of the Huntingdon Valley Bank allegedly one on his of transgressions.

Reportedly, when the police approached the house with an arrest warrant, the man was coming out of the building. The guilty man confessed everything. Sentencing of up to 32 years in prison without parole was pending.

Now, the incident remains a grim memory in the back of the minds of the employees who were present when it

occurred. However, in the back of their minds is the possibility that it may happen again. “I’m just glad that I got to see my family again,” a relieved bank teller stated.

2000-2001 UPPER MORELAND SCHOOL CALENDAR RELEASED

The Upper Moreland School District released its annual district calendar on March 28, 2000, during its monthly school board meeting. Unlike last year's calendar, which held many surprises for teachers, students, and parents alike, the board elected to keep the calendar similar to that of the 1999-2000 school year.

The 2000-2001 calendar, which stretches from July 2000 to June 2001, includes the standard 180-day year plus snow days. New for this year, however, is a holiday for Columbus Day, which hadn't been a vacation day in the district for over eight years.

Incredibly, another holiday will take place on election day (Tuesday, November 7), most likely because of the abnormally high turnout expected at the polls. This day has also not been scheduled as a holiday for at least four years.

The Presidents weekend will stretch for four days this year, the administrators awarding an extra day off on the Friday before Presidents' day. The Easter Vacation schedule will furthermore remain the same. Though some students abhorred the change this year, most were in agreement that the new schedule was a better one.

School will conclude on Friday, June 15, two days later than previous years due to the Columbus and election day holidays. However, because of the unusually early graduation date, it is possible for senior students to attend school at UMHS for the last time as early as Tuesday, June 5!

The calendar (this handout was received directly from the administration) has been reprinted below for those who did not receive it in some other form.



July 2000 - June 2001

School District of Upper Moreland Township Calendar

July 2000
4 District Holiday

August 2000
1 Committee Meetings
8 Committee Meetings
15 Agenda Conf./Cmte. Mtgs.
22 Board Meeting

September 2000
4 District Holiday
5 Staff In-service (All Schools)
5 Committee Meetings
6 First Student Day
12 Committee Meetings
19 Agenda Conf./Cmte. Mtgs.
26 Board Meeting

October 2000
3 Committee Meetings
9 Teacher/Student Holiday
10 Committee Meetings
17 Agenda Conf./Cmte. Mtgs.
23 Parent-Teacher Conferences Elementary Schools
24 Parent-Teacher Conferences Elementary Schools
24 Board Meeting
25 Parent-Teacher Conferences Elementary Schools
31 Committee Meetings

November 2000
7 In-service (All Schools)
14 Committee Meetings
21 Agenda Conf./Cmte. Mtgs.
23 District Holiday
24 District Holiday
28 Board Meeting

December 2000
5 Board Reorganization
25 District Holiday
26 Teacher/Student Holiday
27 Teacher/Student Holiday
28 Teacher/Student Holiday
29 Teacher/Student Holiday

January 2001
1 District Holiday
2 Committee Meetings
9 Committee Meetings
15 District Holiday
16 Agenda Conf./Cmte. Mtgs.
23 Board Meeting

February 2001
6 Committee Meetings
13 Committee Meetings
16 District Holiday*
19 District Holiday
20 Agenda Conference
27 Board Meeting

March 2001
6 Committee Meetings
13 Committee Meetings
14 Parent-Teacher Conferences Elementary Schools
15 Parent-Teacher Conferences Elementary Schools
16 Parent-Teacher Conferences Elementary Schools
20 Agenda Conf./Cmte. Mtgs.
27 Board Meeting

April 2001
3 Committee Meetings
10 Committee Meetings
11 In-service (All Schools)*
12 Teacher/Student Holiday*
13 District Holiday
16 Teacher/Student Holiday*
17 Agenda Conf./Cmte. Mtgs.
24 Board Meeting

May 2001
1 Committee Meetings
8 Committee Meetings
15 Agenda Conf./Cmte. Mtgs.
22 Board Meeting
28 District Holiday

June 2001
5 Committee Meetings
12 Graduation
14 All Schools End
15 In-service (All Schools)
19 Agenda Conf./Cmte. Mtgs.
26 Board Meeting

○ District Holiday
❑ Teacher/Student Holiday
▽ Staff In-service
⬠ Parent-Teacher Conferences Elementary Schools
✻ Snow Emergency Dates

Approved by School Board 3/28/00

This handout was distributed to most students during the month of April.

APRIL SNOWFALL SHOCKS RESIDENTS

On February 27, as temperatures soared into the 70s, it seemed as if winter had finally released its grip on the neighborhood. Residents of the area were shocked, however, when over 4 inches of snowfall fell on April 9, 2000.



This flowering crabapple was beginning to bloom during the snowstorm.

The snow made roads
covered trees that were in full bloom and

treacherous for hours. When the sun finally emerged, however, the snow melted quickly to leave only a trace on the ground the next morning.

Late snowfalls, while rare, are not unusual to the Philadelphia area. According to Pennsylvania State University Earth and Mineral Sources (http://www.ems.psu.edu/PA_Climatologist/philadelphia/phlsno.html), the snowfall on April 9, 2000 was the largest ever recorded in April, with the former record being 3.5 inches, measured on April 6, 1982. The latest ever recorded snowfall in the region occurred on May 1, 1963, with only a trace of white stuff being recorded.

DROUGHT EFFECTS STILL FELT DESPITE RECENT RAINSTORMS

Last year's severe drought has already faded from the minds of many neighbors, but the effects of the water shortage are still evident all around the area.

During the last several weeks of April, several inches of rain fell over the period of two weeks, producing day after day of dreary, cold weather that was abnormal for that time of year.

After the rain stopped, however, the water began to dry up quickly, and the once-saturated ground lost its moisture within a matter of weeks, creating cracks in the ground and giving flowerbeds the appearance of deserts as the temperature soared above ninety degrees in early May, setting a range of records.

While the rain is nothing unusual for April, the abnormally cold weather was, with temperatures that were normal for the beginning of March felt in the middle of April.

After the drought ended last fall, many thought that the vegetation and wildlife that inhabits the region would recover relatively quickly. While plants began to regrow just days after the soaking rains of Hurricane Floyd, the drought had done much damage that would not be visible until the following spring.

As a handout from Lou Giroud Tree Service states, "The drought conditions last summer took their toll on many trees [in this area]".

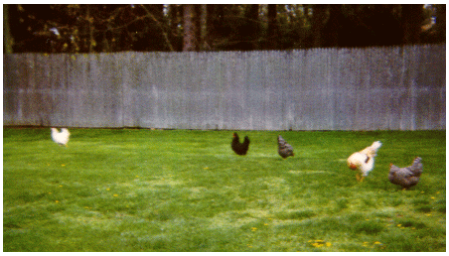
One sign of stressed plants includes the lack of flowers present. Some trees may grow leaves immediately, or deformed leaves may emerge.

We'll keep you updated on the crazy weather as the season progresses!

Lost and Found

WILL THE CHICKENS EVER GIVE UP?

Just when everyone had thought that the chickens that had been roaming the neighborhood aimlessly in 1998 had finally disappeared, they were spotted again for the fourth year in a row and continue to do so to this day.



These chickens were again spotted on April 23 on the Sokolowskis' lawn.

As you can see in the picture, the five chickens were on the Sokolowski lawn on Easter Sunday, April 23. When approached, instead of fleeing from the intruder, the chickens ran to the other side of the yard, away from their home. It was several hours before the chickens finally vanished.

"Fortunately," Henry Sokolowski said to the *Village*, "the chickens went away this time without anyone having to take drastic actions."

What is not visible just to the left of the picture is a large, white fence that was installed in 1999 to protect his wife Jean's vegetable garden from being attacked by the chickens and other animals that invade their

yard and the neighborhood.

Going to the Dogz

UPDATE ON THE NEIGHBORHOOD'S FOUR LEGGED FRIENDS

The late Spring is generally the busiest month for news in the *Village*, and this year was no exception, even in the dog area. Below are listed some miscellaneous happenings throughout the month of April:

-Klaus, the Hoffmans' dog, escaped from his leash one Friday morning before the family was set to leave for school. Reportedly, the animal scurried down the street where it was apprehended by the three "walking ladies" who go for a walk every morning at 6:00AM. Klaus returned to his doghouse shortly after without incident.

-Aubrey has been more active than usual lately, being spotted almost every night outside. At one point during the month of April, the dog bounded up to neighbor Stephen Sokolowski while he was on his normal Tuesday afternoon run.

Neighborhood News

June 2000

CONCRETE VANDALISM DISCOVERED, NEIGHBORS OUTRAGED

At the same time that the bank robbery was playing out at the Just Farms shopping center, chaos ran the neighborhood. Though not as serious as the robbery, these events would release many neighbors' pent up frustration at the vandals.

Through the end of 1999 and the beginning of 2000, the township of Upper Moreland had been pouring new concrete handicapped-accessible street ramps at the corners of every intersection.



This newly poured street corner near the Cohens' house was completely destroyed.

Working their way across the 36 square mile area, the construction crews finally arrived at the neighborhood on Tuesday, May 2. On that and the following day, holes were dug to pour the new concrete. The problems began on that Thursday.

On Thursday, May 4, Henry Sokolowski noticed a small mark on the curbs that had been poured earlier that day. It was obvious that the mark had been deliberately left in the wet concrete by vandals earlier that day. Fortunately, however, the concrete was still wet, and Henry covered over the mark without incident, and no other ramps in the neighborhood were affected.

On Friday, May 5, however, the vandalism took a startling turn when Henry returned home that morning to find that his newly poured concrete sidewalk had been covered over with graffiti. Not only had his sidewalk been vandalized, but two other sidewalks down the street also had marks on them. Henry was again forced to wash the marks out of the concrete.

However, after he again returned home at 4:30 that afternoon, he was astonished to find that the vandalism had returned, this time worse than before. He grudgingly removed it before going to find out news of the bank robbery.

Around 6:40 that afternoon, a bombshell hit as he found that his erased marks were again replaced with new ones. Fuming, he walked down the street to discover that two other neighbors' sidewalks had been completely destroyed by the vandals. Henry was forced to use water and concrete patching compound to remove the damage on the third time. He then ordered his son to watch the sidewalk and to scare away the culprits if they attempted to go on a spree of destruction again.



The Spiecker family was not so lucky in repairing their vandalism.

There were four handicapped-access ramps that were poured on that day. Of them, only the Hoffmans' ramp was untouched. Three of the blocks had the word "Thore" inscribed in them, and one said "Help me". While Henry discovered the damage done to his ramp soon enough after it was done to remove it, the Cohen and Spiecker families weren't so lucky. An angry Larry Cohen, accompanied by his wife Renie, were furiously scrubbing the sidewalk to remove the devastation from their blocks. Since it was already 8:30PM that evening, the concrete had almost hardened, and the Cohens were forced to resort to more drastic measures.

Steve and Rozanne Speicker didn't

notice the damage to their block until after it was irreparable. We were unable to contact them for comment. The writing in their blocks remains to this day. The ramps were finished on Tuesday, May 9.

Those who were responsible for this event were never found. "It's really a shame," Henry said later. "We all work so hard for all of this, and then these people just come around and destroy it."

WILD WEATHER CONTINUES

As if everyone didn't think that April's weather was wild enough, May's weather was so unusual that it was impossible for anyone to ignore it.

The first heat wave of the summer season occurred on the weekend of May 12-14, when temperatures soared above 90 degrees on three consecutive days. Though not unprecedented, the heat wave did get many residents in the summer mood a little early.

After the heat wave ended, the rain returned, sending temperatures back down to highs that were more normal for the end of March.

Though the rain has ended now, predictions for the summer months include a rainfall forecast that is above average. Unlike last year's drought, if predictions come true, this year's summer should be a wet one.

We'll keep updating you on the latest predictions and forecasts as the months progress.

INTENSIVE SCHEDULING MEETING RAISES CONTROVERSY

On Monday, May 15, the Upper Moreland School Board held an "information session" to debate the value of Intensive Scheduling.

Intensive Scheduling, as many are aware, consists of students at Upper Moreland High School attending four 86-minute classes a day. In contrast, regular block scheduling, to which the school board wishes to return, involves students attending eight 43 minute classes.

Since its inception in 1996, Intensive Scheduling has been met with controversy, both by opponents and advocates. This type of scheduling has now spread to other high schools, including neighboring district Hatboro-Horsham.

While those who support the original scheduling plan, including board member and neighborhood resident Skip Lynch, cite improved test scores as their backing, opponents of the plan maintain that the new form of Intensive Scheduling prepares students for college.

Any change in the scheduling system at UMHS will most likely *not* take place in the upcoming school year, and will probably begin during the 2001-2002 school year.

OTHER NEWS TIDBITS

-The annual neighborhood yard sale, organized by Joan Lynch and Mindy Torjman, was again a success for those involved. The event took place on the weekend of May 6-7. Many noted that few neighbors compared to previous years participated in the event.

Going to the Dogz

DOG FIGHT IN HOFFMANS' YARD STARTLES ONLOOKERS

On one Sunday in early May, passersby to the Hoffmans' house were startled to witness a dog fight in their yard.

Klaus, the Hoffmans' dog, was interrupted from his sleep at around 2PM that afternoon when a large black dog that resembled a rottweiler rushed into the yard.

For safety reasons, we were unable to identify the dog, but Klaus and the intruder battled it out with a series of jumping and running around the Hoffmans' yard for at least five minutes.

Neighbors Sara Reiser and Tim Haggerty were spotted watching the dog but departed before they could offer comment. The Hoffmans were believed to not have been home at the time.

OTHER DOG TIDBITS

-Max, the Rorviks' dog, was spotted roaming the neighborhood on Wednesday, May 17. Henry Sokolowski spotted the dog while he was working inside his fenced-in garden and called the Rorviks. This marked the second time in recent memory that the dog escaped from its owners.

Humor from the Village Square

HONEST LAWYER

An investment counselor went out on her own, forming her own business. She was shrewd and diligent, so clients kept coming in. Pretty soon she realized she needed an in-house counsel, and so she began interviewing young lawyers.

"As I'm sure you can understand," she started off with one of the first applicants, "in a business like this, our personal integrity must be beyond question." She leaned forward. "Mr. Peterson, are you an 'honest' lawyer?"

"Honest?" replied the job prospect. "Let me tell you something about honest. Why, I'm so honest that my father lent me fifteen thousand dollars for my education and I paid back every penny the minute I tried my very first case."

"Impressive. And what sort of case was that?"

The lawyer squirmed in his seat and admitted, "He sued me for the money."

CENSUS TAKER

The old man was sitting on his porch, when a young man walked up with a pad and pencil in his hand.

"What are you selling, young man?" he asked.

"I'm not selling anything, sir," the young man replied. "I'm the Census Taker."

"A what?" the man asked.

"A Census Taker. We are trying to find out how many people are in the United States."

"Well," the man answered. "You're wasting your time with me. I have no idea."

HURRICANES

1. How are hurricane's names selected?

a. After Congressmen who are full of hot air

b. Names of spouses are submitted by divorced people

c. Hurricanes don't care what you call them

2. What do they call the most severe hurricane?

a. Category 5

b. Red Alert

c. Costly

d. "It said holy *&#!@ here before. Help me think of a different word, mom.

3. If hurricane Guido with wind speeds of 104 mph leaves the northwest African coast on Wednesday at 7:04 a.m. and is traveling west at 16 mph and hurricane Isabel with wind speeds of 93 mph leaves Key West at 24 mph on Thursday at 11:32 a.m., when would they meet?

a. Tuesday at 3:18 PM, but their luggage would be in Paris

b. Never. Isabel doesn't want to have anything to do with Guido
c. Never. Guido said that there's no place for Isabel to stop and ask directions; she'll probably end up in Rio.
d. Trick question - hurricanes don't depart from Key West

4. You're flying in a small, single engine plane. You look up and see a hurricane directly ahead. What's the first thing you think?
a. It's got the right of way! It's got the right of way!
b. This is the last time I fly no-frills.
c. I can't believe she's going to get EVERYTHING now!
d. I gotta change my shorts!

5. A hurricane is dangerous if...
a. you get in it's way
b. it's had a REALLY bad day
c. you try to stop it to ask directions
d. you do not yield right of way

6. How do forecasters know a hurricane is coming?
a. Hurricanes ALWAYS leave a forwarding address
b. They have REALLY good binoculars
c. Hurricanes LOVE the beach
d. They send out a bunch of small boats and plot the sinkings.

7. How can you protect your house in the event of a hurricane?
a. Sell it - QUICK
b. Bury it and dig it up later
c. Cover it with leaves and pretend it's a big bush
d. Duct tape

8. What is the first thing you should do if a hurricane is confirmed to be heading in your direction?
a. Check your supplies for the big hurricane party
b. Air drop a roadmap into the eye, of another area
c. Put out all your trash for immediate air disposal
d. Begin drawing plans for the new house you will soon be building

9. What should you NOT do if a hurricane is coming?
a. Begin those remodeling plans you've been putting off
b. Put the cat or dog out (unless on a LONG leash)
c. Cancel your homeowner's insurance
d. Go on a picnic, to the beach

10. When is it a good time to evacuate your home?
a. When the water level reaches the roof
b. When your in-ground swimming pool becomes airborne
c. Shortly after your roof is declared a UFO
d. When people ask how you constructed a home without outer walls

11. Where should you evacuate?
a. A nearby lowland to wait out the floods
b. A tall location, like on top of a radio tower or Florida's mountains
c. Anywhere that has a happy hour and free munchies
d. Out to sea on a small craft

12. Why should you not stay close to the beach?
a. All the best spots are probably taken
b. Track in too much sand
c. Cooler keeps blowin' away
d. Hard to stay put under the 50' waves

13. If the eye of the hurricane passes overhead, you should not...

a. stare; it's impolite
b. make direct eye contact
c. offer it some Visine
d. ask if it's seen Dorothy and Toto

14. What happens after the eye passes?
a. Stay very still; maybe it didn't see you
b. It can't see you any more
c. You can expect the nose, followed by the mouth, etc.
d. It winks and waves good-bye

15. What should you do first after a hurricane passes?
a. Locate your computer
b. Determine if your computer is operational
c. Contact your insurance agent about replacing your computer
d. See if your spouse, kids and pets are around; get back to your computer

16. Who should you turn to if you need help after a hurricane?
a. Local government (also blown away)
b. State government (can't afford to help)
c. Federal government (doesn't care)
d. Foreign governments (looking for investments)

17. What services should you expect to be without, after a hurricane?
a. Electricity (no cold beer)
b. Telephone (no modem)
c. Your computer!! (Eeeeeaaaaahhh!)

18. What happens a year after you're hit by a hurricane?
a. Still looking for pieces of your house
b. Still looking for pieces of your computer
c. Still looking for pieces of yourself
d. The government sees you've started rebuilding; concludes you need no emergency help

THE SERMON

A minister told his congregation, “Next week I plan to preach about the sin of lying. To help you understand my sermon, I want you all to read Mark 17.”

The following Sunday, as he prepared to deliver his sermon, the minister asked for a show of hands. He wanted to know how many had read Mark 17. Every hand went up. The minister smiled and said, “Mark has only 16 chapters. I will now proceed with my sermon on the sin of lying.”

MERCEDES-BENZ AUTOMOBILE TEST

1. Before changing lanes you should:
(A) signal.
(B) check.
(C) both a & b.
(D) just swing into the lane without doing either a or b.

2. The top light on a traffic signal is:
(A) red.
(B) yellow.
(C) green.
(D) Who cares, it doesn't apply to me anyway.

3. The speed limit in a residential area is:
(A) 35 MPH.
(B) 25 MPH.
(C) 45 MPH.
(D) I paid $65,000 for this car, I'll drive as fast as I want.

4. In California, when a pedestrian enters a cross walk, you should:
(A) slow to a walking pace.
(B) go around the block.
(C) stop.
(D) speed up and honk your horn.

5. In the other 49 states, when a pedestrian

enters a cross walk, you should:

(A) maintain your speed.
(B) slow a little.
(C) slow a lot.
(D) speed up and don't bother honking your horn.

6. Your may make a left turn from the right lane:

(A) never.
(B) when there is a left turn arrow.
(C) on Sunday at 2 A.M.
(D) When ever you darn well feel like it!

7. When a school bus has flashing red lights, you:

(A) must stop.
(B) may pass on the left after checking.
(C) may pass after slowing to 5 MPH.
(D) use your car phone to order Chinese food while passing on the left.

8. When you hear an emergency vehicle siren, you should:
(A) pull to the right and stop.
(B) pull into the nearest car wash.
(C) roll down your windows.
(D) turn up the radio and ignore it.

9. You may make a U-turn in front of a fire station:
(A) never.
(B) when the doors are closed.
(C) if there are no police around.
(D) when you have missed your turn.

10. When approaching a traffic light where cars are stopped, you should:
(A) relax.
(B) watch the signal.
(C) stop a safe distance back from the car in front.
(D) call your wife/secretary on your car phone so everyone can see that your have a car phone.

11. When turning onto a side street, you should signal:
(A) two blocks before turning.
(B) two car lengths before turning.
(C) two miles before turning.
(D) what for, if the guy behind me hits me, I'll sue him.

12. A U-turn in a business district is legal:
(A) only at an intersection.
(B) always.
(C) never.
(D) if I pass a sale at the jewelers.

13. Parking in a red-zone is permitted:
(A) never.
(B) on Sunday.
(C) if there is a fire hydrant.
(D) when I'll only be there for five minutes.

14. What is your annual gross income:

(A) $10,000-20,000.
(B) $20,000-40,000.
(C) $40,000-80,000.
(D) $200,000 and up.

<u>Scoring</u>

If you answered 'd' on every question, you have a perfect score. You are certified to drive a Mercedes Benz Automobile. You may, at your discretion, proceed to your nearest Mercedes Benz authorized distributor and select the Mercedes Benz Automobile of your choice.

If you answered a, b, or c on two or fewer questions, you may request a retest in two weeks time. Please study the Mercedes Benz motor vehicle guide in preparation for your retest.

If you answered a, b, or c on more than two questions, we're sorry, you just don't have the proper attitude to be a Mercedes Benz Automobile driver. Perhaps you should consider a BMW.

Thank you for your interest in Mercedes Benz Automobiles.

MIDDLE AGE

Maybe it's true that life begins at fifty, but everything else starts to wear out, fall out, or spread out.

There are three signs of old age. The first is your loss of memory, the other two I forget.

You're getting old when you don't care where your spouse goes, just as long as you don't have to go along.

Middle age is when work is a lot less fun -- and fun a lot more work.

Statistics show that at the age of seventy, there are five women to every man. Isn't that the darndest time for a guy to get those odds?

You know you're getting on in years when the girls at the office start confiding in you.

Middle age is when it takes longer to rest than to get tired.

By the time a man is wise enough to watch his step, he's too old to go anywhere.

Middle age is when you have stopped growing at both ends, and have begun to grow in the middle.

Of course I'm against sin. I'm against anything that I'm too old to enjoy.

A man has reached middle age when he is cautioned to slow down by his doctor instead of by the police.

Middle age is having a choice of two temptations and choosing the one that will get you home earlier.

You know you're into middle age when you realize that caution is the only thing you care to exercise.

At my age, “getting a little action” means I don't need to take a laxative.

Don't worry about avoiding temptation. As you grow older, it will avoid you.

The aging process could be slowed down if it had to work its way through Congress.

You're getting old when getting lucky means you find your car in the parking lot.

You're getting old when you're sitting in a rocker and you can't get it started.

You're getting old when you wake up with that morning-after feeling, and you didn't do anything the night before.

The cardiologist's diet: if it tastes good, spit it out.

It's hard to be nostalgic when you can't remember anything.

You know you're getting old when you stop buying green bananas.

MURPHY’S LAWS FOR PARENTING

1. The tennis shoes you must replace today will go on sale next week.

2. Leakproof thermoses - will.

3. The chances of a piece of bread falling with the grape jelly side down is directly proportional to the cost of the carpet.

4. The garbage truck will be two doors past your house when the argument over whose day it is to take out the trash ends.

5. The shirt your child must wear today will be the only one that needs to be washed or mended.

6. Gym clothes left at school in lockers

mildew at a faster rate than other clothing.

7. The item your child lost, and must have for school within the next ten seconds, will be found in the last place you look.
(Tom's note: Isn't something ALWAYS in the last place you look? I mean, you don't keep looking once you've found it, do you?)

8. Sick children recover miraculously when the pediatrician enters the treatment room.

9. Refrigerated items, used daily, will gravitate toward the back of the refrigerator.

10. Your chances of being seen by someone you know dramatically increase if you drive your child to school in your robe and curlers.

PARKING PROBLEMS

A guy had been unemployed for several months and unable to find a job. After numerous applications, he was finally invited to a downtown business for a job interview. Upon arriving downtown, he was unable to find a parking spot near the building where he needed to go. Thinking that someone parked along the curb near the building where he needed to go would surely be leaving soon, he circled the block. After 20 minutes of pure frustration in not finding a parking spot he decided to park at a red curb, rather than be late for his interview. Prior to leaving his car, he wrote this note and placed it on the windshield:

Dear Officer,

I have been driving around this block for twenty minutes. If I don't do this it means my job. FORGIVE US OUR DEBTS!!!

The man proceeded into the building where the interview went really well. Upon returning to his car, he noticed a parking ticket on the windshield. Next to the ticket was a note that read:

Dear Sir,

I have been driving around this block for twenty years.
If I don't do this it means my job. LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION !!!

PASSWORD SECURITY

For immediate issue:
Password Security Guidelines V2.2b

Due to new security policies, the following guidelines have been issued to assist in choosing new passwords. Please follow them closely.

Passwords must conform to at least 21 of the following attributes.

1. Minimum length 8 characters

2. Not in any dictionary.

3. No word or phrase bearing any connection to the holder.

4. Containing no characters in the ASCII character set.

5. No characters typeable on a Sun type 5 keyboard

6. No subset of one character or more must have appeared on Usenet news, rand(3), or the King James bible (version 0.1 alpha)

7. Must be quantum theoretically secure, i.e. must automatically change if observed (to protect against net sniffing).

8. Binary representation must not contain any of the sequences 00 01 10 11,

commonly known about in hacker circles.

9. Be provably different from all other passwords on the internet.

10. Not be representable in any human language or written script.

11. Color passwords must use a minimum 32 bit pallette.

12. Changed prior to every use.

13. Resistant to revelation under threat of physical violence.

14. Contain tissue samples of at least 3 vital organs.

15. Incontrovertible by OJ Simpson's lawyers.

16. Undecodable by virtue of application of 0-way hash function.

17. Odorless, silent, invisible, tasteless, weightless, shapeless, lacking form and inert.

18. Contain non-linear random S-boxes (without a backdoor).

19. Self-escrowable to enable authorities to capture kiddie-porn people and baddies but not the goodies ("but we'll only decode it with a court order, honest").

20. Not decryptable by exhaustive application of possible one-time pads.

Due to the severity of the restrictions, if the password is entered incorrectly 3 times at login time, you will be asked if you would like to pick a new one.

REFLECTIONS OF A KISS

A principal of a small middle school had a problem with a few of the older girls starting to use lipstick. When applying it in the bathroom they would then press their lips to the mirror and leave lip prints.

Before it got out of hand he thought of a way to stop it. He gathered all the girls together that wore lipstick and told them he wanted to meet with them at the ladies room at 2pm. They gathered at 2pm and found the principal and the school custodian waiting for them.

The principal explained that it was becoming a problem for the custodian to clean the mirror every night. He said he felt the ladies did not fully understand just how much of a problem it was and he wanted them to witness just how hard it was to clean.

The custodian then demonstrated. He took a long-handled brush out of a box. He then dipped the brush in the nearest toilet, moved to the mirror and proceeded to remove the lipstick.

That was the last day the girls pressed their lips on the mirror.

THE SPEAKER

A man is giving a speech at his lodge meeting. He gets a bit carried away and talks for two hours.

Finally, he realizes what he is doing and says; "I'm sorry I talked so long. I left my watch at home."

A voice from the back of the room says, "There's a calendar behind you."

SWEARING IN

CLERK: Please repeat after me: "I swear by Almighty God..."
WITNESS: I swear by Almighty God.
CLERK: That the evidence that I give...
WITNESS: That's right.
CLERK: Repeat it.
WITNESS: Repeat it.
CLERK: No! Repeat what I said.

WITNESS: What you said when?
CLERK: That the evidence that I give...
WITNESS: That the evidence that I give.
CLERK: Shall be the truth and...
WITNESS: It will, and nothing but the truth!
CLERK: Please, just repeat after me: “Shall be the truth and...”
WITNESS: I'm not a scholar, you know.
CLERK: We can appreciate that. Just repeat after me: “Shall be the truth and...”
WITNESS: Shall be the truth and.
CLERK: Say: “Nothing...”.
WITNESS: Okay. (Witness remains silent.)
CLERK: No! Don't say nothing. Say: “Nothing but the truth...”
WITNESS: Yes.
CLERK: Can't you say: “Nothing but the truth...?”
WITNESS: Yes.
CLERK: Well? Do so.
WITNESS: You're confusing me.
CLERK: Just say: “Nothing but the truth...”
WITNESS: Is that all?
CLERK: Yes.
WITNESS: Okay. I understand.
CLERK: Then say it.
WITNESS: What?
CLERK: “Nothing but the truth...”
WITNESS: But I do! That's just it.
CLERK: You must say: “Nothing but the truth...”
WITNESS: I WILL say nothing but the truth!
CLERK: Please, just repeat these four words:
“Nothing,” “But,” “The” “Truth.”
WITNESS: What? You mean, like, now?
CLERK: Yes! Now. Please. Just say those four words.
WITNESS: “Nothing. But. The. Truth.”
CLERK: Thank you.
WITNESS: I'm just not a scholar you know...

The Decline of the Neighborhood

by Stephen Sokolowski

Anyone who's ever set foot inside a high school has probably been required to read one of the great "negative utopia" novels such as *1984*, or *Brave New World*. Matt Care would write a ten-thousand word essay on the value of those novels, but the reason that I mention them is that all of them describe society as going downhill toward a totalitarian system where nobody is allowed the basic freedoms that are enjoyed by most citizens of the world today. In these novels, people have little contact with each other except in planned activities that happen rarely or never. They live in large apartment complexes or super-modern houses where it's not necessary anymore to even step foot outside. While when I read them I dismissed most of what was said for pure fiction, the last part that I mentioned seems like it actually is coming true - in a way.

Remember the times when neighborhoods used to be close? You knew all your neighbors and sat outside on the porch to converse or walked around the development in larger areas. When holidays came around, you had a barbecue or invited other residents of your neighborhood over for dinner. When someone was outside doing yard work, you might stop for a minute to chat, or help the other person in accomplishing their task. There wasn't any vandalism to be seen and when something did happen, the residents banded together to force the bad influence out of their neighborhood. Kids even played sports or games outside in the streets, and sometimes adults joined in too.

Now contrast that picture of the 50s (or even 1995) to today's neighborhoods. I arrive home from school between 2:30 and 4:00 every day and don't see a soul outside. Noise from the turnpike and the traffic on Pioneer Road drowns out your ability to enjoy the scenes outside. Neighbors might meet once or twice a month. Freedom, a popular game in the middle 90s, is now dead with nobody even setting foot outside their house at night. Vandalizing gangs roam the streets as shown in this month's Neighborhood News and destroy property. Bank robberies take place down the street. Few venture outside on those

summer nights save for a few special occasions. Nobody even mows their lawn anymore while grass cutters make a mint off the development. And, despite all my needs to understand this - people *drive their cars* a few feet down the street instead of simply taking thirty seconds to walk.

This rapid change hit me one day while I was out for one of my runs. It was a Tuesday, because the only day I regularly run is on a Tuesday, and about 5:00pm. I ventured all around the Shoemaker Village development, down Frontier and Ivystream Roads, up Colony Drive, and back without seeing one person over the age of 10 outside for any purpose except cutting grass.

Even five years ago, it was a common thing to be outside with your neighbors. I remember going outside every night to ride a bike, visit friends, play Freedom, or just be outside. Now, it seems as if everyone has retreated into their little coves to avoid any contact with anyone else. Perhaps it's because of the increases in technology that cause neighbors to lose touch with each other. Perhaps the baby boomer generation is growing up, which shouldn't even be an excuse, because it's not what age you actually are but what age you perceive yourself to be that determines your choice of activities.

There is, astonishingly, one exception to this rule that defies common sense. While relations in other areas seem to be dwindling, walking into this neighborhood seems to be walking back into the past. The friend who lives there lives on Cherry Street, a small one-way street off of York Road in downtown Willow Grove. In fact, he affectionately calls this area "Philligrove" because of the proximity of the houses to each other. Every Thursday when I have walked down that street, I have seen at least ten people *at 3:00* before even walking into his house! Children play in a playground that is in the middle of the street. Neighbors sit out on the step and converse. When someone comes down the street, everyone yells "Hello." Everyone knows everyone else and if someone wants to play hockey or have a race, it's organized within minutes.

What could have gone wrong with other neighborhoods as compared to his? Maybe it's the constant drive for wealth and materialism. Owners of houses want large yards and buy everything they

can afford, as well as constructing fences to clearly divide their property, cutting them off from human contact. Traffic has also gotten heavier, making it nearly impossible to play games on the street without the threat of being run over by a car. And the threat of vandals and other criminals or more frequently stray dogs and other animals (I have been attacked three times in the past year) is ever-present.

Whatever the reason for this change, it's a shame that neighborhoods are slowly vanishing. Maybe the things prophesied in those novels will come true - how long will it be before we lose contact with society all together?

Elian Gonzalez and His Situation

I feel really sorry for Elian Gonzalez. He is only six years old and he has gone through more than I will ever in my lifetime. He has been pulled out of his home and flown to Maryland to be with his father. He has had cameras around his Miami home twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. He is forced to live inside all the time with the occasional time outside to be on his many sliding boards and the occasional wave to the media. I wonder if he really knows what he is going through at the present time. He is only six years old and he will have to tell his kids and grandkids about what he went through during his childhood. There are so many people that are involved in this scandal: Janet Reno – the Attorney General of the United States, the father of Elian, his American relatives, and of course, Elian himself. There are so many small questions that are left to be answered, but the main question is should Elian Gonzalez stay in the United States or should he go back with his father to Cuba.

If it were up to me, Elian Gonzalez would stay here for the rest of his life. Think about it: would you want to live in a country where you were always deprived of your freedom or would you want to live in America – land of freedom and democracy where you could vote for who YOU wanted to lead your country. I think the choice is quite clear. Will he be allowed to stay in the U.S.? That question still needs an answer. This long string of events could take weeks, months, and even years to sort out. I just think this young boy should be sent somewhere for the time being so he can live some time of peace and quiet. I saw the event where Elian was being forced out of his home in Little Havana to a van where he would be taken to an airplane. Then he would be taken to Andrews Air Force Base in Maryland, where he would be reunited with his father. Now they are saying that some pictures with Elian and his dad have been doctored and that the kid in the picture is NOT Elian. I have seen the pictures and I have to agree that the boy does not look like Elian. However, I do not work for the government so my opinion is pretty much worthless. Elian should remain here in the U.S. with his American family.

My Short Rant

It's amazing how often in these days an issue can be blown out of proportion. Such is the case in the Elian Gonzalez events over the past few months. This topic had originally been declared for May's issue, but it is far from old news now. Sure, it's not as prominent, but it's astounding how people continue to demonstrate in Miami, and how morning talk show-forums repeatedly feature the topic on their shows.

I really don't have much to say on this issue, but it will probably turn into a five-page extravaganza on some obscure fact. What I can say is this - the police were perfectly justified in what they did to bring young Elian Gonzalez back to his home. At any other time, what his relatives did would be considered kidnaping, but in this case, the political stakes were too high, so the government allowed the boy to stay in that house for months.

It is a shame that Elian's mother was killed on her way to the United States from Cuba. However, the issue here now isn't even whether Elian should remain in the US or not; it's just a question over who has custody of the boy. When the question of where he would live was settled in the courts months ago, the argument about his mother sacrificing her life became irrelevant.

As I said, I don't have much to say about this issue, but perhaps my short rant has enlightened you in some way.

A Multi-Forum Thing

Looking at the title of this piece, one must think "Where ever did the writer of *that* piece get that title from?" The answer to that question is simply: nowhere. I cover so many topics in this piece that it would be impossible to attempt to condense it into one title. Therefore, I simply gave up, and entitled the article *A Multi-Forum Thing*.

Over the past few months, I haven't been writing as many opinion-style articles as I used to. You may think that I thought things were fine with the way they were - in fact, the truth was far from it. I was so overladen with assignment after assignment of tedious homework that every other part of my life was thrown away for those weeks. I started working sometime in late April with it raining and cool outside, and then two weeks later came out to find it warm and sunny with leaves on the trees and Spring finally arriving. Those two weeks were a nightmare that I would not care to repeat, even though I know that it will only get worse in the future.

I ask teachers this - what does overloading their students with 5-6 hours of homework a night get them in benefit except lack of sleep and the suffering of other activities (such as the *Village)?* There are two kinds of homework: constructive and busy. Constructive work actually teaches you something that you will remember in the future and use. Busy work repeats certain concepts over and over just so that the teacher can make his or her students' lives miserable. Most of the work during that time period was, in fact, busywork, and one student I know was so depressed by this overload of homework that he lost his cool one Friday afternoon and banged his head on a table as well as denting lockers on the way out of the classroom and abandoning his friends who were looking for him in order to get out of the school as soon as possible. And there are some people who (for reasons I can't understand) just decide not to do the work and throw their future down the drain in the process.

The student who I am referring to (whose name I will not mention for safety reasons) currently

holds a job at a local retail store and works over 25 hours on most weeks. I don't have a job, and was (and still am) struggling to keep up, so I can only imagine how he was able to survive the onslaught. People look at me in strange ways when I say that I spent two entire nights doing *nothing* but homework, but that's what it took if you were going to do all the work. It is almost as if many students just don't care anymore, and this attitude shows in many ways around UMHS and adds to the stereotypes that teenagers are given that I have to overcome everyday.

The most blatant example of this is those attendees at the high school who drive to school. Of course, I'm sure there are a few safe drivers, but as always, the few ruin the reputation for the many. Only this time, it's the opposite - the many are ruining the reputation of the few. I have seen people drive as fast as thirty-five miles per hour on school grounds past speed limit signs that state a clear limit of 10 MPH. Even though the disciplinarian keeps watch in the mornings and is able to maintain order in at least the small area he patrols, when the afternoon dismissal bell sounds, it's complete chaos.

The cars quickly line up in front of the school parallel to Terwood Road, waiting for their opportunity to make the right or left onto Bear Boulevard. At about 2:15, the buses are allowed to leave from the bus port behind the school and travel down the Boulevard (if the two-lane drive can be called that) to where the two streets intersect. To my understanding, the vehicle that approaches the intersection first has the right-of-way. These ignorant drivers completely disregard this concept. After stopping at the stop sign, the bus driver accelerates across the intersection, as not one or two but sometimes *three* cars dart in front of the bus to make the turn. The waiting vehicles who decide not to take their lives into their hands wait with half their car's length past the stop line, revving their engine and edging forward to cross in between the buses as they proceed down the road. It is an insane thing to do even if there were other cars traveling down the road, but multi-ton buses that are rumbling down a hill with a steep grade couldn't stop even if they wanted to.

Fortunately, as of yet, nobody has been seriously injured in this practice. There was one unlucky

driver, however, who wrecked her car on the median strip after crashing into a telephone pole sometime in the fall. Fortunately, nobody was injured, but it made a spectacle for those passing by. Down the road fifty feet however, the cars continued to cut of the buses without thinking twice.

This kind of unsafe driving is what gets people killed. And it's not just on the highways anymore (which are dangerous enough), but right at our schools. Imagine your son or daughter driving off to school one day and never coming home because of this sort of behavior. Unfortunately, the administration of the school turns a blind eye to these irresponsible actions. While students complain about there not being enough parking spaces, none of the discipline department or administration even suspects the chaos that erupts at 2:15. Something needs to be done about this immediately before someone is hurt.

Students' attitude is nowhere more apparent than on the road, including on our township buses. I can't help but feel sorry for all the bus drivers who brave this scrutiny one hundred and eighty-four days a year to earn their paychecks. In my opinion, there isn't a more depressing job in the world.

Think about it. You awake at a quarter after five or even earlier so that you can be at the bus garage by 6:20 to start your route. You proceed to drive your route, the same route you drove the day before, the same one that you will drive tomorrow, and the same one that you will drive for the rest of the year and possibly the next. In the morning, at least, the kids you pick up are too asleep to care, if that can be considered a blessing. Now skip ahead to the end of the day.

It's 2:10 on a Monday afternoon, the longest day of the week. UMHS students come bounding out of the doors and swarm the buses. The first kid on the bus, having strange body piercings and wearing a chain that extends the length of his legs, bounds toward the back of the bus. More follow, squeezing toward the back and ignoring the driver. Finally the bus is full, and nobody has even said a greeting to the bus driver. After braving the "dangerous intersection" at the bottom of the hill, the bus is underway.

In the back of the bus, two people arguing, using inappropriate language such as "F*** that!" and "What kind of s*** music is this!", is heard throughout the bus. The driver raises her voice and shouts "

Watch the language!" but is ignored, and the tumult continues. Meanwhile, a girl near the middle of the bus shouts "I hate this station! Could you turn on something else?" The driver grudgingly obeys the "order" and changes the station to a heavy metal/rap mix that must annoy her to the brink of crying because I couldn't stand it either. Without any manners whatsoever, the same girl shouts to "turn up the radio!" and it is done. At least the argument is blocked out in the back of the bus.

At last the first stop arrives, and the bus stops four times down Byberry Road. Nobody says a word to the bus driver as they exit. When the driver reaches the third stop, she hollers back, "Is anyone getting off here?" "No!" another girl replies gruffly, and the ride continues. At the next stop, a station wagon turning from Frontier Road takes the corner at 35 miles per hour and guns its engine while the bus is stopped with its "stop" sign extended. Cursing at the driver, the bus driver resumes driving.

The reason that I say that being a bus driver is so depressing is that the attitude of certain students is simply astounding. Could you stand repeating the same ritual 360 times a year without a word of gratitude for measly wages? Maybe that's why the school district is in need of bus drivers now.

Anyone who's even stepped foot near the school over the past four years has probably heard the controversy over intensive scheduling that has been raging on seemingly without end. Now, it seems, the school board has decided that the solution to this problem is to simply abolish intensive scheduling in favor of shorter block-scheduling classes. However, neither type of scheduling will solve the district's problems.

One of the complaints about intensive scheduling is that certain classes, such as physical education, must be held year-round so that students can stay physically fit. This is a great idea, but making all of the classes 45 minutes long will not accomplish this goal. One way to solve this problem would be if there were somehow one period that was divided into two 45 minute classes (gym and another subject, such as AP courses, which teachers also complain about). Originally, I believed that one of the advantages of intensive scheduling was that there would be less homework (instead of eight classes to assign homework,

only four do now). However, this simply isn't true, as shown by courses such as Global Studies. However, with intensive scheduling, certain classes can seem to stretch interminably. One argument that advocates of intensive scheduling use that is completely irrelevant is that intensive scheduling prepares you for long classes in college. In 9th grade, I had a teacher whose goal was to prepare me for college; however, I remember very little now and will have forgotten everything by the time I actually attend college. So, a combination of both types of scheduling would work best. Because of our weird publication schedule this month, I won't know the outcome of the school board meeting on Monday, May 15 soon enough to include it in this article, but I hope that the school board does not simply decide to keep intensive scheduling as it isn't working the way it should.

Now that you're completely bored after listening to me express my opinions in my longest Discussion Forum article ever, take a break and go read the neighborhood news. It's been a busy month, one of the busiest in our history, and hopefully next month I'll be free of work long enough to keep up with it all.

Evan's Quest

Chapter 6 - The Dead Fortress

Evan and Crystal rode through the beautiful countryside, running streams and dazzling waterfalls for some time. It was still daytime, about midday, and the sun was high in the sky.

The two adventurers were just coming over a ridge and Evan was looking in his rucksack, not really paying attention to the road ahead, when Crystal said, "I think you should see this, Evan." Evan looked up and ahead there was a fortress.

It was smaller than the castle in his hometown but still looked quite grand. It was mostly made from wood with a large fence round the edge and he could see some buildings inside the outer fence.
"Well, let's go have a look, shall we?" Evan said to Crystal, and she began to walk down the hill toward the fortress.

They reached the moat that was around the fortress and walked over the small bridge, arriving at the outer wall. They rode around it until they found a wall. It was knocked down and Evan and Crystal squeezed through the hole that was there. Inside the castle grounds Evan looked around and couldn't see any sign of life.

"Where is everyone?" Evan asked Crystal.

"I don't know, but it looks as if this fortress has been under attack. Let's go have a look inside those buildings," Crystal answered.

Inside, the fortress was the same as outside. Nobody was there.

"Perhaps its been deserted?" Evan questioned.

The two went further down into the fortress, down corridors. Finally they came to a room at the end of a corridor. The door was closed and looked heavily fortified.
"Well, we've looked everywhere else. If there are any people in this fortress, they're in here!" Evan said down to Crystal.

Evan got down from Crystal's back and walked to the door. He tugged at the handle and realised it was locked. He knocked on it and shouted, "Hello? Is anyone in there?" Evan waited for an answer. There wasn't one,

"Well, looks like I was right. This place is deserted!" Evan and Crystal were about to leave when they heard a quiet, faint voice. "No, please wait!" The voice came from behind the door. Evan and Crystal looked back at the door.

"Hello? Who's that? Can you let us in?" Evan asked.

The door slowly opened and a large man was at the door. "Who are you? Why are you in my fortress?" Evan giggled in his head. The man's weak voice did not match his body.

"Well, my name is Evan and this is my horse Crystal. We are on a journey and we came to your fortress and wondered if we could rest?" The man looked relieved and his body slumped a bit.

"Oh good, because my humble fortress has been under attack. In fact, the attackers are up there right now, surrounding the castle! I'm surprised you managed to get in," the man said and led Evan and Crystal into the room.

"Well, sir, there are no attackers out there. In fact, there was nobody around," Evan told the man.

"My name is Josh, by the way. There isn't? Are you sure?" Evan nodded and looked around. The room was quite small to say how many were inside it. There were about twenty five or so knights sitting

in the room, all huddled together and looking very sad and bored.

"Why are you all down here?" Crystal asked Josh.

Josh jumped as a horse was talking to him, but he managed to mumble, "We are hiding out from the attackers!"

Evan then cut in and gave some advice. "I think you should stand up for yourself and fight back! This enemy can't be that strong!"

By nightfall Evan had persuaded Josh and the other knights to come out of hiding. Evan got the men ready for the next attack. He lined up all the bow men on the battlements.

The night went on and the soldiers became tired and bored. Evan was up on the battlements with his crossbow, too. Evan had almost fallen asleep when there was a bellowing near him and he jumped up. "Look! They're here! On the horizon!" Evan's heart started to beat out of control. Looking toward the horizon, he saw horses, men and catapults coming toward them.

"Bows at the ready, men!" Josh shouted.

Within minutes, the attackers were closer and Josh yelled. All the men raised their bows and Evan did the same with his crossbow. They pulled back and released. The sky was filled with arrows as they flew across and the first few rows of men fell to the ground.

This arrow flying went on until the catapults were in range for them to fire. Evan looked down as the long arms of the catapults flung forward and the enormous rocks flew toward them. Evan prepared himself as the rocks hit the wall and there was a rumble. The castle shook and some of the wall fell.

"I told you! They're too strong," Josh said to Evan.

"Don't give up yet!" Evan replied. But at the back of his mind he knew they had no chance of winning.

The carnage went on for hours and Evan thought to himself how they had survived so long. Eventually, as most of the walls had fallen, most of Josh's men were dead and the enemy was storming the castle, Evan said to Josh, "We have no chance! Let's get out of here!" Evan and Josh fled the castle at the back, Evan riding on Crystal and Josh on his own horse.

They looked back as they were about to go over a hill. The castle was crumbling and the enemy had overthrown it. Evan looked at Josh riding next to him. He could see that Josh was upset.

"I'm sorry, Josh," Evan said in a quiet voice.

"It's okay. You only meant the best. It's just that I've lost everything, my fortress, all my soldiers. I'm alone and have nothing!" Evan looked down at the ground and felt so bad for him.

For the next half-hour the two men rode through beautiful countryside, with gorgeous streams and trees all about.

"So, what are you going to do now?" Evan asked in a soft voice, trying to sound comforting.

"I don't know. What am I supposed to do?" Josh replied, and his voice seemed even more upset now.

"Evan, why don`t you tell Josh about your uncle and aunt?" Crystal asked from down below Evan. He didn't know what she meant.

"What? Why? How do you know about my family?" Evan asked her. Josh looked puzzled, too.

"Didn't you know your uncle and aunt's house is on the route you are following? I know about them because the King has filled me in on all of your life, so that I can help you the best I can!"

Evan's uncle and aunt were kind people, but he didn't see them often, because they lived so far away. But Evan was sure that they would take Josh in for a while.

"Yes, that's it, Josh. You can stay with my uncle and aunt for a while, until you get yourself back on your feet." Evan grinned at Josh. He had helped him for once.

"Are you sure? Are you sure they won't mind me staying for a little while?"

So Evan, Josh and Crystal continued on through the empty countryside, on their way to Evan's uncle and aunt's house.

Evan's Quest

Chapter 7 - New Faces

"How much farther is it, Crystal? We've been riding for hours. The sun will be setting soon, and we don't want to be riding in the dark!" Evan asked wearily.

The three travellers were now getting tired, but Crystal reassured them that they were close. In fact, they rode over a small hill, and there it was.

"Ah, I recognise that house!" Evan jumped down and ran down the hill toward a small house. Crystal and Josh followed at a slower pace.

As Evan got closer, he saw a terrifying sight inside one of the small windows. "Oh my god! Quick, quick!" Evan shouted up to the others who were quite far behind up the hill.

Evan stared in horror as the flames he had seen inside the window started to burn to the outside. He quickly headed for the door, but Crystal arrived and stopped him. "Don't be stupid, Evan. You'll be killed!"

Evan stopped and stared at the burning house. A small tear ran down his cheek, and Josh, who had just arrived, saw the small reflection of a flame in Evan's tear. Josh looked away from the sadness.

About an hour later the fire had gone out. But the house was wrecked. Evan, Josh and Crystal searched frantically inside the rubble for any sign of life. But all they found was blackened wood and some still glowing embers.

"Well, that's it. They're gone!" Evan said in a slow, saddened voice.

"I'm sorry, Evan," Josh said to him.

"Me, too. I know you loved them," Crystal said to him in a reassuring voice.

"Oh well, we had better go. It's starting to get dark," Evan said. He jumped up onto Crystal and rode off. Crystal and Josh knew he wasn't right, and he was acting strangely.

The three travelled for quite some time through the beautiful hillsides. Evan was riding up front with Josh just behind. Evan was thinking to himself while slowly looking around. He'd never been this far from home before. He suddenly wondered, as he saw the sky turning a peachy orange with the sun setting on the horizon, how much farther they were going to have to travel to get to Ry's.

He slowly stopped Crystal and got out the map that Elgan gave him. He realised he was very close!

"We're nearly there! At last!" Evan said to the other two. Evan didn't notice it but, in Josh's mind, he knew this was the end of the road. He had nowhere to go and nothing to do. He was just tagging along with Evan. A small tear just hung under his eye and the reflection of the setting sun glinted as it rolled down his cheek. He wiped it with his arm.

They rode for just a little while longer. They saw a large hill where Ry's house was supposed to be,

"Hmm, where is it? All I see is a hill?" Evan said. He jumped down from Crystal and wandered up the grassy hill. Near the top he looked around, searching for any signs of a house. Just as he got to the very top of the hill, Evan felt the ground beneath him fall away. He screamed and heard Crystal shout,

"Evan!" He was falling at quite a speed. Evan slowly opened his eyes and saw he was sliding down a thin tube that was only the size of Evan's body. He felt very claustrophobic and looked up and just saw a spot

of light too far away to see.

Evan fell for a least one more minute, and he was becoming increasingly worried. Just as Evan was slightly getting used to the tube, he shot out of the end, flew through the air, and landed on a soft surface. He bounced a little before landing flat on the soft surface. Evan was quite flustered after this and, as his eyes adjusted to the light, he looked around.

He was in a large, circular room with a very high ceiling. On the ceiling was a large, round piece of glass where the last beams of the setting sun shone through. The walls were wooden panels and the floor was also wooden. The soft surface Evan had landed on was a large, four poster bed. Around the room there were a dozen or so bookshelves stacked high with old looking books. There were no windows on the wall apart from the circular one on the ceiling. Then Evan looked in front of the bed and there, standing upright, was a very old looking man who Evan did not notice at first.

"Evan, I presume?" the old man said in a very frail voice. The man was quite tall but was bending over slightly, probably because of his back. He had a very long beard that hung down to the floor and white, scraggy hair. He was wearing a long, red robe which draped along the floor. He also wore small glasses that were perched on the end of his nose. After Evan had looked at the man, he uttered, "Err, yes, are you Ry?" Evan sat up on the bed, then stood up at the side.

"I am indeed, lad, the one and only Ry!" Evan looked at Ry, then looked around some more.

Ry saw this and said, "It's pretty impressive, don't you think?" Evan now focused back to Ry and began to talk to him for several minutes. Evan's main concern was that of Crystal and Josh. But Ry reassured him that they were fine.

"Ah yes, your two friends up on the surface. Do not worry, Evan. They are just fine. My workers are looking after them!" Evan was shocked once again by the news that Ry had his own workers! But Evan was not sure that this was the whole truth.

"Ah, you do not believe me!" Ry said to Evan.

"No, no. I never said that!" Evan replied.

"You are forgetting that I am a master magician. I know what you are thinking!" Evan felt very disturbed by this, that the privacy of his mind was being listened in on by Ry.

"How do you think that I got in contact with my good friend Elgan?" Ry continued.

"Well, I would like to see these workers," Evan answered.

"Ah yes, you are still concerned about your friends. Yes, certainly. I will take you there now." Ry beckoned Evan over with a curl of his hand. Evan looked around the room and could see no apparent door apart from the tube he first entered through. He walked over to Ry, and Ry clicked his fingers. There was a flash and Evan suddenly realised that he was no longer in the circular room but he was back on solid ground with the now night sky above him.

Evan looked around. He could see he was in the centre of a clearing, surrounded by tall trees all around the edge. In the clearing were a dozen or so little men scuttling around doing various tasks. Evan couldn't believe his eyes. The men were only about half the size of Evan. Evan watched as the small dwarf creatures busily ran around. Some were chopping wood, some mixing liquids in pots, and others were talking to each other.

"Evan, I'd like you to meet my workers. They do jobs for me, and in return I give them a home and I feed them.

Over the next ten minutes, Ry introduced all of his workers to Evan. Evan shook their hands with a smile on his face. All the workers were small, with green clothes on. A few had brown beards, and

others had little hats on. After they had all been introduced, they went back to work. Evan looked around and saw Crystal far over the other side of the clearing, eating out of a trough, and Josh talking to one of Ry's workers.

Ry turned to Evan and began to speak. "As you can see, Evan, your friends are being well looked after, and they are very safe. This clearing is my worker's home. It is very secret so that my workers will be safe. But it's getting late now, Evan. Let's go back to my home and I'll show you your room for the night. Tomorrow we can get started with some magic."

"Thank you, Ry. I can't thank you enough for how you are helping me. My father is very ill, and I need to help him anyway I can," Evan replied.

"Oh, it's nothing, Evan. I'm happy to help however I can." Ry clicked his fingers once again, and as before, Evan found himself back in the circular room.

Evan's Quest

Chapter 8 - The art of magic (Part I)

Evan looked around for his room, but still could only see the room he was in and the small tube opening in the wall.

"Ah yes, your room." Ry turned to one side of the room. He pointed at the wall and clicked his fingers on the other hand. There was a sparkle of white light on the wall, and when it faded, a door was revealed.

"Wow, that's amazing!" Evan said in amazement.

"Oh, that's nothing, Evan. Well, go in then," Ry said. "I'll be here if you need me. Have a good sleep." Ry turned away from Evan and walked toward one of many of the book shelves around the room. He looked at the books for a minute, then took one down. He sat down on a large chair and began to read. Evan looked at the door and was just about to go in when Ry looked up from his book and said, "Goodnight, Evan."

"Thank you. Goodnight to you, too, Ry," Evan replied.

Evan closed the door behind him and looked around the room. It was almost pitch black and he searched for a candle. He found a large one by the door. He lit it and the room came into view suddenly.

Evan's room was square, with four walls. There was a large, comfy bed in the middle and various other pieces of furniture around the room. There were no windows because Ry's entire house was inside the hill. Evan got into the bed, blew out the candle and fell straight to sleep.

Evan had a very good nights sleep, and his bed was very comfortable. Evan suddenly awoke as sunlight beamed through his bedroom door. He slowly opened his eyes and rubbed them. He sat up and looked at the open door. Standing in the doorway was Ry.

"Good morning, Evan. I trust you had a good night's sleep? We have to get started early, so up you get. Breakfast will be ready in a few minutes," Ry said in a soft voice.

"Ok, thank you. Yes, I did. I had a very good night's sleep," Evan said in a weary voice, as he was still half-asleep.

Evan got dressed and made his bed. He opened his bedroom door and walked out into the main room. Ry was preparing breakfast. He looked up and said, "Hello, Evan. Ready to get started after we've eaten breakfast?" Ry asked Evan as he walked into the room.

"Sure, but after we have eaten, do you mind if I go and see my friends for a little bit?" Evan asked as he sat down at the large, circular table.

"Not at all. We'll just eat this, then I will send you to the clearing and you can see your friends for a bit. Then we can get started with teaching you some magic."

Ry put the breakfast onto the table and they ate. While Evan was eating, he thought about his father.

The two finished their meal and Ry sent Evan to the clearing as he said he would. Ry stayed at the house, though. Evan looked around in the clearing. A warm breeze blew around his face and he looked around for his friends. The dwarfs were all in one corner of the clearing eating their breakfast, and Evan saw Crystal and Josh also eating in one part of the clearing. Evan ran up to them.

"Hello. How are you doing?" Evan walked to Crystal and began to rub his hand along her side.

"We're fine, Evan. These dwarfs are treating us very well," Crystal said to him. Josh turned to Evan. "

Yes, we are fine. How are you doing with Ry?" Josh asked.

"Ry is great. He is an amazing man, with remarkable powers," Evan replied.

The three talked for about fifteen minutes. Evan was reassured that they were ok and wouldn't mind staying there for a while.

"Well, I'm glad you are ok. I will be back tomorrow to see you again, but I've got to got started with my magic." Evan waved to the two friends and walked into the centre of the clearing. He looked around and thought to himself how he was going to get back. He went over to one dwarf and asked him,

"Err, excuse me."

"Yes, can I help you?" the dwarf replied in a quick, squeaky voice.

"How do I tell Ry that I am ready to go back to his house?" Evan asked.

"Ah, no problem," the dwarf replied. Then he walked a little further into the centre of the clearing. He then stopped and clapped his hands loudly. The dwarf then went back to work with the others. "He'll be here in a minute," he shouted over to Evan.

As the worker said, Ry appeared in the centre of the clearing within a few minutes. Evan walked over to him.

"Evan, you're ready to get started then?" Evan nodded and Ry took them back to the house.

The Knights of the Square Table

Chapter 12

The roar of the battle was growing louder as Christopher and Dave made their way toward the unusual building in the center of town. The town was deserted, or, at least, it seemed to be. Most of the townspeople were hidden in their houses, away from the pandemonium that was taking place outside. Few seemed to realize the graveness of the situation. It would be less than an hour at the rate things were happening before the last knights were defeated and the trolls made entry into the town. Then what?

Dave blocked out the thought as they drew closer to the structure. Several armed guards stood watch outside the complex, which was surrounded by a tall wall. From what they could see, there was only one entrance, directly in front of them, and two guards stood on either side, swords ready.

"What could be so valuable that so many guards are needed to protect it in the middle of a battle that Anthony's forces are losing so badly?" Dave wondered aloud. Christopher nodded in agreement. With a motion from his hand that was not visible to the guards, both Christopher and Dave turned down a side street less than a block from the structure.

Around them, the wind made eerie noises as it blew between the buildings. The sun, which was now just above the horizon for its ten-minute day, cast strange shadows around them. When they were safely out of sight of the guards, Christopher spoke first.

"I don't think we should ask the others to join us," he suggested. "It would inevitably just draw attention to ourselves and create more problems than we already have."

"Agreed," Dave said, surprised that Christopher was asking him for his opinion. "How are we going to get inside?"

"We must distract the guards somehow," Christopher said. "Or else we must gain entry by climbing over that wall, but I wouldn't suggest it."

Dave peeked around a nearby corner. The wall was visible in the distance. Atop it were sharp spikes that would kill anyone instantly who attempted to scale the wall.

"I guess we'll have to go with our first idea," Dave replied.

"How will we go about that?" Dave asked, but as the words were emerging from his mouth, a large gust of wind erupted from the sky. It appeared to be concentrated in one area - around the medical building. The trees surrounding the structure groaned and swayed, and the snow on the ground made it impossible to see inside. From where they were, Dave and Christopher felt nothing. It was obvious what the effects of the sudden gust were: there was a sickening crash and a loud boom that shook the ground around the now splintered building. Enormous slabs of stone that had once been the foundation of the building flew out in all directions, but, once outside the wind, landed quickly.

People scrambled out of the way, running for their lives from the flying rocks. The two watched in horror as one of the stone slabs slammed into one of the passersby, killing him in seconds. Christopher and Dave turned away.

"Mike was in that building," Dave said, fear evident in his voice.

"He was when I last left him," Christopher said, uneasiness now creeping into his voice.

"We have to go back for him!" Dave shouted and began to run back toward the storm. He stopped at the end of the street, frozen in place, watching the storm which still raged. Though the building was now completely reduced to a pile of rubble, the fragments inside continued to whirl around due to some

unseen force. Christopher grabbed Dave by the arm and pulled him back into the alley.

"You fool! You're only going to get yourself killed!" he exclaimed in anger.

"But Mike was inside there-"

"We have to face the truth," Christopher stated. "Mike may have been inside the building when it was destroyed." He was interrupted by a gasp from Dave but continued on. "But if he were, there's nothing we can do about it now except get ourselves killed with him. And if he somehow escaped, he will be fine on his own."

"On his own...?" Dave asked. "You're not suggesting that we still go inside, are you?"

"Of course I am," Christopher said. "In fact, that occurrence just gave us an opportunity. Look over there!" Christopher pointed toward the enclosed structure, which now stood unguarded. Looking down the street, Dave spotted the guards standing just outside of the range of flying debris, watching the destruction unfold.

"Hurry!" Christopher said. "Get inside before someone sees us!"

"But-" Dave started to reply, before he was pulled along as Christopher ran across the open street to an opposite, closer alleyway. When he saw that the coast was still clear, he sprinted off again inside the spiked wall, motioning for Dave to follow. Dave ran as fast as he could toward the gates, but a rock halted his progress about halfway through the trek. Falling over, he grabbed his knee in pain.

"Come on!" Christopher shouted just loud enough for only him to hear. "The guards will be back as soon as... that stops!"

"I can't get up!" Dave screamed. He pushed against the ground in an attempt to get some leverage, but shooting pains seared through his left leg.

Christopher shook his head but rushed over to Dave and bent to help him up. It took precious seconds in the open for Christopher to finally get into a walking stance and support Dave at the same time, and it took what seemed like ages to reach the inside of the wall.

When they were finally out of sight of the guards, Christopher motioned for Dave to make himself flat against the wall, while he did the same. After a few moments, when it was clear that the guards had not seen them, Christopher said, "They didn't see us... yet, so don't let your guard down. If they come back, we'll be discovered in seconds."

"There's something very wrong with my leg," Dave said, wincing and grabbing it just above his knee.

"Let me take a look. We need to keep moving." Christopher looked down at Dave's leg. The injury seemed more serious than at first glance - blood stained Dave's pant legs down to the ankles.

"It's nothing," Christopher said to reassure Dave, "but I'd better take a look just to be safe."

Pulling up Dave's pant leg, Christopher discovered a big gash that ran almost the entire length of Dave's leg, widening near his kneecap. It appeared as if most of the bleeding had stopped; however, Dave's knee was somewhat out of position.

"You just bumped your knee," Christopher said. "Let me get this fixed up and we'd better move on."

"How are we going to move on?" Dave asked Christopher as Christopher tied a cloth to Dave's leg. When he tightened it, Dave winced again, but made no sound. "I can barely walk as it is," Dave said.

"Well," Christopher debated, "we can't go back outside - we'd surely be caught then, and there's a battle raging. If the calks are afraid of what's inside, maybe the trolls won't enter either should they invade the town."

“If calks are afraid to enter,” Dave said grimly, “shouldn’t we be afraid too?” Christopher gave no answer.

“OK, it should be fine now. I would suggest that you try to not use that leg for a while, but since you can’t do that, just try to walk with the other leg as much as possible so that it doesn’t start bleeding again.”

Dave pulled the bloody pantleg down again and did his best to follow Christopher across the wide expanse that surrounded the structure. It now appeared to be some sort of place of worship. The building possessed a large domed ceiling, which somehow seemed transparent though it was made of neither glass nor any material with which Dave and Christopher were familiar. That part had been invisible from the outside. Christopher wondered aloud why a city would want to hide an architectural wonder such as this.

Dave was preoccupied by the growing pain in his leg, which intensified with each step. By the time that the two had finally reached safety in the shadow of the building, the pain was almost unbearable. Moving around the side of the round structure, Dave noted that there were many candles that seemed to be lit by an unseen source.

“There must be a door here somewhere,” Dave whispered to Christopher. What little light the sun had provided was now dwindling fast, and it would not be much longer before the sun did not rise altogether. Christopher had explained that, for four weeks each year, Yavin’s castle is shrouded in darkness, and this is when he is at his strongest.

Putting his thoughts aside, Dave followed Christopher around to the back of the building, where they found a door which appeared to be plated in gold. Ornate designs covered the entire surface, except for a small hole where a key could be placed.

“This is great,” Christopher stated indignantly. “We get all the way inside, and we’re stopped by a simple lock.”

After he had stopped speaking, the noise of battle was again beginning to intensify. Torches and fires on top of the distant walls lit the city, which would have normally been invisible in the pitch darkness.

“Have any ideas?” Dave asked cautiously, not wanting to anger Christopher.

“We could force it open with magic,” Christopher said, “but not without the help of Katie and Chapin. Even then, with the stones being depleted as they are, I don’t know how much effect that would have.”

“There doesn’t even seem to be a doorknob,” Dave said suddenly. Indeed, it was impossible to locate one on the heavy door. Even if they were unable to undo the lock, it might be impossible to force it open.

“It doesn’t look like any keyhole I’ve ever seen, either,” Christopher said. Instead of being shaped as a normal keyhole, the hole was oval in shape and appeared to have several grooves. The door was thick, as well, and the hole seemed to reach most of the way through it.

“It almost looks as if it could be opened with-“

”A sword!” Christopher exclaimed. “I never thought of using a sword. Try using the Falchion, Dave.”

“I can barely stand up as it is,” Dave said. “How can I exert enough strength to even turn the key? What’s the chances of this working, anyway?”

“Fine,” Christopher said. “If you want to be stubborn, then I’ll do it myself. He reached for Dave’s sword, but Dave clamped his hand down on it.

"I'll do it," he said indignantly and straightened himself up from the slumped position he had been maintaining during the past few minutes.

Reaching his full height, Dave drew the sword from its sheath. He had had little occasion to use it over the past few months and had almost forgotten that the weapon was at his side, even though it weighed him down tremendously when he tried to run.

The sword seemed to sparkle and shine with a whitish glow. It was very faint, but Dave was sure that it hadn't been there before. *Maybe I'm going crazy because of this leg*, he thought. The unique shape of the sword seemed even more distinct from where he was standing.

"Here goes," Dave said and slammed the sword into the keyhole. There was a hissing sound, and Dave removed his hand from the sword's hilt in astonishment. The sword was glowing red hot, even though it was well below freezing outside.

"What...?" Dave asked Christopher, who appeared to be as astonished as he.

"I didn't even turn it..." Dave began to say but was interrupted as the door began to swing outward. The massive object threatened to crush Christopher and Dave as they scrambled out of the way.

The sword clattered to the ground, still superheated from whatever had just taken place. The snow around the scorching sword turned to steam, which promptly froze in the sub-zero temperatures around them.

"Amazing!" Dave exclaimed. Christopher was too busy looking around to see if anyone had heard the commotion they had made. When it was clear that nobody had been anywhere near to hear, he turned toward Dave.

"I've never heard of a device like this," Christopher said, as awestruck as Dave for a change. "You'd better wait for a few minutes to get your sword before we go inside - someone might steal it, and besides, it will give us away if anyone happens to come back here."

"Good idea," Dave said, and they spent the next few minutes in silence, waiting for the sword to cool enough so that Dave could reclaim it. The sounds of the battle were growing ever more frantic, and the number of figures on the city walls seemed to multiply every time the comrades looked over at them.

When the sword had finally cooled enough so that Dave was able to pick it up just long enough to replace it in its sheath, Christopher led the way inside the temple. There was only one room, and from what they could tell, only one entrance. There were no windows save for the translucent top, which had a strange quality where Christopher and Dave were able to see clearly out, but anyone who attempted to peek inside would not see a thing.

The room they were in was perfectly circular, the walls adorned with great painted figures and more gold decorations. "Now I see why the guards are protecting this place," Dave said.

Upon further inspection, however, everything was covered in a thick layer of dust that seemed to suggest that the interior of the building had not been disturbed for quite some time. By the looks of things, at least ten years, Dave thought.

"If nobody's been here in a long time as it seems the case," Dave said audibly, "how would the guards know what was inside to protect? And why would they protect it if nobody could get inside?"

"All questions we cannot answer," Christopher replied mysteriously. "We are only wasting our time attempting to comprehend these things. Look at that!"

Christopher was pointing toward a large pedestal that was rising out of the ground as they watched. The entire building creaked and rattled as some mechanism lifted the heavy stone out of the floor. As they watched in amazement, layer after layer rose up, so that almost a third of the room was encompassed by

the concentric steps that led up to the top of the pedestal. The top was adorned as ornately as the rest of the building and appeared to be made out of some type of crystal.

"I'm becoming more amazed by the minute," Dave said in a whisper, almost speechless. Christopher had ascended the steps to examine the top of the marvel of engineering.

"I think you had better come and see this, Dave," Christopher said in a voice that had a note of urgency.

As Dave walked up the multitude of steps, he noticed the eerie quiet that pervaded the atmosphere. No normal building could block out the sounds of the war that were present outside, but some property of the temple seemed to stop all noise. As a result, the only sounds were the shuffling of Dave's and Christopher's feet as they walked on the stone, and the hubbub that seeped through the open door.

The top of the pedestal was more complex than Dave had thought when he had first noticed it rising from the ground. Whoever had cut the crystal that made up the top of the structure had obviously spent a long time on the exquisite design. *But why would someone do such a thing when nobody would ever see it in a place like this?* Dave thought.

"It looks like the keyhole out there," Dave said, puzzled. Christopher was looking around the room, taking in his surroundings.

"Yes, it does share a striking resemblance," Christopher said. But Dave wasn't listening; he was staring at the Falchion, which he had replaced at his side. It was glowing white again, and the white seemed to permeate even through the makeshift scabbard that Christopher had fashioned for him.

"Look!" Dave exclaimed but did not move to touch the sword for fear of what would happen to him. Christopher rushed around to the other side of the pedestal, where Dave was frozen in awe.

"Ahh!" Dave screamed and fell backward. The sword was now impossibly floating in midair. The force of the sword rising from its place had thrown Dave back down several steps onto his bad leg. Even though he grimaced in pain, he watched as the sword rose higher and higher, eventually reaching the domed ceiling. It hovered there for a few moments.

Christopher took his eyes off the levitating object and moved to help Dave, who was attempting without success to right himself. The fall had reopened the cut that had slit Dave's leg, as was obvious by the fresh blood seeping onto Dave's ruined garments. Both turned away from the injury, however, when a low rumbling began to sound.

"What is that?" Dave asked.

"It's glowing again... look!" Christopher pointed out. The Falchion had remained in its floating position for several minutes, but a low rumbling sound was now beginning to be emitted from it, and it was again moving back down.

"What is possessing it to do this..." Christopher began, but cut himself off when he looked at the crystal, which was beginning to glow with the sword. Both artifacts pulsed wildly, and the rumbling was beginning to increase. Soon it was loud enough for Christopher and Dave to hear clearly without straining.

"Maybe we should get out of here," Dave suggested, but was again cut off by a loud crash. The door had slammed shut, sealing them in. The sounds of the outside world were now inaudible.

As the trapped party members watched in horror, the sword continued to approach the crystal. The rumbling intensified dramatically, droning out the two's thoughts. Eventually the noise became unbearable. *It must be able to be heard outside,* Dave thought as he covered his ears. *The guards will discover us*, he thought ironically.

The rumbling was beginning to shake the very building to its foundations. Dave and Christopher

had backed up to the walls to get as far away from the sword as they could. Just when it seemed that the noise could get no louder, and the light could get no brighter, it came to an abrupt end as the sword lowered itself into the hole in the pedestal.

There was a moment of complete and utter silence as well as pitch darkness. All of a sudden, without warning, the dome's covering shattered, and the sword again began to resonate in its full glory. The light formed a pillar stretching far up into the sky and visible for miles, bathing the entire city as if it were noon.

The noise was unbearable. After a few moments, the walls around Dave and Christopher began to fall one by one, breaking into a million pieces that flew away from the pedestal. Wind began to blow that was unlike any they had ever seen, even the strange phenomenon they had witnessed earlier.

"Let's get out of here!" Dave screamed at the top of his lungs. Even though he knew that Christopher could not hear, Christopher shook his head affirmatively and ran as fast as he could over the rubble.

The surrounding wall outside the temple was untouched, and debris from the explosion had settled at the foot of the inside of the structure. Dave halted just before the entrance.

"We'll be executed for whatever we just did if we're found," Dave said, looking back. The rays of light that were permeating the sky were still as vibrant as they were earlier, but there was an air of waiting, as if something were going to happen.

"There's no time for that. At least we'll live for a few days more," Christopher said, and threw himself through the opening. Just after Dave followed, the light erupted into a storm unlike any imaginable. Even through the now whiteout conditions, they could see clearly around them. There were no soldiers near, and people scrambled to get as far away from the building as possible.

The light appeared to branch out into thousands of individual rays, which headed toward the city walls. There were enormous bangs, and the cries of men and trolls outside the walls echoed throughout.

After a minute, the light vanished and the noise disintegrated, leaving almost no trace that anything had happened.

There was complete silence. People around the two stood in shock. The darkness of the night had returned, along with the weather conditions. Dave, who was half buried in the now foot of snow that was on the ground, was writhing in pain after the rough treatment of his damaged knee.

As Christopher tended to him for a second time, the world seemed to come back to life. Guards scrambled every which way, stunned at the occurrence. A cheer rose up. It was impossible to tell from where the sound had originated or why anyone would cheer.

"Will you be fine here for a few minutes?" Christopher asked Dave.

"I guess so," Dave said unsurely. "Go on and do what you need to. Don't forget about me, though."

"I won't, I promise," Christopher said, and then hurried off to investigate what had just happened.

The Knights of the Square Table

Chapter 13

Emerging between the buildings, Christopher walked nonchalantly among the chaos that surrounded him. Guards who had been stunned were now rushing toward the scene. Christopher looked back and was astonished to find that the entire building had somehow blown apart and that the only remaining part of it was the high pedestal, which dwarfed the wall around it. The light was gone now, but it was clearly evident that something unusual had happened by the debris that was scattered about everywhere in the snow.

Christopher made his way toward the walls and the celebrations. The mood change was astounding. In one minute, Christopher had moved from the somber, curious mood of the destroyed area to the celebrating mood near the city walls, but he could still not guess what had happened. Scrambling up the slippery ladders to the city walls, Christopher was met with an incredible sight.

Scores of trolls lay dead surrounding the city, as if a catastrophe had happened. But, to his complete astonishment, there wasn't a single human soldier that had fallen. Somehow, the soldiers who had been killed earlier had been brought back from the dead! Christopher rushed forward, pushing past onlookers in his hurry to get to the front of the line.

Anthony was standing to one side, secluded from the others, in a state of utter shock. A soldier approached him to inform him of the casualty reports, but he didn't even look up. Christopher waited until he had recovered and then approached him.

"A great victory!" Christopher shouted and reached out to shake his hand. "You have done a fine job."

Anthony shook his head. "It was nothing we did. But it looks as if someone set off the Fortress's powers. Though I cannot be entirely ungrateful, I must say that it is one of the things we have guarded against during the last twenty-five years."

"Twenty-five years?" Christopher asked, trying to obtain information. "What happened twenty-five years ago?"

"Twenty-five years ago, there was a darkness that fell over the world for three entire days. During that time, everyone was fearful to even leave their houses. Suddenly a bright light came down from the sky and that Fortress was... just there all of a sudden.

"At first, we had no idea why it had been placed there or even what its intended purpose was. A few days later, however, a traveler came to visit our city. It appeared that he was in a disguise, but we had no authority to question him. Though he was a lowly peasant, he knew more than I did or ever will.

"He told us that the Fortress that had been placed there was to guard a great evil and remove the darkness from the world. This man told us that we must guard it against those who would attempt to release the evil. Then, just as mysteriously as he had appeared the day before, he departed after having said this."

"An unusual story, indeed," Christopher nodded in agreement. "Do you know who this fellow was?"

"Not really. Nobody in the town had ever seen him before, but since he was the only person that could explain what had happened, no matter how false his explanation might be, we were better safe than sorry. Oh yes, he also gave a name. Name was Fred Chaster..... I believe."

Christopher stumbled and the world swirled around him. *Fred Chaster? Katie gave me that name*

from one of her and Mike's and Dave's adventures. It's too much of a coincidence to be true. Is it? He could still not think straight when Anthony tapped him on the shoulder and asked "Are you alright? You look as if you've seen a ghost."

"No, I'm fine. The events of the past few hours have shaken me up, that's all," Christopher said, trying to give the appearance that he had recovered quickly. "If the Fortress was so evil, then why did all of those men just somehow come back to life? Who would have had the power to enter the Fortress?"

"Chaster..... said that only one man was able to enter and that he must be kept away at all costs. He was the one who would be able to undo the lock and unleash the evil to destroy the world. But that seems untrue, now," he said, puzzled.

"Well, I think you've got enough to do right now without me bugging you," Christopher said, making an excuse to leave. "If you'll pardon me," he said and quickly moved away before the tall man could respond.

Making his way down the steps, Christopher's most pressing thought was that he must, under any circumstances, protect Dave from the knights. If they accused Dave of any trouble in their ignorance, he or they would not be able to stand against odds of six-thousand to five.

When he reached the area where Dave had been standing, the entire surroundings were illuminated by bright lanterns and soldiers combed the ruins. Dave was no where to be found, but Katie, Chapin, and Mike were standing right where Dave had been, looking in awe toward the destroyed structure.

Suddenly, the air grew quiet, and the soldiers looked toward an approaching figure. "Stop now!" one of them said, obviously uneasy about the exposed sword that now stood out above them.

The man, who looked young enough to be a boy, did not stop. On the contrary, he began to quicken his pace, pushing through the rows of guards, who seemed powerless to resist. They fell to the ground, frozen. Chapin and the others also seemed unable to do anything. Christopher attempted to walk forward but he was met with an invisible force. Frustrated, he watched in awe with all the others.

He was astonished to discover that the boy approaching the pedestal was Dave! He said not a word, and there was an air about him that seemed to suggest that he was not willingly carrying out the actions that he was now doing. Nevertheless, Dave became closer and closer to the podium.

The sword, the Falchion, began to shine as Dave reached out for it. As he grew closer and closer, the brightness of the light that illuminated him seemed to increase tenfold. Finally, Dave grasped the hilt of the sword and easily removed it from its position in the stone. The aura of light seemed to surround Dave.

Christopher blinked, and then everything was gone. Dave was standing on the ground with the sword in his hands, no longer surrounded by the light. The Fortress had simply vanished, leaving only the spiked fence around it. Even the debris caused by the explosion that had occurred earlier had vanished without a trace.

Dave suddenly looked up, and the restrictions that held everyone were suddenly gone. Several knights fell over after being released from their unbalanced positions. Christopher looked around to survey the area, finally able to move. Dave was moving across the square. Several knights reached out to stop him, but Dave held the sword out in front of him, shining, and they backed off. Finally he reached Christopher and sheathed the sword. The glow around him vanished.

"Incredible!" Dave said. "I wish I could remember what happened, but this sword seems to have magical powers that I didn't believe in before."

"It always had magical powers. I didn't tell you this, but I suspected this building to be the Shrine

from the moment I heard about the huge number of guards around it and the man named Chaster."

"Chaster?!?" Dave shouted, loud enough for everyone to hear. "When did you find out about Chaster? This may be the most important information for our journey in months!"

"Not only did I find out that a man named Chaster had visited here before, but I also discovered that the Chaster that visited here was not like the one you described. Since Chaster is a pretty uncommon name to show up in an event of that importance, at that particular time, in this place, that must mean that this Chaster has altered his appearance in some way."

"I thought it was not possible, other than becoming unseen," Chapin offered, "for any magic-wielder to take on the shape of another being."

"It is, for people like you and me. But that is what makes Yavin so powerful. He can travel around the world without arousing an eye, and even if someone did discover who he was, he would crush them in an instant. This Chaster that was here was one of two things - one of Yavin's Lords, or..."

"Or?" Katie asked hesitantly after Christopher trailed off.

"Or Yavin himself." The thought sent shivers down Mike's spine, but he said nothing.

Meanwhile, as they talked, a large crowd was gathering around the square, looking at awe at Dave and the other travelers. Katie, who had been speaking, quieted down when she noticed the scrutiny that was being placed upon them. Unnoticed to her or the others, Anthony had joined the crowd, coming to the forefront.

"It truly looks as if the Wielder has finally resurfaced. After all these years, it is truly remarkable to believe that I am seeing this in my lifetime. I know now that you are the Christopher I knew many years ago."

"You knew me?" Christopher asked slowly, a sign of recognition coming over his face.

"Mike and Katie, you have grown much since I last saw you at that troll raid twenty-five years ago. I long for the old days of pool parties and meeting together in each others' houses to play a game of Super Nintendo."

"Tony?" Katie asked, a smile coming across her face. The next moment was filled with wild jubilation. Katie and Tony embraced, everyone received pats on the back, and the crowd around them broke their silence.

"I thought you were dead," Mike managed to gasp in his astonishment. "These last twenty-five years have not been uneventful, but I have thought of you often as the time passed."

"The man you placed in the ground, I am told, was a innocent trader who was killed during our escape. I myself managed to lose the trolls in the confusion but fell into a ditch and didn't awake for two days. By that time, I was far behind you and tried to make up the lost time, but it was to no avail. So I followed you to the towers and lost you there. This city, believe it or not, is just two days' travel north of the towers. And I settled here because I did not know where else to turn. So I helped all these years to defend against trolls and every invasion. It is a good thing that you showed up just in time or I would have had my first real defeat," Tony said, cracking a smile.

"The book of Thor..." Christopher mumbled.

"Pardon me?" Katie asked Christopher.

"The book of Thor - it predicted the events that have just happened. A man named Thor wrote it hundreds of years ago after witnessing the ebb and flow of Yavin's power in the north. The book states that, after a long period of darkness, three 'outsiders' and one other will arrive to battle Yavin and put an end to the tyranny of his reign since the beginning of time, using the Falchion and the Hadar stones. The

book, however, never states whether they will be successful or not," Christopher said on a somber note.

"Except Thor did not predict the kind of help you would receive in your quest," Tony said.

"Help? You are willing to come along with us?" Chapin asked.

"Indeed. Except I have decided that some... minor reinforcements, say my entire army of loyal followers united against Yavin, would aid us," Tony smiled.

"I can't say how much I can thank you for this," Christopher said. "But I'm not the only one who is in need of thanking you. The entire world will know you as a hero."

"I can only hope that that is true," Anthony said. "Even with this assistance, we may still be going against great odds if we were to attack now."

"I agree, but-" Christopher was cut off as a soldier came running up at top speed.

"I have an urgent message for you, Sir Anthony," the knight said, out of breath.

"Go on," Anthony said with a wave of his hand.

"A messenger from Talhan to the south just told me to relay the message that Yavin's forces are gathering around the mountains, about ten miles south of here. They are mounting what could be a catastrophic attack on the lands to the south."

"How many were involved in this attack?" Christopher asked. "Did King Jor tell you?"

"He said..." the man began, and then froze, as if he could not say the words that were about to be said. "He said that over 50,000 trolls had gathered, as well as calks and other creatures that number in the tens of thousands. They mean to conquer the world."

"With those numbers, it is not a far-off proposition," Christopher muttered, looking around. "We must do something about this."

"The King also said that we have less time than he previously thought - the evil ones mean to attack within weeks."

"Th..thank you," Christopher managed to stutter. The messenger walked away at a more leisurely pace now that his message had been delivered.

"This is a grave turn of events," Anthony said. "Even with the entire world united, which would never happen, we would never stand a chance against an army of that magnitude! Yavin will force a reign of terror and tyranny on the whole world!"

"Let's attack now," Chapin suggested.

"Pardon me?" Anthony said. "We don't have nearly enough men to withstand an attack of that magnitude."

"No," she said. "Let's go right to Yavin's castle now and finish this! No warning, no waiting, let's just put an end to it all!"

"She does have a point," Christopher said a moment after the suggestion was offered. "We do have over six thousand men here with which to charge the fortress, and Yavin can't have held that many supporters back if so many are on the offensive."

"If we were to attack now, Yavin would be caught completely by surprise. Since we can be assured that there were no dark survivors of this battle, he may believe that his followers are still involved in a stalemate here and send even more troops. By that time, we will have evacuated the town and been on our way."

"Before he receives news that the town is deserted, we will be at Yavin's throat," Mike said. "And more of his troops will be occupied here thinking that reinforcements are needed!"

"If we were to defeat Yavin himself, his armies in the south would surely fall without his

controlling powers," Christopher pointed out.

"Sounds like we have a task on our hands," Anthony said. "I sent word to the next city, named Yahokl, about twenty-five miles to the east. I'll send back a message to have their reinforcements meet us at the foot of the Black Stone Mountains."

"It's hard to believe that we're really going to try to do this," Dave said.

"You must understand that we all are undertaking a grave risk. Even with six thousand soldiers, most of us will not return alive, whether we win the battle or not. But we will be fighting for the entire world, and our deaths will not be in vain," Christopher ended his mini-speech.

"We are all behind you," Dave ensured him.

"Very well then," Christopher and Anthony said together. Anthony continued, "We will leave in the morning. We can't afford to waste any time at all."

Katie, Chapin, and Mike went back to rooms that had been provided for them by Anthony. Unlike other rulers, Anthony was not a king or queen, and he lived among the people, partly because of his own choosing. He hadn't been elected or succeeded to the throne but had won so many victories that people began to think of him as the leader, and eventually that became true.

"This may be the last night we will sleep in a bed for the rest of our lives," Katie said grimly as she and the others arrived at the room.

"We will prevail in this battle," Chapin said. "Pessimism won't help us win any more quickly."

"You're starting to sound like Christopher," Katie mumbled.

"We have traveled all this way, and when the moment you have been waiting for for twenty-five years arrives, will you sit on the side and watch the battle, or will you try your hardest to help ensure the victory?"

"Well, if you put it that way-"

"It doesn't matter which way I put it," Chapin said in a low tone. "It's still important that everyone who accompanies us be entirely committed to the journey ahead."

"I understand," Katie responded. Mike had left for his room next door; he would share it with Dave if he ever stopped celebrating the victory.

Well into the morning the victory celebration continued. At first, Mike had assumed that when he was told "tomorrow morning", Anthony had meant right now, but upon listening to the joyous music that was just fading away as dawn came despite the near blizzard outside, he was more and more convinced that the celebration and the weather would keep them inside for most of the day.

There came a bang on the door. Mike plodded out of his bed, half asleep, to answer the courier who, he could see through a small hole in the door, was waiting outside in the snow to deliver a message to him. He pulled the locks off the door and pushed. It didn't budge. Looking through the peephole again, Mike noticed that over two feet of snow was barricading the door in front of him. The courier seemed unaware of this fact as he stood on the doorstep.

Mike shouted outside, and the courier realized that Mike was asking him to remove the snow from the doorstep. He did so grudgingly. When he delivered the letter, Mike gave him some extra gold to keep him satisfied.

The letter was written in a scraggly handwriting, which Mike recognized as Christopher's. It read simply:

There will be a strategy meeting today at high noon at Anthony's residence. Bring no one, and do not

show this letter to anyone other than Chapin or Katie.

Following the instructions, Mike trudged through the waist deep snow to gather Katie and Chapin before proceeding across town to where Sir Anthony lived. It was a hard trek, to say the least, but there was still an atmosphere of exuberance and waiting in the air.

Arriving at the house, the three threw down their coats on a large wooden bench and looked about the surroundings. There were more rooms - the one they were currently in seemed to serve only as the entryway. A maid noticed them and, after Dave showed her the letter, she led them to the back of the house.

The room was nothing less than extravagant. Large tapestries lined two sides of the room. The third consisted of clear glass that let in enough natural light that candles were not necessary even at dusk and dawn. There was one door to the room, a heavy wooden door that appeared to be nearly soundproof so that nobody would be able to overhear negotiations inside.

In the middle of the room was a large square table, with elaborately ornate edgework and four decorated legs. The table was made of oak wood, it seemed, a precious commodity in the north. Perhaps Anthony's modesty was not entirely deserved.

He was seated at the far edge, with Christopher and Dave sitting adjacent to him and across from each other on the windowed side of the room. The table was large enough to hold at least sixteen people from end to end. Several soldiers who appeared to be high-ranking were seated further down the table from Dave and Christopher. Mike, Chapin, and Katie took the last three seats. Evidently, Anthony had known who and who not to invite.

Christopher and Anthony were talking, and the rest of the room was in complete silence except for occasional whispers among the soldiers. One of the soldiers whispered in response to Katie's question that it was mannerly to wait in silence until the commander called them to order.

At the present, it seemed as if that wait would be quite a while. Mike pulled out a piece of parchment from his bag of belongings - it was one of the few that he had saved since he had obtained them before they had left in the fall.

Mike was engrossed in drawing a picture of the unusual scene. *It will be an interesting story to tell*, he figured. *It's not often that we go on a journey to crush the greatest evil in the world.* Suddenly, he realized that he no longer wished to return home as much as he had years before. He was debating what he would do if they were successful when there was a loud rap on the table.

"We will now begin," Sir Anthony said.