Shoemaker Village

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Volume 39 - August 2000

Serving the community for over 3 years



record rain

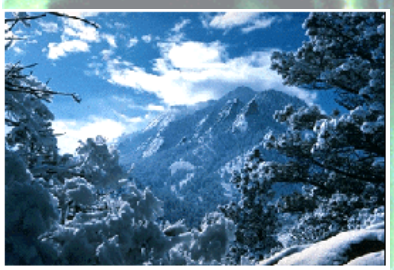
a *shoemaker village* special report

heaviest storm in area's history shatters records and shuts down entire region for hours

vandals with guns?

a *shoemaker village* special report

neighbor rozanne spiecker reveals shocking information about the extent of recent vandalism



on the inside

humor from the village square included
misfortune befalls a character in *the knights of the square table* - will he survive?
massive power outages plague area

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***Cover photo courtesy Henry Sokolowski**

editor's pages

information you should know

Welcome to the August issue of *Shoemaker Village*!

To begin, the big feature in this month's issue is the two special reports we have included. This is only the second time in *Village* history that we have been able to include two *Shoemaker Village* Special Reports in one issue. The first report, *Record Rain*, details an enormous storm that occurred on July 30. The second, *Vandals with Guns*, consists of a letter that Rozanne Speicker wrote to the *Village*, and some commentary on it. We encourage you to read these reports as they contain important information for you to know as a neighborhood or area resident.

You might have noticed that the July issue of *Shoemaker Village* was unable to be published. Had you visited the *Shoemaker Village* website, you would have been informed that the publication date for the July issue had at first been pushed back, and then cancelled. However, because we fully expected to have to cancel at least one issue this summer, all is not lost. As you may recall, in the June 2000 issue of the *Village*, it was stated that because of college visits and other duties, one of the summer issues may have had to be canceled. In fact, the reason that the July issue's cancellation was forced was because of vacation and college visitations. Because we were forced to cancel the July issue, the accounts of paying subscribers will be credited an additional month. We are sorry for any inconvenience this may have caused you.

This month's issue contains news that was gathered for both last month and this month. It is impossible for the *Village* editors to put together a quality news section of the magazine without additional help. Therefore, we are repeating our plea for a news editor. All this position would require is to take note of important news that occurs during the month and contribute articles on the subjects we have missed. Of course, anyone who would take this position would receive a free subscription to the *Village*.

While we'd like to share good news with you for next month's issue, there are many factors working against us. The first is an enormous load of homework, including over 1700 pages of reading and some 150 math problems to accomplish in three weeks. The second is a vacation that is planned at the end of the month for me as well as some of our other staff members. Visit our website to keep updated on the latest *Village* news at all times.

The *Shoemaker Village* website continues to expand, receiving over two thousand page views in the month of June alone. (This doesn't even include reloads!) We have moved our pages to a faster server to accommodate our readers and have begun to offer free internet subscriptions, for which several

people have taken up our offer. Also, you may also have realized that the comment form link on the pages was functioning incorrectly. Though the comment page had been operational since early April, nobody had informed us that the link to the page was not working right, and we did not discover the problem until June. In the future, if you notice that something on our site isn't quite right, just send us an email and we'll be sure to address it as soon as possible.

As you may have noticed on the cover, neighbor Rozanne Spiecker asked us to relay some important information about neighborhood vandals. Be sure to check out her email message and the accompanying article in the Neighborhood News section of the *Village*. Hopefully, with this information, our readers will be able to prevent similar incidents from occurring in the future.

You may also have noticed a new type of puzzle featured on the puzzle page this month. Since we began featuring different types of puzzles instead of the usual crossword puzzles and word searches, we have been receiving much positive feedback. This month's puzzles come in the form of four "math squares" in which you must fill in the correct numbers to equal the totals after the specified operations are performed. To see this month's puzzles, turn to page 6.

We have made several changes in the format of the magazine this month. You may have noticed the different font styles that now are featured as the titles of the colored sections. In addition, the cover has also been slightly modified from June's issue. Now that we've revamped the look and feel of the magazine, we need to know what you think! Send us some comments through our webpages at http://www.shoemakervillage.org/ or send a letter to the address on the acknowledgments page.

Finally, we realized that Daniel Burgess, one of our storywriters who contributes Evan's Quest to the *Village*, did not have his name featured on the acknowledgments page. We apologize for this mistake. In addition, Daniel has sent us a picture of himself for the *Village* community to see. You can see this on the acknowledgments page. Daniel currently resides in Yorkshire, England.

That's all for this month! Enjoy this issue of the *Village* and we hope to be hearing from you when you share your comments with us in the interim between this and next month's *Village* publications. Have a great August!

acknowledgments

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The September issue of Shoemaker Village is tentatively scheduled to be published on Friday, August 25, 2000.
All contributions for the next issue must be received by Monday, August 21, 2000.

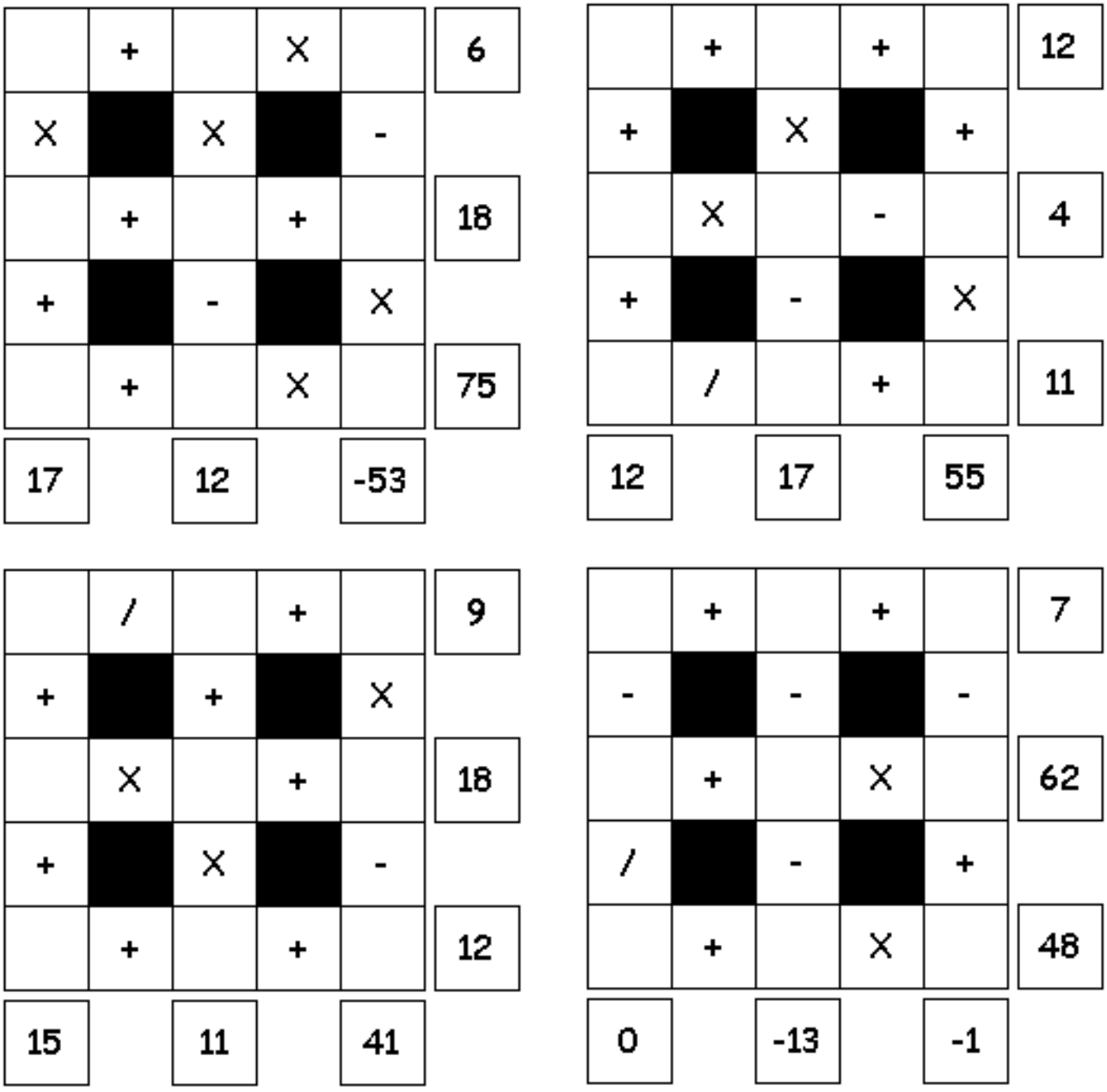
Upcoming topics in **The Discussion Forum:**

September 2000: How has the college admissions process changed in recent years, and is this change for better or worse?

October 2000: What has happened to the holiday of Halloween?

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puzzle page



Attempt to solve the puzzles above by inserting the numbers 1 to 9 in the empty boxes such that when the operations in the connecting boxes are performed, the results are the numbers at the bottoms and rights of the columns.

Each number (between 1 and 9) is only used once in each puzzle.

The solutions for these puzzles can be found in the September 2000 issue of the *Village*.

record rain

a shoemaker village special report

Sunday, July 30 dawned a day that seemed as if it would be just like any other the neighborhood had been experiencing during the week before. Cool temperatures for the past month had meant open windows throughout the area as if it were spring.

When clouds began to roll in at around 5:30 p.m., neighbors expected just another thunderstorm like those the area had been experiencing during the past few weeks. Unlike July 1999, which had recorded almost no measurable rainfall, July 2000 showed a surplus of rain.

There was little to say that that day would bring the most rain in recorded history.

The torrential downpours began shortly after 5:50 p.m.. The rain began hard and stayed that way for almost an hour, at times reaching an unprecedented intensity of almost *five inches per hour*. Within ten minutes, rainwater was flowing down Butternut Drive like a river and draining off of neighbors yards that looked like lakes.

Neighbor Christopher Sokolowski, who was standing in awe looking out the window, simply commented, “Woah!” as he watched the deluge wash away flowers and mulch in his front yard.

The flood waters ran to the lowest point in the neighborhood, the water retention ditch at the end of Butternut Drive. Within a half hour after the deluge began, the basin was already filled to capacity. By the end of the night, the water level had set records.

“This is the worst I’ve seen it in fourteen years.”

-Ed Haggerty

The first wave of rainfall ended just an hour later. However, it was impossible to survey the damage because of dangerous lightning in the area. Therefore, the pictures that you see featured in this story have been enhanced as much as possible because they were taken just before sunset. Even with these enhancements, the pictures show only a shadow of what the disaster was like.

Between 6:50 and 8:20 p.m., an additional two inches of rain fell in spurts, aggravating conditions in the area. The raging torrent that had once been the creek at the end of the neighborhood had risen at least ten feet, enveloping the entire wooded flood plain at the end of the development. It came within feet of enveloping houses at the end of the block.



These poor-quality photos were the only that were able to be taken due to the time of day and the heavy rain.

When the lightning had let up enough, some members of the *Village* staff went out in the still torrential downpour to survey the damage. The first thing that we noticed was that cars parked on the side of the street were almost six inches in the water, despite storm drains twenty feet down the street.

Arriving at the retention basin, we were met with an incredible sight. The basin was overflowing almost up to the curb. In addition, at least one hundred feet to each side of the creek bed was inundated under several feet of water.

Looking toward the left, neighbor Ed Haggerty was standing at the

fence to his yard, or what used to be his yard, talking to neighbor Mike Reiser, Jr.. We didn't even need to ask Ed what he thought of the disaster - as he looked over his shoulder at his yard, which was completely submerged, he said simply, "This is the worst I've seen it in fourteen years."



Half-visible in this photo is the flooded field between the development and the creek.

Reportedly, as the rain continued after sunset, the flooding became so severe that the retention basin began to spill out into the cul-de-sac at the end of the development, under parked cars moving toward houses.

"I haven't had to use this generator in years."
-Henry Sokolowski

Around 7:00 that evening, after the first big deluge ended, police moved in to secure the area by blocking off dangerous flooded roads and closing Shoemaker Road where the creek had risen some eight or nine feet and washed over the bridge.

The next stop on the tour was the intersection of Byberry and Pioneer Roads, which, as during Hurricane Floyd, was completely submerged in several feet of water. Mike Reiser, Jr. reported to us that a car had been visible under the water before we had arrived. Now, the water had risen high enough to make the car invisible, as well as flooding out the Pennink-Arrimour parking lot and the surrounding fields. The intersection itself was under enough water to hide even the stop sign that had stood at the corner. All roads leading up to the flooded area had been closed.

Our attempt to venture to the Justa Farm Shopping Center, which had lost power during Hurricane Floyd, was futile as water had washed over the Shoemaker Road creek bridge, and the road was now flooded and closed to traffic. Yellow police tape had been tied across nearby poles and signs, and an officer at the scene said simply, "You can't cross the yellow line."

An observer reported the next day that the Marketplace shopping center was a disaster area because the heavy rains had washed flowers and other plants, which had simply been placed into the ground with roots wrapped in burlap bags, all over the parking lot.

Because both outlet roads were closed, police stood at the intersection of Frontier and Pioneer Roads diverting traffic with loud sirens and barricades.

That evening, 6.9 inches of rain fell in two hours. In comparison, Hurricane Floyd only produced 6.48 inches of rain, and this rain fell over the period of eight hours. The water didn't even reach the Shoemaker Road creek bridge during that storm, let alone wash over it.

The rainfall ended at around 8:20 that evening, just as the darkness was beginning to set in. Some residents were now beginning to flock toward the retention basin, and ten cars at times were parked at the curbs of the street.



The water spilled out of the retention ditch and onto the street.

As if the rain that night wasn't enough, another half inch of rain fell at around 3:30 next morning. More dangerous lightning in the area caused a

power failure for many residents, who required the electricity to keep water out of their basements.

Neighbor Henry Sokolowski woke up at 6:30 that morning to discover that his power was out. He rushed to start his generator to supply power to his rapidly filling sump pump and also to his pool filter, because the heavy rain had shorted out the outlet that usually runs the filter. “I haven’t had to use this generator in years,” he said later.

When the first round was done on Monday morning, a rain gauge in a backyard in the development read 7.5 inches, making July 30, 2000 the rainiest day ever recorded in over 110 years of weather records.

The previous record, of 6.48 inches, was set on September 23, 1999, during Hurricane Floyd. This incredible rainfall broke the severe drought that had plagued the area during that summer.

However, even more rainfall fell the following night, aggravating conditions in the area. 0.6 inches of rain was recorded in the rain gauge on the morning of August 1. That means that 8.1 inches of rain fell in the time period of just 40 hours.

July is typically the wettest month of the year, with 4.28 inches of rain falling on average. The area had already exceeded the typical rainfall total when the storms hit.

The incredible rainfall totals were caused by two severe thunderstorm cells that hovered over Upper Southampton, just over the county line. Just a mile away, it was reported that rainfall totals on the night of the story exceeded those for this neighborhood by almost a half inch. Lower Southhampton, a few minutes away, reported the same conditions.

In Philadelphia, where the Republican National Convention was being held at the time, there was very little precipitation recorded. On the outskirts of the city, however, where Rita Wilkowski lives, people who ventured to a meeting just a few minutes away at 6:00 that night were forced to wait until midnight before returning home.

Whatever had been planned to happen the night of July 30, the record-breaking storm that hit that evening shattered all plans, but the devastation that occurred that evening will not soon be forgotten.

vandals with guns?

a shoemaker village special report

The ongoing news of streaks of vandalism took a grave turn on June 28, 2000, when neighbor Rozanne Spiecker sent an email to *Village* headquarters. What was inside was no less than shocking.

According to the letter, the Spiecker family had had problems with some people shooting BB guns in the direction of their property for several years.

However, this new information suggests that while serious incidents such as those that happened in May 1999 with the destruction of a tree and the concrete vandalism this May, the vandalism had taken on a deadly aspect without neighbors even aware of the danger.

The E-mail also states, fortunately, that the suspects were caught and the illegal materials were confiscated by the police.

A complete copy of the E-mail can be found below. As Rozanne points out, you can email her at the address at the end of the letter if you have any questions.

On Monday, June 12, 2000, I (Rozanne Spiecker, mother of three) was cleaning my son's room and looked out the window and saw someone shooting a "bb" gun into the direction of our property. I just let it go at first, trying to mind my own business. Then later on I went out to get the mail and the person was in a driveway with this rifle-like bb gun still shooting it around. I told this person to stop and he said he wasn't shooting it in my direction but I saw otherwise. I said I would call the police if it didn't stop. I went inside and wasn't going to do anything but this type of an incident has been going on for a few years now without my saying anything, but it is a safety issue for my family and the neighborhood. So, I called the police and they went to the property in question and I spoke w/ them about what has been going on for the past few years. This group of young people have been setting off dangerous bottle rockets, fireworks type materials, and other bb gun incidents have occurred without much attention being made to it because I do not want to be a "complaining type of a neighbor" and thought these people would find other things to do and the problems would just go away. The police found the rifle and took away the firework materials I gave them some examples of what has been set off in the direction of our property and the Sobolefski's property. This flammable and illegal type material has been found all over our property from time to time and we clean it up without saying anything because we like to try to mind our own business and try to be good neighbors. However, not that anyone cares, but we have a special needs child with a history of many medical and developmental challenges that we are trying very hard to assist him w/his daily life, and a baby and another older son and a dog who goes crazy every time these firecrackers, bottle rockets, etc., are set off.

> “I ... was cleaning my son’s room and looked out the window and saw someone shooting a bb gun in the direction of our property.”
>
> -Rozanne Spiecker

NOT ONLY IS IT DANGEROUS FOR OUR PROPERTY AND OTHER NEIGHBOR'S PROPERTIES BUT IT IS DANGEROUS FOR THE PEOPLE SETTING THESE THINGS OFF.

Someone IS GOING TO GET REALLY HURT IF THIS THING DOESN'T END. A FIRE COULD START, SOMEONE'S HAND COULD GET BLOWN OFF, OR SOMEONE ELSE IS GOING TO GET HURT BY A BB GUN. BB GUNS ARE JUST AS DANGEROUS AS A REAL GUN.

ANYWAY, THE POLICE TOOK THE GUN AND THE FIREWORKS AWAY FROM THESE PEOPLE AND SAID THE PARENTS DID NOT KNOW ABOUT THE GUN AND THAT IT WAS A FRIEND OF THE PERSON SHOOTING THE GUN. THE POLICE SAID THE PARENTS ALONG WITH THE PEOPLE
INVOLVED IN THIS HARASSMENT TYPE BEHAVIOR WOULD COME OVER AND APOLOGIZE.

APPARENTLY, THEY ARE NOT SORRY ABOUT CAUSING UNNECESSARY ANXIETY AND POTENTIAL HARM BECAUSE THERE HAS NOT BEEN AN APOLOGY. THEY ARE ONLY SORRY THEY GOT CAUGHT THIS TIME. STILL WE ARE BEING HARASSED BY OBNOXIOUS PHONE CALLS AND CURSING AND YELLING AS THEY DRIVE BY OUR HOUSE. WE LIKE TO IGNORE SUCH IRRESPONSIBLE THINGS SUCH AS THESE, BUT FEEL THE NEIGHBORS NEED TO KNOW WHAT COULD BE HAPPENING TO THEM AS WELL BECAUSE A LOT OF THESE INCIDENTS OVER THE PAST FEW YEARS HAVE BEEN OCCURRING IN THE MIDDLE OF THE DAY WHEN MOST PEOPLE ARE AT WORK OR SCHOOL AND IT GOES UNNOTICED.

WE ARE HARD WORKING, QUIET, AND FRIENDLY, NICE PEOPLE TRYING TO RAISE OUR FAMILY IN A PEACEFUL SETTING BUT SOCIETY TODAY IS FULL OF UNCARING PEOPLE AND I GUESS NO MATTER WHERE YOU GO OR WHAT YOUR BACKGROUND IS, VIOLENT AND IGNORANT BEHAVIOR IS GOING TO EXIST. HOW LONG BEFORE THE BB GUN TURNS INTO A REAL GUN? THE COLUMBINE PARENTS OF THE SHOOTERS DID NOT KNOW WHAT WAS GOING ON IN THEIR HOUSE EITHER.

WE HAVE SO MANY OTHER PRESSURES IN OUR LIVES RIGHT NOW THAT IT IS NOT RIGHT THAT WE CANNOT FEEL COMFORTABLE IN OUR OWN NEIGHBORHOOD.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION AND HOPE WE ALL CAN BE GOOD NEIGHBORS! ANY FURTHER QUESTIONS, YOU CAN E-MAIL ME AT SPKER90MBCA@AOL.COM OR PHONE US.

THE SPELLING ON THIS IS NOT THE GREATEST BUT I AM IN A HURRY SO PLEASE EXCUSE THE POOR SPELLING AND POSSIBLE GRAMMAR ERRORS IN THIS.

THANK YOU!

SINCERELY, YOUR NEIGHBORS,

ROZANNE AND STEPHEN SPIECKER

POWER PROBLEMS PLAGUE NEIGHBORHOOD

Throughout the month of July, the majority of the neighborhood has been plagued with power problems, causing many residents to scramble to find alternate sources of power before their homes flooded or refrigerators defrosted.

The problems began on the evening of Friday, July 14, when neighbors were awakened in the middle of the night by a loud bang that shook neighborhood homes with its ferocity.

As you can clearly see in the pictures to the right, the transformer is located on a power pole on the Schropes' property. When the device gave out, power was cut off to all houses in the neighborhood except the Hoffmans' and Sokolowskis' homes, which are on a different circuit.



This transformer is located across Pioneer Road.



Power crews rushed to repair the damage on Saturday, July 15.

The power outage lasted the rest of the evening and through the night. The following morning, PECO crews rushed out to the scene and repaired the transformer quickly, restoring power in the late morning. Most neighbors thought nothing of the problem and went back to their normal lives.

That evening, however, a severe thunderstorm created lightning that again blew out the transformer with a power surge, again cutting off electricity from the same homes that had been without power the night before. This presented a new problem, however: with the rain in the ground, neighbors with basements had to find an alternative method other than a sump pump to remove water from their basements.



This is another view of the wires in question.

Before the power was turned on again, however, workers investigated the incident to find that a power line buried below ground in the vicinity of the Johnstons' yard may have been at fault.

Soon after, the crews returned to bring out a huge reel of wire that would temporarily fix the problem until a more permanent solution could be reached.



Workers scrambled to make temporary repairs so the power could be turned on.

Neighbor Bob Altimari was forced to ask his neighbors to supply his house with power to run his sump pump during the outage. He joked with his neighbors about their being his "alternative power source!"

As if that weren't enough, power was again cut off to the neighborhood during the severe thunderstorm on July 30. It is unknown whether this incident was related in any way to the previous occurrences.

lost and found

ANIMAL PROBLEM CONTINUES; NEIGHBORS HELPLESS

It would be nice to be able to begin this article with what has happened numerous times throughout the past two years: “Just when neighbors thought that the animal problem had disappeared...”

Unfortunately, this time, the problems the neighborhood has had with runaway animals have not disappeared over the past few months. In fact, they have been becoming progressively worse.

This time, it was the chickens. The fowl were again let loose to inflict their wrath on the neighborhood. Congregating generally in the Sokolowskis’ and Altimaris’ yards and then traveling throughout the yard, they continue to aggravate residents and visitors alike.

Jean Sokolowski had had it when a chicken was able to enter her garden when she left the gate open for a few minutes one day in June. It took five minutes to get the animal out of the garden while it flapped its wings and stepped on fledgling eggplants.

Unfortunately, there isn’t much anyone can do about this problem, short of calling the police and filing yet another report, when the police can’t do anything either.

Hopefully the owner of these chickens will keep them under control in the months to come.

humor from the village square

THE PEARLY GATES (PART I)

A minister dies and is waiting in line at the Pearly Gates. Ahead of him is a guy who's dressed in sunglasses, a loud shirt, leather jacket, and jeans.

Saint Peter addresses this guy: "Who are you, so that I may know whether or not to admit you to the Kingdom of Heaven?"

The guy replies: "I'm Joe Cohen, taxi driver, of Noo Yawk City."

St. Peter consults his list. He smiles and says to the taxi driver, "Take this silken robe and golden staff and enter the Kingdom of Heaven."

The taxi driver goes into Heaven with his robe and staff, and it's the minister's turn. He stands erect and booms out, "I am Joseph Snow, pastor of Calvary Church for the last forty-three years."

St. Peter consults his list. He says to the minister, "Take this cotton robe and wooden staff and enter the Kingdom of Heaven."

"Just a minute," says the minister. "That man was a taxi driver, and he gets a silken robe and golden staff. How can this be?"

"Up here, we work by results," says Saint Peter. "While you preached, people slept; while he drove, people prayed."

THE PEARLY GATES (PART II)

A man arrives at the Pearly Gates, waiting to be admitted. St. Peter is reading through the Big Book to see if the fellow's name is written in it. After several minutes, St. Peter closes the book, furrows his brow, and says, "I'm sorry. I don't see your name written in the Book."

"How current is your copy?" he asks.

"I get a download every ten minutes," St. Peter replies. "Why do you ask?"

"I'm embarrassed to admit it, but I was always the stubborn type. It was not until my death was imminent that I cried out to God, so my name probably hasn't arrived to your copy yet."

"I'm glad to hear that," St. Peter says, "but while we're waiting for the update to come through, can you tell me about a really good deed that you did in your life?"

The guys thinks for a moment and says, "Hmm, well there was this one time when I was driving down a road and I saw a big gang harassing this poor girl. I slowed down, and sure enough, there they were, about 20 of 'em torturing this poor woman. Infuriated, I got out of my car, grabbed a tire iron out of my trunk, and walked up to the leader of the gang. He was a huge guy; 6-foot-6, 280 pounds, with a studded leather jacket and a chain running from his nose to his ears. As I walked up to the leader, they formed a circle around me and told me to get lost or I'd be next.

"So I ripped the leader's chain out of his face and smashed him over the head with the tire iron. Then I turned around and yelled to the rest of them, "Leave this poor innocent girl alone! You're all a bunch of SICK, deranged animals! Go home before I really teach you a lesson in PAIN!"

St. Peter, duly impressed, says "Wow! When did this happen?"

"About three minutes ago."

SIGNS YOU MIGHT BE ALASKAN

1. You only know four spices: salt, pepper, ketchup, and Tabasco.

2. You design your Halloween costume to fit over a snowsuit.

3. The mosquitoes have landing lights.

4. You have more miles on your snowblower than your car.

5. You have 10 favorite recipes for moose meat.

6. You thought "Grumpy Old Men" was a documentary.

7. The local hardware store on any Saturday is busier than the toy store at Christmas.

8. You live in a house that has no front step, yet the door is three feet above the ground.

9. You've taken your kids trick-or-treating in a blizzard.

10. Driving is better in the winter because the potholes are filled in with snow.

11. You owe more money on your snowmobile than your car.

12. At least twice a year, the kitchen doubles as a meat-processing plant.

13. The most effective mosquito repellent is a shotgun.

14. Your snowblower gets stuck on the roof.

15. You think the start of moose season is a national holiday.

16. You head south to go to your cottage.

17. You frequently clean grease off your barbeque so the bears won't prowl on your deck.

18. The major parish fund-raiser isn't bingo -- it's sausage making.

19. The mayor greets you on the street by your first name.

20. You find -60 C a little chilly.

21. The trunk of your car doubles as a deep-freeze.

22. You attend a formal event in your best clothes, your finest jewelry and your Sorels.

23. You know four seasons: Winter, Still Winter, Almost Winter, and Construction.

24. You can tell the difference between a chipmunk and a squirrel from 300 yards away.

25. Shoveling the driveway constitutes a great upper body workout.

26. The town buys a Zamboni before they buy a bus.

27. You actually get these jokes and forward them to all your Alaskan friends.

SIGNS YOU MIGHT BE ALASKAN (PART 2)

(This joke was contributed in response to the first joke printed above.)

1. Going to the store for milk can be life threatening.

2. Your town has no stray animals.

3. Most dogs in your area have a job in transportation.

4. You have a good supply of arctic wear AND mosquito repellant.

5. The schools or businesses don't give "Snow Days".

6. You have more problems with moose eating your bushes than with grasshoppers or beetles.

7. You have to plug in your car even though it isn't electric.

8. The Halloween pumpkin you carved in October doesn't go bad until April or May.
-- One woman said that the jack-0-lanterns don't last til spring because the moose come up on the porch in November and eat them.

9. Short sleeves are considered appropriate wear in any temperature that doesn't have a - (minus) in front of it.
-- That's for sure. When one man was in Kodiak, 40 degrees (F) was considered warm enough for a bathing suit.

10. Living in the "boonies" or "out in the country" has a whole different meaning than in the Lower 48.

11. You sometimes have to wait for the bear to leave the yard before you can come in from the bathroom. (One woman says that this actually happened to a friend of hers).

ALL-PURPOSE APOLOGY FORM

Dear

a) Mom,
b) Dad,
c) Love of my life,
d) Assistant Principal,
e) Local Police Chief,

Words cannot begin to express how sorry I am that your

a) Car
b) House
c) Pet
d) Mother-in-law
e) Left arm

was severely damaged by my

a) infantile
b) puerile
c) inept
d) comically brilliant but nonetheless sadistic
e) woefully under-appreciated

prank.

How could I have known that the

a) car
b) jet ski
c) large helium balloon
d) Patriot missile
e) Zamboni

I was riding in would go so far out of control? And while it is true that I should not have pointed it in the direction of your

a) house
b) wife
c) Cub Scout troop
d) 1/16th sized replica of the Statue of Liberty, complete with lightbulb in the torch
e) priceless collection of Rolling Rock beer cans

you must understand that it was all meant in fun. The subsequent carnage that I caused is beyond my ability to

a) imagine
b) fathom
c) comprehend
d) appreciate
e) pay for

and I must therefore humbly ask your forgiveness. I know that you are perfectly within your rights to

a) hate me
b) sue me
c) spank me

d) take my firstborn
e) gouge out my eyes with spoons and feed them to the fish in your koi pond

but I ask you to remember all the good times we've had, joshing around at

a) school
b) work
c) church
d) the bowling alley
e) the municipal jail

and to remember that I am first and foremost your

a) friend
b) child
c) sibling
d) lease co-signer
e) only possible match should you ever need a bone marrow transplant.

I think that counts for more than one prank, especially one that

a) was so stupid
b) was so silly
c) would have been funny if it worked
d) you would have done, if you had thought of it first
e) I'm going to use again on someone else.

Sincerely,

(your name here)

BASEBALL IN HEAVEN

Two ninety-year old men, Moe and Sam, have been friends all their lives. It seems that Sam is dying, so Moe comes to visit him.

"Sam," says Moe, "You know how we have both loved baseball all our lives. Sam, you have to do me one favor. When you go, somehow you've got to tell me if there's baseball in heaven."

Sam looks up at Moe from his deathbed and says, "Moe, you've been my friend many years. This favor I'll do for you." And with that, Sam passes on.

It is midnight a couple nights later. Moe is sound asleep when a distant voice calls out to him, "Moe.... Moe...."

"Who is it?" says Moe, sitting up suddenly. "Who is it?"

"Moe, it's Sam."

"Come on. You're not Sam. Sam died."

"I'm telling you," insists the voice. "It's me, Sam!"

"Sam? Is that you? Where are you?"

"I'm in heaven," says Sam, "and I've got to tell you, I've got some good news and some bad news."

"Tell me the good news first," says Moe.

"The good news," says Sam "is that there is baseball in heaven."

"Really?" says Moe. "That's wonderful! What's the bad news?"

"You're pitching Tuesday!"

HARVARD GRADUATES

Two young men who had just graduated from Harvard were excited and talkative about their future plans as they got into a taxi in downtown Boston. After hearing them for a couple of minutes, the cab driver asked,"You men Harvard graduates?"

"Yes Sir! Class of '99!" they answered

proudly.

The cab driver extended his hand back to shake their hand, saying, "Class of '58."

PARKING LOT RULES

Rule #1 - When waiting for a parking spot, stop in the middle of the road, don't signal, and orient your car diagonally to prevent others from passing.

Rule #2 - Always park on the lines, taking up as many spots as possible. Diagonal parking is preferred.

Rule #3 - In a crowded parking lot, if you find a spot and have the opportunity to pull through to an adjacent one, drive up half way and stop on the line, taking both.

Rule #4 - As you pull into a spot, if you see that the space ahead of you is empty and you see another driver signaling to take it, pull though and take it from him.

Rule #5 - Always park close enough to the adjacent car so that the other driver must grease up with Vaseline to squeeze into his/her car.

Rule #6 - When getting out of your car, hit the adjacent vehicle with your door really hard. If you leave a dent, wait for a car, which is painted the same color as yours, to drive down the aisle looking for a place to park. Then back out, giving up your spot like "Mr. Good Guy" and park somewhere else.

Rule #7 - When driving through the parking lot, ignore the painted lanes and drive diagonally from one end to another at a high rate of speed.

Rule #8 - When stopped in front of a store and waiting for a friend/relative to make a purchase, make sure that you are stopped in the middle of the road. The same rule applies to picking-up and discharging passengers.

Rule #9 - When a vehicle from the opposite direction is signaling and waiting for a parking space, position your car so that you are in his way and let the car behind you take it.

Rule #10 - If you don't see a speed limit sign posted in the mall's parking lot, there isn't any!

Rule #11 - When walking back to your car, if you notice other shoppers walking past your car to get to theirs, press the buttons on your keychain remote so that your car's alarm makes a sudden loud "BLOOP BLEEP" that scares the mess out of them.

Rule #12 - If the vehicle in front of you stops to let a pedestrian cross or another vehicle turn, pull into the lane of opposite traffic and attempt to pass him.

Rule #13 - deleted...for those who are superstitious

Rule #14 - When exiting a shopping center into a busy road, exit through the narrow "ENTER ONLY" driveway, stick the nose of the car into traffic, and wait.

Rule #15 - When driving through a parking lot with alternating one-way aisles and angled parking spots, drive the wrong way. Then when you see a parking space, take 20 minutes to do a 12-point turn to pull into it.

Rule #16 - Always leave your shopping cart behind or tightly between parked vehicles.

Rule #17 - Empty your ashtrays on the ground in shopping center parking lots. While you're at it, dump out all the garbage, too, including that Wendy's or McDonald's bag sitting in the back seat from breakfast.

Rule #18 - If you are forced to change an infant's diaper in a parking lot, leave the soiled diaper under the car next to you.

Rule #19 - When another vehicle is waiting for you to pull out of a spot in a crowded parking lot, take your time. Adjust the mirrors, your seat, and the radio. Roll down your window, light a cigarette, and eat your lunch. Feel free to go through your shopping bags and look at what you just bought.

Rule #20 - When pulling into a parking spot, if there is a shopping cart in the way, lightly tap it with your bumper and send it rolling into an adjacent car. Then, when you step out, if the cart is still too close, push it down the parking lot aisle and let it go. While the cart is flying solo, turn around and walk toward the stores.

Rule #21 - When walking back to your car in a busy shopping center, gesture to other drivers waiting for a spot to make them think that you are getting in the car and leaving. Then walk between the cars to the next aisle and do it again.

Rule #22 - When holiday shopping at the mall, which requires you to load your bags into the car and go back in to do more shopping, do NOT tell the driver who is sitting patiently watching you load your car and signaling for your spot.

Test Scores

Students today are expected to achieve at incredible standards, as never before. With these expectations must come ways of measuring success. One of the ways that success is measured in today's scholastic world is by looking at standardized test scores. Test scores are extremely inaccurate and a very unfair standard to which to hold students.

A prime example of this are the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) tests. These tests should never be given to a single student again. Having experienced the drudgery of taking these tests, I can say for sure that they have no practical purpose and no educational value whatsoever for students.

It really is a shame that the status of our high schools is measured entirely on the results of such tests. In reality, the tests are so incredibly easy that even a mediocre student can score well above the ninetieth percentile. Also, the tests take away valuable class time from students. I remember when I was taking the tests last year. The testing schedule was so disorganized that many students fell drastically behind in their work. Such was the schedule that one student, who had a class during a different time of day than another, could do much better in their studies than the other class simply because they were given more class time for instruction and asking the teacher questions; whereas the teacher I am referring to simply left the other class on their own while they took the tests.

The PSSA tests are useless and should be eliminated from consideration in all aspects of a student's and a school's record. It's a crime to impede a student's progress simply because the school wants to look good in the newspapers. I've seen this happen. I was assigned several projects, homework assignments, and lessons with no practical value except to prepare students for these tests, so that the school could boast its image. It's ironic that Upper Moreland can find the resources to hire proctors and procure rooms for the test-

giving but can't hire another Physics teacher so that those students taking two different Physics courses can have different classrooms.

Then there's the SAT tests, which are also an inaccurate indicator of a student's progress. It's simply despicable that a student could come first in his class, and be excluded from being admitted into the college of his or her choice because of test scores. If you follow the chain of events, a mistake that a student makes on one of these tests during a three-hour Saturday morning session could potentially mean the difference between leading a ruined life and being a wealthy CEO of a major corporation. This is just plain wrong. Overall high school grades should be considered as part of the criteria for these sorts of decisions.

It's also not fair that students should be graded solely on test results alone. I have had many teachers who simply give a quiz a week and expect you to do your best or you will fail. There's no merit in this type of system; students should be graded on their performance and homework instead of how they do on tests.

Hopefully, educators will realize the mistakes they've made by basing students' lives on useless tests and learn for themselves that it's only through genuine hard work that students will succeed.

Evan's Quest

Chapter 8 - The Art of Magic, Part II

by Daniel Burgess

"Ok, let's start from the beginning. First, I need to teach you about what magic is. Magic is an art, you must learn to master it, and you must not abuse it. Magic is not a tool of evil. Magic is a weapon to defend yourself and others with." Ry continued as he sat down on a chair. Evan sat down next to him and listened carefully.

"You can only learn as much magic as your mind wants to learn. Now, the first thing you have to be able to do is a simple mental task. If you can't complete this, then you have no chance of doing magic," Ry told Evan.

"Ok, what is this simple task?" Evan asked.

Ry reached inside his pocket and brought out an orange stone and placed it on a small table in front of them. Evan looked at it carefully. The orange stone was partly transparent and had different shades or orange in it. The stone was about the size of Evan's clenched fist.

"What is it?" Evan asked.

"It is a magical gem. The task is to make the gem move," Ry said. Evan jumped in.

"Oh, that's easy!" Evan threw his hand out and pushed the stone about five centimetres with one of his fingers.

"No, no, no. Let me finish," Ry said abruptly. He moved the gem back into the centre of the table. Evan apologised and sat back in his chair.

"Now, where was I? Ah yes, the task is to make the gem move, without physically touching it. You must move it with your spirit and mind," Ry said. Evan thought in his mind that he could never do this. It was impossible.

"No, Evan. It's not impossible. It's very possible indeed." Evan remembered about Ry's mind reading trick.

"Well, can I see you do it?" Evan asked.

"Certainly." Ry positioned himself above the gem. Evan watched as Ry concentrated on the stone, staring at it very carefully. Suddenly the gem jerked about two centimetres towards Evan, then, smoothly and slowly, moved around the table. Evan gasped loudly and watched carefully as the gem moved back into its original position in the centre of the table.

"Now, your go," Ry said to Evan.

Evan did as Ry had and concentrated on the stone. "Just concentrate all your energies into that gem moving." Evan tried his best to do what Ry had just told him but nothing happened. The stone just sat there on the table and didn't move a millimetre.

"Never mind,. Keep trying. It is only your first attempt." Evan kept trying, and Ry stood up and went and got drinks for them both.

A few hours later Evan was sitting in his room alone, still trying to make the gem move. He had had no luck as yet and was getting quite frustrated at it now. Suddenly just as Evan was about to give up, the gem flew from the table and hit the wooden wall with a thud, then fell to the ground. Evan felt proud of himself. He stared at the gem on the floor. Evan concentrated his mind again, and the gem lifted from the floor and floated about a metre above the ground.

This time the gem moved a lot easier, and Evan kept practising until he was very good

at moving the gem. He opened the bedroom door and made the gem fly through the doorway.

Ry stood up. “Brilliant, Evan. I knew you could do it!”

A few days past. Everyday Evan went and spent about an hour with his friend. Ry and Evan got on with the training.

“I love this new fire spell you taught me, Ry,” Evan said as he walked across the circular room.

“Yes, it is a good one, and you seem quite good at it. Try it again,” Ry suggested.

Evan raised his arm horizontally and held his hand out flat with his palm facing upwards. He closed his eyes and concentrated firmly. A small, stout flame appeared in Evans hand. It flickered, and Evan opened his eyes with a smile on his face.

“Very good Evan, but remember, your magic is not unlimited. When you use it a lot, it becomes tired, and your magic will not work as well when it is tired. You need to rest it, by not using it as much,” Ry told Evan.

“You refer to magic as though it is a real creature,” Evan replied in a bemused voice.

“Well, not exactly a creature. But magic is real. Magic is not just a skill; it is a gift also.”

Evan sat down and read through a large, heavy, magic book that Ry had given him to examine.

“All these spells look very complicated, much harder than the fire spell,” Evan enquired as he flicked through the pages.

“Yes, all magic is not as simple as the fire spell. You will never know every magic spell, because there are just too many, and you have to study hard to become a powerful wizard like me,” Ry replied. Evan sighed deeply and carried on reading through the dusty book.

Evan's Quest

Chapter 9 - Putting magic into practise

by Daniel Burgess

Evan was beginning to get worried. The magic he was reading through was starting to look difficult, and he didn't want to disappoint Ry. The only spells Evan could do so far were moving small objects with his mind and the fire spell.

Because Evan didn't want to disappoint Ry, he kept doing the fire spell, because it was the one he was best at.

"Umm, Evan, I think it's time we introduced another spell to you. I think you are good enough at the fire one now," Ry said looking over his shoulder at Evan creating yet another flame.

Evan reluctantly said, "Well, okay, but can it be another simple one?"

For the rest of that afternoon Ry taught Evan one more spell–a water spell. Evan had been staying with Ry for a few days now and was beginning to get comfortable and quite used to it. Evan mastered the water spell quite easily.

"Good, good. You're doing well at this spell, but we'll call it a night. Keep practising that one and I'll show you another tomorrow. Goodnight, Evan. Evan smiled and went off to his room.

In his room he sat on his bed. He thought to himself about all the trouble he'd got himself into, having to go on this long quest and risk his life. But then he thought about the good points. He had made lots of new friends, which he never would have before and also he thought about these cool spells he was learning. What he was really worried about was what he was going to have to use them for.

The next day Evan was up before Ry. He was hesitant to go into the main room, because Ry was still asleep, so he sat on his bed thinking. He raised out his hand flat and closed his eyes in deep thought. A small apple-sized globule appeared in the palm of his hand. Evan opened his eyes and stared at it. The globule shook slowly at any movement of his hand. The globule was like a bubble of water, but more stable than a normal bubble. With his other hand the poked the globule with his index finger. As soon as he made contact, the globule collapsed and cold water fell into Evan's lap. He wiped the water from his clothes, sighed and lay back on the bed looking up at the wooden ceiling.

Evan opened his eyes suddenly. He thought to himself he must have dropped off. He heard movement in the main room, so he got up, stretched his arms high in the air, and walked out.

"Good morning, Ry," Evan said.

"Ah, good morning, young Evan," Ry replied.

Just as Evan was sitting down and Ry was taking a book from a shelf, one of Ry's workers suddenly appeared in the middle of the room in a swirl of smoke. Ry and Evan both looked startled at the worker. The little dwarf ran up to Ry and started jumping up and down in front of him. Evan could now see that the worker had small scratches of blood on his face and his clothes were torn. From the way the worker was acting, Evan could tell that

something was seriously wrong. He stood up quickly and ran over to Ry and the worker.

"What!?" Ry shouted, The worker was blurting out a language Evan had never heard, but Ry seemed to understand it.

"Oh my god! Evan, quick! The clearing is being attacked!" Ry hastily said to Evan.

Ry moved to the centre of the room, and Evan and the worker quickly followed. Ry raised his hand in the air and flicked his fingers. Evan was used to being teleported to the clearing now and found himself instantly standing on the dewy, wet grass.

Evan quickly looked around. Small workers were running all around the clearing, screaming in a bolt of hysterics. Some workers were laying on the grass badly injured, and others were trying to stand up but failing. Evan tried to see what they were going insane over. Then he saw. In the corner of the clearing stood three beasts, the ones he had encountered earlier in his quest. They were growling loudly and snarling, with blood dripping down their faces.

Evan frantically looked around for Crystal and Josh. He saw them no where, until suddenly he saw Crystal lying on the floor.

"NO!" Evan screamed in a prolonged shout. He ran as fast as he could towards the injured horse, fearing the worst. As he reached Crystal he dived on his knees and gently stroked her. "Come on, Crystal. Don't you die on me!" he quietly whispered to her.

Evan turned his head and saw Ry with his arm out straight, frantically shooting beams of purple energy at the beasts. The beams that hit seemed to be working, injuring the beasts, but more beasts were diving out of the brush and attacking. Evan could see Ry was struggling, and one of the beasts overpowered him, diving at him, sending him flying and landing on the ground with a thud.

Evan jumped to his feet and ran towards the beast that was attacking Ry. He ran in a craze of hysterics, plunging at the beast, kicking it in the side. The beast retreated back to its gang in the corner.

"Ry, Ry!" Evan screamed louder and louder. This was going horribly wrong. Ry turned his head slowly towards Evan and slowly and softly whispered, "Fight them off, Evan. You can do it!" Evan took a deep breath and stood up. He turned to the cluster of beasts, put out his hand and began to create a fire ball in his hand. Evan suddenly became worried. The fire ball in his hand was alarmingly small, smaller than he had created before. With the fire still in his hand, he knelt down to Ry.

"What's wrong? Why is it so small?" Evan whispered to Ry. He gulped as he saw three beasts leave the group and begin to run towards him.

"It's your magic! Your magic is tired! Here, hold my hand. We can join magic forces!" Ry said in a weak voice.

Evan quickly placed his hand in Ry's old, chapped hand. The fireball instantly began to grow. When Evan thought it was big enough, he threw the fire with all his might. All his anger was released in the throw. The fireball flew through the air with amazing ease and hit right underneath the three beasts, sending all three of them into the air.

Evan looked over to the group and counted. There were seven of the ferocious beasts left. He looked back down to Ry, who had passed out. It was all down to him. To make things worse, he saw all the seven beasts were running towards him together.

Evan suddenly got a swirling, worried feeling in his stomach. He knew he couldn't

take on seven beasts, and he knew he had to protect the workers, so he ran, out into the brush. He ran as fast as his legs would take him, but the forest was getting thicker with more twigs, leaves, bushes and branches. He tripped up three times and he could hear the pursuing beasts getting closer to him. The underbrush around his feet was getting even thicker. Evan's heart was pounding. He was breathing rapidly. Evan stopped and looked around. They were getting closer, so Evan took his chances and clambered up the nearest tree. He got as high as he could and then stopped and tried to be silent.

Evan watched as the seven beasts ran past. He watched as the shabby, grey hair and beady white eyes went past. After the last one, Evan breathed deeply and relaxed a little.

Evan cautiously made his way back to the clearing, looking back every few seconds. He came to the edge of the clearing and ran in, looking around. The small workers had stopped panicking and were tending to their injured. Crystal was now standing but still looked injured. Ry and Josh were no where to be seen.

Evan ran up to a nearby worker and began to ask him questions. "Where is Ry? Are you all okay?"

"Ry went back to his house to get some healing spells. I'm okay, although some of us are quite badly injured. Thank you for leading them away. I'm just afraid they are going to come back!" the worker replied in a quiet, squeaky voice.

A couple of days later, most things were back to normal. Ry healed the workers, and he moved them to a new location. Crystal was back to full health, but Josh couldn't be found. Evan and Ry had searched for him, but they could not find him anywhere.

"I think we can get back to your teaching now, Evan," Ry said.

"Sure. I'm ready to learn some more spells," Evan replied.

"You used your magic very confidently. I'm proud of you, Evan," Ry told him. Evan grinned at what Ry said, and Evan began to feel much more positive about using his magic.

Over the next three days, Evan learned five new spells. Ry was really delighted at Evan's progress.

Evan looked around him, as the sun beamed down from above, through the few white, fluffy clouds which sailed across the deep, blue sky. Evan had asked Ry to teleport him outside, because Evan was beginning to feel the stress of all the work. He walked along a grassy ridge of a small stream. He looked down as he walked, glancing into the clear, blue water which trickled over large pebbles with a soothing sound.

Evan looked around him. The trees were all around the stream, with a ridge at either side. He could hear the birds singing around him. Evan looked ahead and saw a small wooden bridge just up the stream a little. He walked up to it and strolled onto the centre of it. Stopping, he leaned over the side of the bridge. He looked down as the water went past and under the bridge.

Evan suddenly looked up as he heard a noise. He looked around and saw a small, grey rabbit running along the ridge towards him. Evan wandered why the rabbit was alarmed. Then Evan saw a beast jump from the undergrowth just behind the startled rabbit. He recognised the beast straight away. He could tell these beasts were a regular occurrence. Evan stared into the terror in the rabbit's eyes, and he couldn't let the beast get it.

Evan held his palm vertically towards the pursuing beast. He whispered a few words under his breath and a small, purple flash happened in Evan's palm. A small cloud of purple smoke was hovering around Evan's outstretched hand, as though Evan had an object in his hand. He threw the ball of energy. The beast stopped as he saw the cloud of mist and flashes coming towards him. For a brief second Evan saw terror in the beast's eyes and felt sorry for it, but then he remembered the havoc and fright the beast brings.

The spell Evan just cast came closer to the beast and landed with an almighty crash in front of it. The small area around the beast was engulfed with the purple smoke, and the beast came flying from the mist. It flew into the air and over the top of the trees. Evan laughed aloud and as the mist cleared, he saw the little, cute rabbit come running out.

Evan walked up to the little creature and stroked it on the head. He smiled at how friendly the rabbit was. The rabbit seemed to enjoy the grooming. Evan suddenly became startled as the rabbit cowered and began to tremble for a few seconds before running into the undergrowth. Evan stood up and was shocked as the whole area was submerged into shadow. Evan looked around frantically, but then looked up.

Evan was astonished as he saw a gigantic mass above him. He looked closer and saw that the thing he could see was a huge dragon. Evan realised it was the dragon that he was out to kill.

The dragon seemed to be quite slowly flying overhead. Evan could not see much detail, so he quickly ran to the nearest tree and clambered up it. He got as high as he could, and he saw enormous scales all over the stomach of the dragon. Its immense wings flapped with colossal strength. Evan saw that the dragon's body was red, and its underbelly was a creamy, pale yellow colour. He looked further up the body and saw its head and its big beady, white eyes. Looking straight forward, Evan gazed at the dragon's amazing teeth, just poking out of the side of its mouth. One of the teeth was bigger than the whole of Evan's body.

Evan saw the dragon was flying further and further out of view of his tree. So he dived down and landed flat on his face in the grass. He scrambled to his feet and ran as fast as his feet would go, almost falling over. He bounded down the ridge, until he came to an opening in the trees. He ran through it and was overwhelmed with the view he saw.

Evan was so amazed he stopped dead. He couldn't believe his eyes. He was on a ridge, high up above the kingdom. He stared down in amazement. He could see as far as he could imagine. He could see fields, hundreds of trees, streams, waterfalls, hills, and villages. He could see all over the kingdom.

Evan looked down and saw the dragon gracefully flying over the kingdom. He thought to himself how he didn't want to kill such an elegant creature, but then he remembered the pain and sorrow it had caused. He watched it fly over the horizon, getting smaller in his view as it went. Evan gazed down at the view, at the sea of tranquillity and he prayed to himself that that moment would last.

Evan began walking back to Ry's house. He walked back through the opening of the trees and back to the side of the stream. He glanced below at the side of the stream, where the water lapped softly on the grassy edge. He thought to himself as he walked slowly along the stream. He thought about the dragon, and about Josh, and what had happened to him. With his mind full of thoughts, Evan solemnly walked back to Ry's house, the place up on the hill still in the back of his mind.

Ry smiled. “Welcome back, Evan. Enjoy your walk?” Ry asked as Evan came shooting out of the tube and landed on Ry’s large bed.

“Yes, thank you, Ry. You’ll never believe what I saw. The dragon! It was so graceful and elegant. It was huge. You should have seen it!” Evan blurted out, trying to tell Ry everything at once.

“Evan, I have seen the dragon and experienced its wrath. It may appear graceful and elegant, but it is a horrible monster! It would kill you in an instant!” Ry replied.

The Knights of the Square Table

by Stephen Sokolowski

Chapter 14

The rumbling of chairs scraping against the hard stone floor echoed throughout the house as the participants filed out of the meeting room through its only door.

Katie was able to catch a little of the whispering that was taking place fervently behind her back. Phrases such as “crazy man” and “impossible” drifted toward her ears. At first she had been in agreement with the people who held those opinions, but after further thought, Katie realized that what Christopher was suggesting, though it may not be... conventional, might have a chance of working. Only time would tell, she thought.

Christopher pushed past the guards at the door who were talking excitedly with Anthony about battle strategies. “Brilliant!” he heard Anthony say as they passed, but they faded out of earshot before any more could be heard.

“Do you think this is going to work?” Mike asked, joining Katie as they exited the house into the waist-deep snow. Fortunately a small path that was barely one person wide had been cleared through the powder, making it possible for them to get back to their cabins. The night was as dark as ever, and the blizzard that had started earlier still raged, if not half as much in intensity.

“It’s a risk, no doubt,” Katie said, looking over her shoulder at Mike, who was following behind. “But I agree with Christopher on one thing - we must strike now if we are to have any success. More time only benefits the enemy and will get more people killed.”

“That’s what’s important now,” Mike said despondently. “Not trying to save people, but minimizing the number of people who get killed.” On that sour note, the two, followed by the others of the party, returned to their small houses.

The night was hard. Mike found that it was nearly impossible to sleep with the events of the day going through his head. What if the plan didn’t work? What if they never were able to see home again? He finally fell into a fitful sleep just a few hours before what would have been morning. Up in the north, it was called the grey, referring to the time the morning would have been but did not come in the winter.

The snow continued to fall, and when Mike finally awoke, he found at least another six inches piled outside his door. This didn’t appear to have stopped the knights from gathering, however. Many of them were standing out in the cold, putting on various pieces of armor and weapons. Servants brought out barrels full of swords from one nondescript building that appeared to be the town armory. Several men guarded the place tightly. Mike scolded himself for not noticing that before.

Whatever the building had been used for, it was now surrounded by knights in the middle of their preparations. Some of the knights wore snowshoes fashioned from some kind of wood that Mike had never seen before. The shoes were larger than any kind of footwear he had ever seen. However, it appeared that in this barren land there was not enough wood to go around to produce more of them; in fact, some of the knights wore plain boots that sank almost a foot down into the powdery snow. He wondered how those would survive the journey.

Of course, horses couldn’t navigate through the harsh conditions, so the knights wore heavy, bulky backpacks stuffed with food and other provisions. The only saving grace that Mike thought of as he packed a similar bag was that he would not have to bring water with him, with all the snow around.

He saw Dave and Katie as they exited their houses across the street from his. He did not know where Christopher had acquired these houses or who would be willing to give away their house, but it seemed as if all the townsfolk were willing to accommodate them after the battle.

The knights continued their preparations. In under an hour, Christopher and Anthony were about, giving orders to everyone as if they were all old friends.

Before it was time to go, a large crowd of the townsfolk had gathered around Christopher, Anthony and the knights. All together, there were at least 6,500 knights, Anthony had told them, and the townsfolk also numbered in the thousands. All were expectant of Christopher giving a speech.

Mike had finally caught up to him and cornered him to ask what he intended for Dave, Katie and him to do while his grand scheme was unfolding.

"I haven't thought about that yet," he said frankly when asked.

"So you mean for us to just sit there and watch if you don't think about what we're supposed to do?" Mike asked, somewhat indignantly.

"Don't worry about it," Christopher replied. "I'll figure it out as we get closer. It will take almost a week to reach Yavin's fortress anyway, and that's under ideal weather conditions. But if you'll excuse me," he continued, motioning toward the people who were expecting him to speak.

"I don't know what you're expecting me to say," Christopher half muttered, "but whatever it is, I probably won't." Several heads close to him heard and laughed. Putting his head down for a minute to compose himself, he looked up and started.

"You should be looking at Sir Anthony over here for encouragement."

Several members of the crowd shouted things such as "You saved our town!"

"What are we thinking, sending just 6500 soldiers into Yavin's fortress, hoping to overcome all odds and win against him? We can only try our best."

"But our best might not be good enough. If we lose here, the entire world could fall under Yavin's grip and turn you all into slaves. But if we are victorious, you will never have to worry about trolls and calks ravaging the land, killing here and there, making it unsafe to even venture outside the walls.

"That's why I have a simple request for everyone. Never lose hope. Even when the situation seems bleak, we can always hope for things to get better. And that's what's inspired this journey. Many will die, have chosen to die, because they have a hope that Yavin will be destroyed and things will get better.

"Anyone who's been around for the past twenty-five years may have doubted that there was even hope. That's what Yavin and all his evil forces want you to think. As soon as you stop hoping for a change, there will never be a change.

"Therefore, no matter how bad things get, you must persevere. Don't submit to Yavin's forces, no matter how many trolls or calks or who knows what are around. Yavin is mounting a huge attack aimed to destroy the world as I speak right now.

"Tens of thousands, no, hundreds of thousands of trolls have been assembled and ordered to stop at nothing. Think of all the innocent lives that could be lost. Even if we succeed, many lives will be lost. But that is nothing compared to what is happening right now. Children who aren't old enough to walk are being murdered in their sleep.

"On the morning of our victory, Katie, Dave, and myself will create a light bright enough to be seen all over the world with the power that will be released after the defeat of Yavin, bright enough for all the world to see in the years to come. When you see that light, you can find comfort in knowing that you, and humankind, never lost hope."

As Christopher made his way off the roof from where he had delivered his speech, the crowd was dead silent. There wasn't even a whisper.

Slowly, a cheer rose among the crowd, rising louder and louder, gaining intensity until the entire gathering erupted into a roar. The noise became deafening, with the beating on the sides of houses and other structures standing out among the pandemonium. Amid the standing ovation, Christopher and Anthony stood, shocked. Regaining his composure with the entire city behind him, Anthony suddenly ordered "March!"

The knights filed out of Northwall through its northern gate, two abreast in a column that stretched for miles. By the time Mike, Katie, and Chapin had left the town at the end of the line, the

front was already snaking over the foothills of the mountains to the north and beyond. Christopher and Anthony, of course, headed the troops as they began their long march northward.

It was extremely difficult trekking through the incredibly deep snow, and difficult was an understatement. The column began to break apart despite Christopher's orders; the weather conditions were such that one man or another who became caught in the snow could hold up the line for quite a while.

Instead, all the knights were ordered to select a partner in case one of them encountered a problem or was suddenly attacked. In this way, everyone was assured of someone to come to their aid in the case of an emergency, and things moved much more swiftly after this decision.

After the first day, the knights had traveled little more than a few miles, and those without snowshoes were at a severe disadvantage, struggling to catch up long after the rest of the column had departed. As they moved north, the sparse pine trees thinned to none at all.

When it was apparent that it would take weeks simply to reach the fortress at the rate at which they were going, Anthony called a halt, and all of the knights spent the next day searching for enough lumber to produce enough snow equipment for the army to move around in.

After this task had been accomplished, and another "day" wasted, the knights were able to move many times faster, but another problem arose - the increasingly difficult terrain.

As the mountains drew near on the fifth day, Christopher began looking for a pass between the highest peaks. Traveling high up into the mountains in the dead of winter would certainly lead to their imminent deaths, but Christopher largely ignored the problem in the eyes of the soldiers because he didn't make a big deal about it so as not to draw out any uneasiness.

By the seventh day, the party had reached the mountains and there was no break in the jagged peaks. A scout sent the day before had reported no troll installations or other enemy camps near the base of the mountains - either Yavin's support had deemed the weather conditions too harsh, or, as Christopher thought, they were planning an ambush somewhere else. Where, it was impossible to determine. Near the end of the seventh day, which happened to be December 14, Christopher took Dave, Mike, Chapin, Katie, and Anthony aside, along with some of Anthony's military leaders, to discuss the situation.

"It seems that we've come to a dead end," Christopher begun, looking grim.

"We don't have much choice but to continue on," Anthony pointed out. "If we start back now, we may not make it through the harsh conditions. The scouts report a blizzard to the south of here. These flurries we are receiving are only the fringes of the storm."

"Then we must go on. Traveling across the mountains here would be committing suicide, possibly for the world as well as us," Chapin continued, looking at Christopher.

"But if there are no passes, where will we go," Dave questioned, shifting his feet which were only an inch down in the chest-deep snow.

"I fear we will have to try something that has not been done in thousands of years," Chapin said.

Katie nodded. "While I was in Riverbend, I learned of this from a rumor. "The caves of Ghordan."

"It would also be suicide to brave the caves," Dave said quietly.

"Not necessarily. Rumors say that an ancient race used to live in the caves before they were taken over by Yavin's followers many years ago. They sealed the entrances to the caves with some sort of magic, which, with some investigation, I found would actually preserve the caverns and keep them from collapsing," Chapin stated. "If we could somehow disperse the spell, we might be able to make it through before the caves collapsed on us."

"That doesn't sound like pretty good odds," Christopher said simply. "If someone destroys a pillar holding up a roof, the roof falls. What is to say that this won't be the same?"

"There isn't anything to say that," Katie pointed out. "However, we have no other choice. If we

don't move soon, we will be facing a hundred thousand men at Yavin's fortress once he recalls those who are gathering to attack the world. There will be no hope then. What hope can the six thousand of us have against those numbers?"

"It is no good either if the mountains fall on top of us," Christopher pointed out bluntly. "Our knights will never live to see that battle."

"Mike?" Dave asked.

"What?" Mike said, startled. "I'll have to agree with Chapin and Katie on this." Dave looked at Mike questioningly.

"I fear we have no other options," Anthony said. "I vote to rest outside so we can move through as quickly as possible."

"Vote?" Christopher asked. "When did this ever become a vote? It's your army. You dictate what your soldiers should do."

"Your judgement saved us once," Anthony replied. "Perhaps it will come through again."

"Where are the entrances to the caves?" Christopher asked.

"Well," Chapin said, avoiding the subject, "it is not documented anywhere except in one source where exactly the caves begin, and that source points to a mountain about ten miles due east of here."

"That shall be our first attempt then," Christopher stated.

"Traveling those ten miles may take a little longer than expected," one of Anthony's guards said quietly, and then shut his mouth quickly as if he had done something wrong. Anthony looked at him and nodded.

"I learned of this a while ago, but thought it best to keep it secret from the troops so as not to cause any alarm. Besides, we weren't traveling in that direction at the time."

"What is it?" Chapin asked anxiously. When Anthony hesitated, Dave added, "Tell us!"

"Well, there is an... abnormally high drift to our east."

"What do you mean by 'abnormally high'?" Katie asked.

"At least one thousand feet." There were a few gasps heard around the room.

"That's impossible," Christopher said. "Even winds the force of a hurricane wouldn't create a drift that high."

"Then there's only one other way," Katie said. Though nobody said a word following that remark, everyone knew what she meant.

"How will we get around this . . . evil drift?" Chapin asked.

"Well, we could try to go over the drift, of course," Anthony said matter-of-factly, "but that would be impractical seeing that the drift resembles a huge cube of ice. We could attempt to tunnel through it as we will be doing when going under the mountains, but the scout reported that he couldn't crack off a chip even with his sword. Or we could take a two-week detour around the thing and hope to get there before the world ends."

"That doesn't leave us many choices," Mike said. "You're supposed to bring us *good* news," he mused.

"Then we must travel around the thing," Christopher said. "There's no other way."

"Very well," Anthony said. "Those are my thoughts exactly. Unless you three can accomplish anything with the stones."

"Unfortunately, the stones' power was depleted back when we were defending your army," Chapin said. The rest of the conversation turned to smaller matters.

That was the way things went for the rest of the "evening". When the party set out on the next day, toward the giant obstruction, it was snowing again, piling another foot of powder beneath their feet.

The army arrived at the strange blockage about halfway through their trek for that day - a huge block of ice that was impossibly square and could not be chipped. The thing had a reddish sort of

glow to it, suggesting that some energy source was needed to keep it in place.

"Whatever Yavin places in front of us," Christopher said, "he can't possibly know that we have decided to go through caves that have been forgotten for thousands of years. If he remembered them, why wouldn't huge hordes of trolls and calks be rushing at us through the caves right now?"

And so the journey continued for the next eleven days–traveling along the seemingly endless block of ice always stretching off to their left, passing two exact corners, and arriving at the same spot on the other side of the obstruction late on the eleventh day. It would only be one more day before they would enter the caves.

"Look!" Chapin shouted as they were settling down for sleep. Above them, a black shape like a bird reared, swooping down at them. But it was too cold for any bird to survive in these conditions.

"Calk!" Mike screamed, and a hundred soldiers had their bows ready in a heartbeat. Ready to loose their arrows, Christopher yelled "Stop! What will we do when several hundred arrows come back down at us?"

He signaled one lone archer to fire at the creature. The arrow swooped up into the air and missed the calk by inches. Before another archer could fire, it disappeared to the north.

"We had best be continuing," Christopher hurried, packing things up. "Calks can fly at incredible speeds when they have a message to deliver. Yavin will know about this within a day."

"We can make camp inside the caves, then," Katie suggested, and Anthony nodded.

"Tonight is Winter's Eve," Christopher reminded everyone. The piece of parchment that Katie had been using now read that it was December 20th. Even after all their time in the world, she had not been able to understand the meanings of a score of different calendar systems and had continued to use her original calendar. "We must be careful. Legends say that strange creatures never seen at other times of the year appear on Winter's night. Even though it's not Winter's night yet, we should be wary."

The caves loomed in front of them near the end of the night. The knights were exhausted, and their leaders no less so. However, they had finally reached their goal: the caves of Ghordon. Approaching a rock that looked no different than any other, Christopher stopped.

"This is the entrance," Christopher stated simply.

"Are you sure?" Mike asked.

"I feel the resonance," Katie said. "There is magic at work here."

"Very well," Anthony said. "Do the stones have enough power to enter the caves?"

"They have had two weeks to charge," Chapin replied. "Though they are only at half strength, the power will be sufficient to open the caves."

"Proceed," he said and stepped back, motioning for the knights to stay at least a hundred feet from the rock wall in front of them.

Chapin, Katie, and Christopher gathered together, standing in a line facing the rock wall, holding their respective stones in front of them. They began to glow brighter and brighter, red, green, and blue merging at the supposed entrance point to the caves in a ball of white light. There was a loud explosion, and snow sprayed up in front of the three, stopping inches from burying them. Mike supposed that they had done that on purpose; who knew what was possible with those stones?

The light vanished, and the dust raised by the falling snow fell to the ground. Christopher motioned for the knights to hurry toward him. He, as well as Chapin and Katie, rushed into the cave system ahead of the knights to check for unexpected surprises.

As the first knights marched through the door that was only wide enough to accommodate two abreast, Christopher continued to hurry them into the large cavern that was located beyond the entrance. Anthony, watching from the outside, was unable to see why they were in such a hurry.

Just as the thought left his mind, thousands of black shapes wheeled over the mountain, diving straight for them.

"Let's go, let's go!" Anthony screamed, but the knights needed no urging. Despite the rush of

bodies toward the rock wall, they proceeded in an orderly fashion like the trained soldiers they were.

The calks hit just as the last quarter of the soldiers were entering into the caves. Covering his face with his hands, Anthony motioned for others to do the same and to hurry. The calks' attack was ruthless. As the knights poured into the caves, five times as many calks dove from the sky, some carrying some sort of white light that flew from their claws, creating huge explosions where it hit, both on the ground and on the rocks.

Snow flew everywhere, but the knights continued into the caves at a breakneck pace. Suddenly, the calk attack ceased.

Anthony stopped behind the knights racing inside toward safety. Looking up, his stomach fell in horror. Several hundred of the calks had somehow merged their smaller balls of energy into one enormous blast, aimed at the top of the mountain. There was a loud hiss, and chaos erupted.

Rocks and snow flew everywhere above him. The last of the knights were rushing into the caves, and Anthony scrambled to catch up with them. A roar began above him, and he did not need to look up to see that an enormous avalanche was descending upon him.

"Inside! Quickly!" he shouted to the last of the knights. They disappeared into the blackness of the caves.

In front of him, Anthony could see Christopher motioning for him to hurry. The knights wore worried expressions. The roar grew louder and louder, and Anthony ran at full speed toward the entrance.

The last thing he remembered was being just feet away from the caves and wondering why the knights had such dreadful looks on their faces.