

## Wpδcraftia

## Monthly Single Edition Spin-Off

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## The Magic of Bravery

Every summer Sons and Daughters of Witches Knights Academy would have a camping trip to commune with the beauty of nature. Not every student of SADOW attended the mid-summer get together so it was usually just a handful of students that attended. The 2018 trip was held at Lake Stargazer. Lake Stargazer was a lake on Pinethick Island known for its remarkable stillness. Watercraft that traversed the Lake did little to disturb the water. The water was almost always still. It had the calmness of a master of his craft so advanced he felt no anger when making a mistake. The lake, while enjoyable at day, was extraordinary at night. When the sky would light up with stars, the still lake waters would reflect the heavens in perfect harmony. Venturing onto the lake at this hour meant being sandwiched between the stars above and the reflection of the stars below. It was encouraged to lay down in your craft at these times and gaze up at the sky and feel like you are floating, not in water, but in the cosmos. SADOW had never had their summer camping trip at Lake Stargazer which was close-minded, as they had frequented camping on Hardbad Mountain, which was adjacent to the lake.

Liam Phillimore, the round and chubby boy with short frizzy locks of blonde hair, asked, "So what is our first activity? Oh, I hope it is Flux Island Lore. Fake deerskin moccasins are so cool."

Totus Totaltruth, the academy's resident wizard, who was the adult on the outing, "Water-skiing and wakeboarding."

Audell Herrow nodded his head with a gentle tip and coolly said, "Did you say wakeboarding? I like to wakeboard."

Paul Tachpachiwi, who always seemed to be afraid of something even in times of no apparent danger, whined, "Oh, I hate wakeboarding. I always worry I am going to get a serious injury from it."

John Monk, the academy's only monk knight commented, "I hate wearing swimwear. I always feel so afraid a girl is going to gush on me."

Bartholomew Dungus Marauder, who could really be disrespectful to young women at times, spat, "Really? Shouldn't we be doing something more useful?"

Sophie Beauty-Totaltruth, who was not a student yet but was attending with her uncle, Totus, rolled her eyes and complained, "Not everything you spend time on needs to save the world."



Totus replied, "It may seem selfish and like a waste of time to you, but it is what we should be doing."

Concernous Nutters, who always seemed to recount ridiculous notions of how the world operated, reported, "Actually research suggests water sports are summertime activities you shouldn't do."

Lenivy Peasants, who seemed to have the voice of many, agreed, "He's right, you know. You don't know what terrible and awful things are going to happen if you go out on one of those wakeboards."

John Monk asked, "Will it be held against us if we stay back?"

Andrew Wunita, who seemed to unrealistically excel at everything except alphysics, replied, "Most likely not. That would be improper of a school to punish a student for not having fun."

"I am not going to go. Girls don't like the whole wakeboarding thing," Liam stated, as he pushed the last of a triple-cheeseburger from a fast food restaurant into his mouth.

Stan Sterling, who was the son of a rich businessman and inherited a life of ease, declared, "I am not going either. The water could mess up my perfectly crafted hairdo."

Those who found the selected activity unsafe, unethical, or unsocially acceptable stayed at camp, while those who thought they would find enjoyment in the safe, ethical, and socially acceptable activity departed on a motorboat. Totus drove the boat while Andrew, Bernard Nowits, Emma Elmpebble, Audell, and Sophie rode along on the available seating. Emma was a girl who put a lot of effort into what she did but usually failed badly. Bernard had never seen Emma in a two-piece swimsuit before. They hit a wake as another vessel passed and Bernard nearly fell off his seat because he was staring at Emma with such distraction. Andrew, Bernard, and Audell wore swim trunks and Sophie a two-piece as well. Bernard, who lacked greatness much like Emma, broke out of his shyness barrier and asked Emma, "Have you ever been wakeboarding before?"

Emma replied, "I once won a medal for it."

Bernard felt a wave of dread enter him. He thought, "Not a medal! How am I supposed to impress her if she's won a medal!"

Andrew admitted, "I have never been, so I am curious as to how I will do."

They arrived at a vacant spot on the lake a distance away from the shore. The driver, Totus, turned around from the wheel and asked, "Who's going first?"

The teenagers didn't reply. When it became noticeable that they were being awkward with how long a reply was taking, Bernard piped in, "Guess I'll go."

Bernard sat on the stern of the watercraft and strapped on two water skis, one for each foot and pushed himself into the water. He saw the rope with a handle that would tether him to the stern fall in the water after him. He clasped the handle and waited for the motorboat to accumulate speed. Soon the twenty-five feet or so slack on the rope was eaten up. He held on to the handle and waited for it to sweep him forward. Without time to think, he soon rose above the water, then, with equally less time to think he was below the water. He swam in place having lost his grip of the handle and waited for the boat to return, hoping they didn't decide to abandon him due to his pitiful performance. He felt betrayed after half a minute passed and they had not returned. He turned himself around while treading water and saw the motorboat was moving aimlessly in the water like it had ran out of fuel. He removed the two skis from his feet and clutched them as he swam over to the motorboat. When he arrived at the stern, he was nearly struck with a saber blade. He surfaced his head above the water in distress that he was nearly cut.

He asked, "What was that for?"

Emma ordered, "Stay away. I am trying to cut the propeller free."

Bernard asked, "Huh?"

After he asked, he realized what she meant. The rope had gotten tangled in the propeller. Emma was trying to use Audell's saber to cut the rope strands off. It was a good thing Bernard's swim trunks were already wet, or otherwise the others would have noticed unusual dampness. Andrew said with little sugar-coating, "The rope got tangled in the propeller when you attempted to water ski."

Bernard felt anger rise in him. He had already figured out what had happened, and Andrew was so nonchalant at being good at everything. Bernard tossed a ski onto the boat in Andrew's direction. Emma stated, "Hey, I need to concentrate."

Totus ordered, "Control your anger. Do not want something with such impurity that anger is felt when it is not achieved."

Emma lifted the saber out of the water, then instructed, "You may go now."

Bernard re-boarded the boat. Andrew asked, "Is it free?"

Emma replied, "Yes."

She handed Audell's saber to him and instructed, "Hold it up, please."

Audell held up his saber, careful to only hold it by the leather handle. Emma retrieved her ax from the floor of the boat and pointed it at the sun. Her ax glowed orange. The air around them was likely cooler, but so insignificantly, that they couldn't notice. She pointed her ax at Audell's saber. The droplets of water on the metal blade simmered off as the orange light shrunk. They had a spare rope which Audell tied to the stern with the always reliable Totus Knot. Emma went next. She jumped into the water and strapped on the wakeboard instead of the water skis. She clutched the handle tied to one end the new rope as the boat began its acceleration. As soon as she emerged from the surface of the water on the wakeboard, she did a face plant into the water. It became apparent to Bernard that either she had lied about winning the medal or that there were only three contestants in the water sports contest. She climbed aboard the motorboat and angrily started rubbing the water off her skin with her towel. Andrew was the next to go. He entered the lake water and strapped on the wakeboard. When he was pulled above the water, he rode on the small wakes generated by the boat a few times before pulling an amazing stunt. He rode up a wake and did a forward flip before landing and continuing to be pulled along the water unhindered. After riding around a few minutes and doing more flips he decided he had enough. He signaled for Totus to stop. Andrew climbed back onto the boat with a look of being unmoved by his spectacular performance. Audell said, "Good job."

Andrew neutrally replied, "Thank-you."

Bernard said, "We have time for one more before going back for the School Leaders' Meeting."

Audell responded, "Guess it's my turn."

Audell managed to ride the wakes multiple times. He soon tried doing stunts like riding the wakeboard facing perpendicular to the boat. After managing that a few times he attempted Andrew's forward flip. He managed to get upside-down but ended up landing in the water upside-down. He climbed back onto the boat to Sophie applauding strongly at his successes. He coolly went back to his seat.

When they arrived back at the campsite Audell left for the shower while Totus and Bernard discussed places to meet. Totus said, "We should meet at the cabin on Chillrock."

Liam replied, "Yeah, climbing to high places isn't one of my strong points. I might need a little assist."

Stan agreed, "I don't really want to exert myself. Trying not to break a sweat, you know, fake tan."

Bartholomew argued, "According to the park map, that cabin isn't handicap accessible. Why don't we meet someplace we can all get to?"

Sophie rolled her eyes at Bartholomew's concern. Gregory Pouncer, the Gate-Master at the academy, squealed, "Yeah, Totus. That is really rude."

Audell didn't hear the end of the conversation as he closed the door to the shower building, but he assumed, because Totus had not responded to the opposition, that he had changed his mind.

Audell got out of the shower and found Stan in the campsite gazebo, interacting with a tablet. Audell asked, "Shouldn't you be at the School Leaders Meeting?"

Stan replied, "I paid someone else to go to the meeting for me."

Audell weighed in, "I'm pretty certain when you are in a position of leadership you can't pay others to go to meetings for you."

Bartholomew barked, "Says you."

Audell then asked, "Have you seen John? I have sunscreen to return to him."

Bartholomew revealed, "Yeah, he said the lake wasn't challenging enough of an outdoor adventure, so he decided to go to Hardbad Mountain. He is so right. I would have gone with him, but I don't like hiking either."

Bartholomew then saw Sophie walk by. He flagged her down and said, "Hey, I saw some pictures of your family on iSocial. Is your cousin seeing anybody?"

Sophie replied, "No, but if she was, she would pick somebody selfless, caring, and smart."

Bartholomew mumbled a curse under his breath.

They soon heard the waffling sound an aircraft flying near the ground. Outside the gazebo, Gregory pointed up to the sky. Paul looked up and ran for the strongest and nearest shelter, which was a log cabin. Emma covered her mouth in shock as her knees wobbled. Audell exited the cover of the gazebo to see why everyone was afraid of the airplane. Audell realized why when he saw it had a white birdsmouth flag painted on it.

Sophie scolded, "It looks like Nomalis doesn't like people enjoying the outdoors."

From the airplane an object ejected which made a loud whistling sound. The object hit the ground a mile away from the campsite on one of the adjacent mountains. Where it landed there was an explosion. Audell was still in a shocked daze as his Knights' Academy mates started running for the COW transport aircraft. As they ran Paul whimpered, "The forest will go up in flames and the wind is heading toward us. We need to get out of here."

Audell and Sophie were soon the stragglers in the stampede of frightened people. The people ran like animals instead of humans, they were in such fear. The students arrived at the COW and climbed in the back hatch. Audell asked, "What about those at the meeting?"

Sophie replied, "They will be alright. They have the other COW with them."

Audell said, "But, John is still on Hardbad Mountain. He is alone and he can't send up a light flare because he isn't a Potential Knight."

Bartholomew said, "Don't be silly. There is a stampede of motor vehicles coming down from the mountain. You would never get up and have time to find him before the mountain is in flames."

Audell replied, "I can find him in time if I take a dirt bike."

Lenivy stated, "I am not going up into those flames. I could get scarred for life and it would be really painful."

Gregory complained to Audell, "Just because you are braver than us, doesn't make you right. There isn't enough time."

Audell argued, "You are only saying that because you're afraid."

Bartholomew replied, "Yes, we are terrified, and if you weren't such an idiot you would be too."

Audell questioned if he was lying when he declared, "I know the dangers."

He then stated, "I am going up the mountain. I will send a flare either when I find him, or I can't escape the fires. Keep the COW at a safe distance until you see the flare."

Audell pushed the button to close the back hatch of the COW. Before it closed completely, he jumped out onto the grass. The COW was soon taking off. Another group of campers left in such a frightened rush they left behind a dirt bike. Audell climbed onto the seat and revved the engine. He sped out of the campground area by the lake for the road that led up Hardbad Mountain. Bartholomew was right. Both lanes for traffic were being used in the downward direction. There wasn't heavy traffic, but the vehicles that were present were driving at reckless speeds in fear of being caught in the raging fires that were consuming much of the island. Audell was nearly hit by a RV as he rounded a corner. He managed to pull into the other lane just in time. His saber rattled in its sheath on his back as he quickly rolled off the asphalt onto the gravel at the trailhead. Going up the trailhead had its own dangers, as the trail was maintained for hiking, not wheeled vehicles. He kept hitting rocks and logs which made the journey difficult. Audell arrived at a narrow cliffside where the trail hugged the side of the mountain. He saw from the opening in the trees at this overlook that the fire was nearing the mountain. The White Empire bomber didn't seem to have dropped any more bombs after the initial one. Audell wondered if an allied fighter had shot it down and killed the pilot, most likely in fear of being shot down first. Audell rounded the corner of the cliffside trail slowly. He had to brake suddenly as someone had appeared on the trail around the turn. Audell nearly fell off the side of the trail as the dirt bike wobbled from the sudden stop. The person who had gotten in his way was John. He was carrying a hiking backpack filled with all the essentials for an



overnight expedition. John said, "Crazy for being here, but thanks for coming, I need a Light Knight."

Audell replied, "I couldn't just let a classmate die."

John said, "I hoped nobody would come up this mountain for me and die because of me."

Audell stated, "Dying with you isn't the plan."

John asked, "Then what is the plan?"

Audell replied, "Something greater than to die alone- to live!"

Audell pulled out his saber. He pointed it at the sun and it glowed purple. He lunged his saber at the sky and a bright ball of white light shot up from the tip of the blade.

Bartholomew was piloting the COW and cursing to himself for letting Audell leave when he saw a white ball of light shoot up from the other side of the mountain. He quickly yawed the COW toward the source of the light flare.

The flames were licking the stone face of the mountain below where Audell and John were when the COW arrived. It dropped down a rope ladder through the smoke which Audell grabbed hold of, followed by John. The smoke was so intense they had to cover their faces with one hand while being pulled away from the fire. It was difficult to hold on as their eyes burned and throats clogged. Before Audell realized it, they were being pulled into the cabin of the COW.

Audell, after coughing up some soot, asked, "Did the other COW make it?"

Sophie replied, "Yes. Everyone at the meeting got aboard the other COW safely."

John said, "I thank you for saving my life, but you shouldn't have put yourself in danger like that."

Audell replied, "You would have done the same had the roles been reversed."

Sophie looked out the window at the island on fire. She stated, "I can't believe Nomalis did this. It seems most of the campers were able to evacuate from the sky port on a junk balloon, but, just to attack a place of outdoor recreation seems too evil, even for him."

"I know." Audell replied as the COW flew away from the burning island.