

Troy Carpenter

# Upscraftia

The Defenders of the flipside



Volume 1

Aliberto (Alex) Pentdragon is a weak boy with extraordinary need to prove himself. He leaves his hometown with his sister, Aliya, in search of training to become a knight. From there they attend the Sons and Daughters of Witches Knights Academy where he trains in the science of Alphysics along with his classmates to become a knight. Alphysics allows one to control one of the six forms of energy (Gravity, Heat, Motion, Potential, Sound, and Light). He makes many friends and a few quasi-enemies at school. All the while a high monk named Nomalis is growing an army and conquering much of Updraftia. Nomalis sends a loyal servant of his, named Templar (the Black Knight), whom lost his soul to a dark wizard, thus cursing him to be flawed. Updraftia is a land of great updraft. There is one born every generation who keeps it grounded and can use all six energies and convert them- the Red Knight. The Red Knight is neither light nor dark but instead the in-between- shadow. Aliberto's new best friend Soweapia is often the victim of his own sowing but still very lovable. Sophie is a smart and wise wizard in training who captures the heart of Aliberto. Join Aliberto, Sophie, Soweapia, and many more as he learns the teachings of the witch Belle Salembourgh and the Wizard Totus (Sophie's Uncle). Knights in the land of Updraftia pledge their fight, life, and death to a wizard, which wizard is up to them. Aliberto learns about what is to be a knight and does something he regrets.



Troy Carpenter is the author of *Updraftia & the Defenders of the Flipside*. He will not hesitate to tell you he is still developing as a writer, mostly to lower your expectations. He is in his early twenties and lives with his dog.

Included graphics are either the original work of the author or Creative Commons BY 4.0 material

Spelling and grammar editing by Ellen Carpenter

*Updraftia.com*

*Rating*



Visit [fictionratings.com](http://fictionratings.com) for more information

“To teach others to walk true,  
continuing down the trail,  
they will not cower  
and neither shall you.  
To have a wise teacher  
or a king shall fail.  
No time spent is better,  
than to prepare another.  
To seek no power,  
of the immortal Grail,  
to taste a fruit none more sweeter,  
than one last exhale,  
a death with no more to do.”

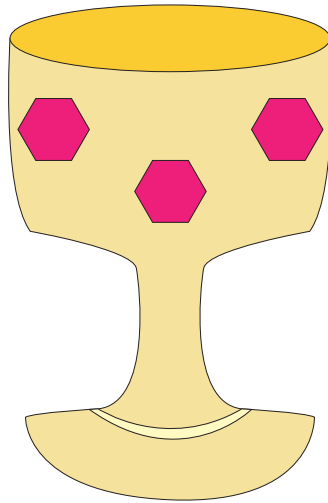
-Sons and Daughters of Witches  
Knights Academy Motto

# Table of Contents

## Volume 1

### Uydraffia & The Defenders of the Flipside

1. The Quest for the Holy Grail.....	6
2. The Phantom Flipside.....	8
3. He Believes He Has No Bad.....	10
4. To See the Unseen.....	12
5. The Walls of Haven.....	27
6. Afloat By a Thin Sheet.....	39
7. Devil in the Details.....	44
8. Soul Searching.....	73
9. The Law of the Conservation of Energy.....	77
10. The Merchant Knight.....	94
11. Crown of Fajia.....	98
12. Athlete Knights.....	110
13. The Magic of Knowledge.....	121
14. Deepgood.....	133
15. The Festival of Mercy.....	135



1



## The Quest for the Holy Grail

Updraftia is a place of great arrogance. The people of Updraftia recklessly build its future on unreasonable ideals. It has so much arrogance all but one of the pieces of land float in the sky. The only piece of land that stays in place is Ocean City. The other cities revolve around it, like planets around the sun. Once upon a time, Ocean City was not attached to the bottom of the ocean. During this time, there was an important object called the Holy Grail. When somebody drank wine

from the Grail, how the wine made them feel became reality. Over hundreds of years Updraftia moved closer and closer to the sun. At the last moment, a man named Chivalrous sacrificed the Grail to tether Ocean City safely away from the sun. After that, many knew, to whom released Ocean City from its earthly tether would receive the Grail. Over the years, many dark forces have sought the Holy Grail. Chivalrous's ghost has been reincarnated every generation since. It is up to his reincarnations to keep Updraftia grounded. The title of his reincarnations is "The Red Knight."



2

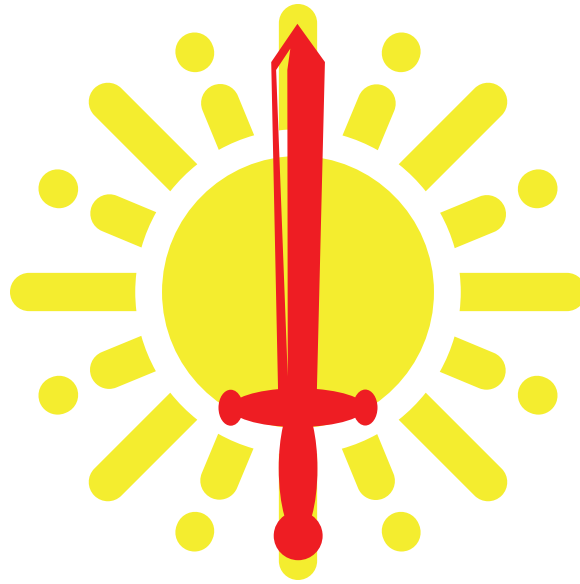


## *The Phantom Flipside*

Once upon a time... there was a drought in the Green Kingdom. The peasants' crops began to wither away from not enough water. The Green King, Solvar the Infinite, oversaw the building of an irrigation system that drew from the nearby river to solve this problem. When it was completed the king was rewarded with the highest of praise. He became immortalized in Green Kingdom legend. Anyone who criticized Solvar's work was stoned by mobs. Ten years after the completion of the



irrigation system, the drought was over and there was a giant flood. Because so many of the peasants had the water sent to their land, they and most of their homes were washed away. Starvation followed the death of the farmers and poverty became great.



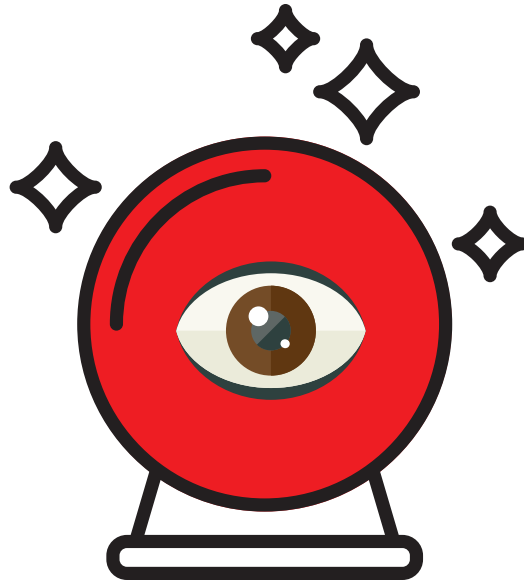
3



### *He Believes He Has No Bad*

A large floating monastery, Cantafruit, pushed through the clouds, which subsided to reveal the structure. It had a large sanctuary, separate monk and nun barracks, dining rooms, washrooms, and a high tower. Hundreds of monks and nuns of all different ages occupied it. It was the religious center of the teachings of the high monk Nomalis. People who had met with him had a reputation of changing. They were said to go in greedy and selfish and leave selfless and in servitude to him. They would join his

Unyielding Warrior Army, as they were called. The Unyielding Warriors would search all Updraftia for more selfish people to recruit. Cantafruit drifted back behind the clouds, which engulfed it and left it hidden once more.

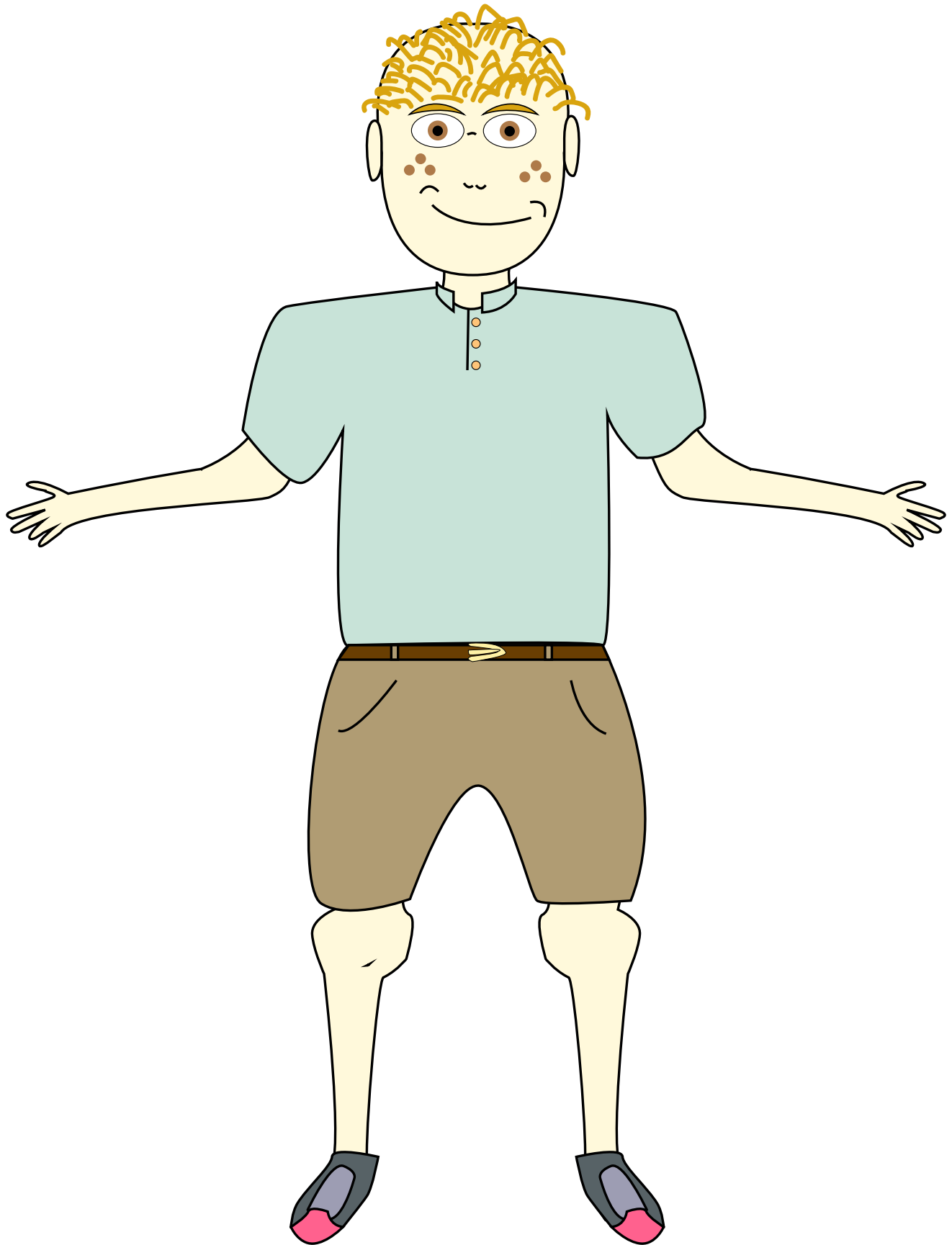


4



### *To See the Unseen*

Aliberto sat hunched back in the plastic chair. His hand was supporting his head and his chestnut brown eyes moved back and forth examining the cobblestone floor, as if reading imaginary words on it. His legs were crossed and stretched out far, as far as his short legs could reach. He was the smallest in his fifth grade class. This was not his fault. He was born with an illness that made it difficult for his muscles to grow. His short curly orange hair gleamed expressively in the sunlight coming in through



*Aliberto Pentdragon*

the skylights. He wore a white cotton collared shirt with three hazel buttons on it. Below this were khaki colored cotton shorts and black tennis shoes with pink soles. His fellow fifth grade classmates were lined up in the cafeteria on chairs against the wall. He looked up and the familiar sight came into view. Without the other grades present, he had never seen the cafeteria this empty; then again, he had never been in it after the school year had ended. They were allowed to talk, but everybody wanted to sit silently as their stomachs felt like they were all trying to digest a rock. The three arched doorways at the end of the cafeteria came into Aliberto's view. The center doorway had Chivalrous at the top, standing centered and looking forward as if gazing into the eyes of the students. Descending the doorway on both sides were Red Knights throughout history bowing on one knee facing toward him. Above the center doorway was a rosette window. It depicted a wizard, the Great Wizard in the Sky, looking longingly over the cafeteria. He was holding an orb, Earth, and casting a spell on it with his gander. A gander was a shepherd's hook-shaped staff wizards would use for performing magic. He was surrounded in swirls of purple and gold. Inscribed above Chivalrous's center doorway was the phrase, "Man shall live where it fairs best."

The doorway to the right of Chivalrous's had a woman witch as the pediment statue. She was ugly with warts all over and a huge smile. She had a halo that was carved to look like the sun. Her name was Helios, the arch-witch of the positive energy of the universe. Inscribed around her

doorway was the phrase, "To be Strong Inside." Fanning down the sides of her doorway were great knights of history defeating dark wizards. To her left Alder the Confident was depicted slicing off the head of Eos the Ashamed, frozen in the iconic moment. Archne the Courageous was burning Nova the Coward at the stake to Helios's right.

The left most doorway had Vitruvius on top of the keystone. He was the arch-wizard of values. His gander was raised high above his head in a position that looked like it was being swung around. His beard was shaven, and he had a scolding and judging look. Inscribed above his doorway was the phrase, "To Value Virtue." Descending him on both sides were the knights of great virtue. Immediately on his right was Xamin the Valid flailing Ahssum the False. Revorow the Balanced was slicing off the arms of Gunnar the Dichotomous on Vitruvius's left.

Their teacher, Mrs. Jorgens, was sitting quietly. She was young and wore a deep red blouse and an orange ankle long-skirt with a pattern printed on it that look liked mosaics. She had sleek reddish-brown hair. She wore plastic reading glasses and was bent down over a magazine with a crossword in it. She gripped a pen and was completing it. Aliberto's best friend, Morheiss, was sitting next to him. He had shoulder long curly jet-black hair and bulbous deep blue eyes. He was smirking up at the bright sunlight coming through the skylights. He looked as if he felt like he was the pride of the pack of students. He had never gotten less than an "A" at the end of the semester for a subject at school and he had good reason to suspect he would be admitted into the Sons and

and Daughters of Witches Knights Academy. Their interviews were said to carry more weight than their grades though, so Aliberto didn't think Morheiss should have looked so cocky. At last the school janitor, Mr. Peteless, walked in. He was an old man with gray hair that grew from all applicable parts of his head without control. His beard smelled of garlic and onions. He walked over to Mrs. Jorgens, who looked up from the magazine and smiled at him. He croaked, in a deep gravelly voice, "They are ready for you to start to send students."

She called the first student, who looked pale as a ghost as she followed Mr. Peteless out of the cafeteria. Everyone shifted in their chairs, as if a transition had happened despite everything being almost completely the same. Morheiss asked Aliberto, "Do you think you will get in?"

Aliberto replied, "I hope so, but then again, I doubt I will, so I don't really care."

Morheiss replied, "Your sister got in."

Aliberto, attempting to sound airy, replied, "Yeah, but she knows exactly what she is going to do all the time, and I don't."

When the girl returned, five minutes later, she was flooded with questions including: "What did they ask you?" "What was Salembourgh like?" "Do you think you did well?"

Aliberto knew Salembourgh was the headmistress of the Academy.

The girl replied, "They asked a lot of weird questions," "She was nice enough," and "I think I did horrible."

At last Morheiss was called. He strode over to Mr. Peteless with his chin



raised and a dignified and detached look. He winced with disgust for a moment when he saw Mr. Peteless, as if he had just been reminded, he would have to be led somewhere he didn't know about by someone far less intelligent than him. After Morheiss returned five minutes later, Aliberto was sent. He followed Mr. Peteless down a hallway and to a classroom. He was about to open the door, but they heard loud angry voices from the other side. Mr. Peteless croaked, "Huh, I guess we are waiting then."

A raised woman's voice said in defiance, "Might I remind you the rules state only one of us needs to approve a student's admittance for it to be the case."

A warm and calm second woman's voice replied, "I am not arguing with you about the rules, Cristine, but Morheiss shares striking similarities to Petra."

The first voice, still raised, replied, "Here you go, bringing up Petra. He was a great School King and he will make a great Senator someday. When I look at Morheiss I see the same clean permanent record."

The second voice, still warm and calm but with an air of resentment replied, "There is no arguing that Petra's record was stainless, so much so that he acted so ordinarily as a Baron and then accomplished very little as King. He seldom talked at council meetings and just sat at the head of the table looking slack-jawed as the others put their records on the line."

A man's voice interjected. It was smooth and not very deep. It said, "Neither of you are going to change each other's mind so there is no

point in continuing this discussion."

There was the sound of the first voice, "I agree."

The second voice, as if unaware of taking more of the next candidate's time, argued, "Petra did not get into much trouble, but he didn't invest himself in the school."

Soon the man's voice said, "Please send in the next candidate."

Mr. Peteless already had his hand on the knob. He waited a moment to pretend he didn't have it there before he opened the door. Inside the room were three adults sitting on one side of a round table which at the center had a large crystal ball. The middle adult was a skinny and old woman. She had stressed and wrinkled skin and teaming teal eyes. Her hair was clumpy, orangish-blonde and about two inches long, but Aliberto suspected it was that color due to dyeing because of her age. She wore a black pointed witch's hat and had on a yellow long-sleeve shirt. Her lower body was obstructed from view by the top of the table. With a single raised brow and the slightest of smiles she observed Aliberto sit down opposite them. Her wand was made of bonsai. She was named Belle not because she was beautiful on the outside, but because she was on the inside. To her right was a short and stout woman who had shoulder length brunette hair. She had large round glasses with thin silver rims pressed against her eyes. She wore a black sleeveless shirt and had an unbuttoned green jacket over it. Beneath that, was a flowing black skirt. Her eyes looked like puppy dog eyes and her lips were puckered and quivering as if she were begging Aliberto not to criticize

her. To the left of the witch was a wizard. He was very tall, skinny, and his muscles were well-toned. He had a clean-shaven face but had short silvery white hair that was leaking through his hat. This and his robes were evergreen with constellations of crimson stars throughout them in the shape of a pegasus. His eyes were brown, like coffee. His gander was made of oak. He looked at Aliberto's eyes with a flat, blank, and unflinching expression that looked neither like a smile nor scowl. Mr. Peteless left the room and closed the door behind him. The witch said in a calm and warm, medium-pitched voice, "Introductions are in order. I am Belle Salembourgh, Headmistress of the Sons and Daughters of Witches Knights Academy."

The innocent looking woman happily said, "I am the Vice Headmistress, Professor Strikeflaw."

The wizard mumbled, "Totus Totaltruth, Magic Teacher."

Salembourgh leaned in slightly and dropped her faint smile as she asked, "Who are you?"

Aliberto replied, "Aliberto Pentdragon, but please call me Alex."

Salembourgh calmly asked, "Not that Alex is a bad name, but why would you rather be called that then Aliberto?"

Aliberto replied, "It is a little dated."

Salembourgh cheerily said, "Oh, there were so many great Alibertos in my lifetime. Some of them are probably rolling over in their graves that you would be ashamed of their name."

Totus remarked, "You should be proud of your name."

Salembourgh then instructed, "Place a hand on the orb."

Aliberto did as instructed. The orb sent out a large glow of red.

Strikeflaw's and Totus's jaws dropped. Totus bowed his head slightly.

Keeping the same neutral expression, he said, "It is an honor to meet you Red Knight."

Aliberto asked, "Red Knight? Me?"

Strikeflaw explained, "The orb glows to color of the energy a person can control in Alphysics. As it glowed red for you, you are the Red Knight."

Aliberto didn't know what to say. He thought he finally had a way to prove himself to all the people who thought he was too weak to do anything. Salembourgh then asked, "Why do you want to attend the Sons and Daughters of Witches Knights Academy?"

She raised the pitch of her voice at the end of the question as if taking great interest in the response. Aliberto didn't know. He felt like he had to now, as the Red Knight. Without time to give it more thought he quietly answered, "To help others."

There was a silence and then Salembourgh asked warmly, "Why do you think attending the academy will help you help others?"

This one was easy for Aliberto to think of an answer. He replied, "Because as the Red Knight, if taught I can use all of the magic of Alphysics. Magic is another word for power and power helps me help others."

She then asked, "What wizard are you thinking of serving after graduating?"

Aliberto didn't know. He felt like post-graduating was not a part of

reality. He figured he shouldn't say this and said, "Serve one who fights for Reme."

She then asked, "Why do you want to fight for Reme?"

Aliberto replied, "Because the White Empire is coming close to conquering Reme?"

She asked, "Is this problematic?"

Aliberto replied, "Yes, the White Empire is oppressive."

Salembourgh added, "Yes, the White Empire does unjustly inflict hardship on its subjects a large percentage of its time."

Totus added, "I didn't vote for Monk Nomlis."

Strikeflaw spat, "You didn't vote."

Totus replied, "My vote wouldn't have made a difference."

Salembourgh then asked, "Aliberto, have you ever known your parents to be witches or wizards?"

Aliberto shyly replied, "No, ma'am."

Salembourgh raised her right shoulder slightly and asked, "Would you please shake my hand."

Aliberto replied, "Yes, ma'am."

They both reached their hands across the table. When they touched Aliberto pulled his hand back in pain. He yelped, "Ow!"

He had felt an electric shock. He tried his hardest not to ask what it was about. Salembourgh instructed, "Alex, you are free to go."

He quickly stood up and with trembling legs walked over to the door. He pulled it open to reveal Mr. Peteless in the hallway. Mr. Peteless led

Aliberto back to the cafeteria and Mrs. Jorgens called the next student. Morheiss snickered when Aliberto said he was the Red Knight, as if believing it was a foolish joke. Aliberto then said the crystal ball had glowed red, to which Morheiss called him a liar. It was sunset by the time the entire graduating grade class had finished their interviews. A summer afternoon thunderstorm had moved in and the cafeteria was filled with the loud sound of millions of raindrops hitting outside surfaces. Mrs. Jorgens led the students to the auditorium where they walked passed all their parents, who were crowding the back-most seats. The students sat in the front-most seats. Aliberto saw his mother and father as well as his older sister, Aliya. The sound of small taps hitting the large stained-glass window above the stage filled the room. The stained-glass window depicted the Knight Hiddoss the Realistic slicing off the legs of the Dark Wizard Appar the Fantastical. This was common, as many educational institutions paid homage to a knight of great wisdom defeating a dark wizard of great arrogance as a symbol of knowledge killing arrogance. On the stage were Salembourgh, Strikeflaw, and Totus sitting on chairs to the side of a podium. When everyone was seated, Strikeflaw stood up and took the place behind the podium.

She then began, "It was so good to meet all of you."

Salembourgh, with an airy smirk, was looking at Strikeflaw speak. Her eyes didn't move from the speaker. With an apprehensive look and a slightly dropped jaw, Totus was looking from the corner of his eyes to above the audience. Strikeflaw said, "Some of you have demonstrated

near great talent in your academic career thus far and have earned the right to admittance into the Sons and Daughters of Witches Knights Academy."

As she spoke she looked straight ahead the entire time, as if her gaze was passing through the audience. She finished by saying, "You will treat those admitted with great respect and dream of living up to their achievements."

Totus was the next to stand. He walked to the podium with his relaxed face and slightly slacked jaw with his eyes directed upward and to the right, as if lost in contemplation. He began by saying, "Good day. I am the magic teacher at the Academy."

Looking flushed and solemn as he spoke, he gazed off into the center of the audience. He had placed his hands on the podium and began lightly tapping the wood with his fingers, as if playing the piano. He continued, "In Elementary School the expectations are very low compared to the Knights Academy. Being adorable, while enjoyable, will not make you magical. In the Academy you are expected to be professional, be serious, and produce top-notch work. It is demanding, and we only allow the best of the best; it is an all-star club you will be joining. You might think you are talented if you get admitted, but compared to the level of your new expectations, you are not incredible now. Without further ado, I will announce my acceptees. She is not there yet, but she is willing to learn-- Savanna Pupils."

Savanna had a long brown braid that went down to her waist. She had

green eyes, the color of grass. She stood up, like instructed before the ceremony to do if called. She had a small and sincere smile. Totus gave a slight wiggle to his gander and a tabard, or cloth vest that knights wear over armor, materialized over her dress. It had a picture of a castle floating on a piece of earth among the clouds on it, the symbol of the Sons and Daughters of Witches Academy. Below that symbol was a dragon circling a lion's head, which was the Pupils' family crest. Totus said, "That is it for my list, Professor Strikeflaw."

Morheiss looked aghast that at least one of the interviewers didn't pick him. Strikeflaw wobbled to the podium and said, "The student I selected has a record as clean as soap and goodness as bright as the sun. With this heart he will do great things. Morheiss Ahoatamname."

Morheiss stood up, smiled proudly, and gazed over the stage with a serious and dramatic pose. Totus flicked his gander and Morheiss's received not a tabard, but a wizard's hat. It was white with orange stars in the shape of a horse. Strikeflaw then announced, "Professor Salembourgh will now state her acceptees."

Salembourgh walked to the podium with a relaxed and neutral look. She began, "My next candidate is flawed with inconsistency and overconfidence but has the potential to grow so much over the coming years. Strike Pupils."

Strike, who was Savanna's twin brother, stood up. He looked much the same except different short and clumpy hair and a less-rounded face. A tabard appeared over his miniature full suit (that he had his sister

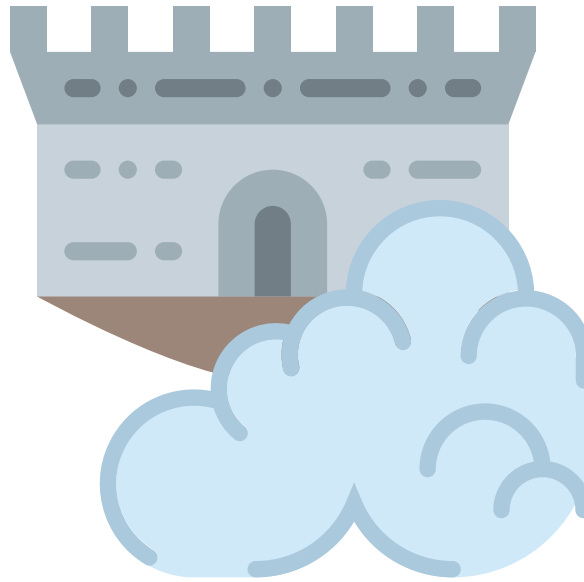


take many pictures with him in throughout the day). His brows became furrowed and his mouth was frowning and looked puckered as if he had just eaten something sour. Salembourgh then announced the next acceptee, stating, "Very rarely does a candidate become known to me who has such promise. When I look at him, I see everything a student of the Academy should strive to be. When I look at him, I know that if there were an injustice or error of thought in the world, he would not be able to rest knowing he could help solve it. When I look at Aliberto Pentdragon, I see something beyond what I see in others, I see love, I see truth, I see the Red Knight."

Aliberto stood up. He felt like he was on the verge of crying with happiness after hearing the wonderful things about him. Salembourgh flicked her wand and a tabard appeared on him. It depicted the Academy's crest as well as the Pentdragon family crest, which was a dragon inside of a human's outline. Salembourgh then said, "If admitted, be at the east gate of the Helios Park on August twentieth."

The three speakers walked off stage, which signaled dismissal of the audience. Aliberto was flooded with parents wanting handshakes with him, the Red Knight. Even though he had just been revealed to be a wizard, Morheiss looked enviously at Aliberto, who now had more attention than him. At last Aliberto managed to break through the crowd to his family. He and his family began walking home from the school engaged in conversation. Aliya wanted to donate her hair to cancer victims, but their mother insisted she should wait until it grew more so

she wouldn't have to cut it all the way to the scalp.



S



## *The Walls of Haven*

Aliberto was merrily packing a new trunk with his personal belongings. He knew he still had the entire next day to pack, but he was very excited to attend Sons and Daughters of Witches Knights Academy. It was late at night and it was passed his usual bedtime, but he was too excited to sleep. He pulled out his sleeping bag realizing it wouldn't fit, much to his disappointment, despite the fact it was neither on the required items to bring list nor the recommended items to bring list. He figured since it

wasn't on the banned item list he would bring it just in case. He crawled over to his bed and started reaching underneath to find his chess set, which was another item on none of the lists. He moved over the box off one-hundred-and-forty-five pristine pencils, that had a picture of a smart looking boy with glasses filling out a test with a pencil the same as the ones in the box. He heard footsteps coming down the hallway. He looked up to see his father walk by. His father was looking down at the ground with a worried look and walking quickly. When he passed Aliberto's doorway he tilted his head up at Aliberto and gave a sigh through his nostrils. Aliberto heard his footstep disappearing down the creaky staircase. Soon, Aliya came to Aliberto's bedroom door and spoke, "I am going to bed now, you should too, you don't want to show up to school tired. I have my last day lifeguarding tomorrow and there will be cake, come by if you are interested."

Aliberto replied, "Don't worry, I won't stay up too late. I am just so excited."

Aliya moved out of the doorway to her bedroom.

Aliya was sitting at a sky-dock overlooking a hot air balloon leaving in the distance. The wind changed directions, and the hot air balloon started moving back toward the island. She smiled and said, "Destino, you're coming back!"

Then from behind her a flaming arrow shot toward the hot air balloon. The balloon silk burned away, and the basket fell out of the sky into the Ocean of Tears. Aliya woke up from the nightmare. She quickly pulled

herself out of bed and walked down to the kitchen. Aliberto was there rummaging through the utensil draw with a look on his face of attempt at inconspicuous activity. Aliya was glad he was alright. She was worried him being the Red Knight made him a target for knights of the White Empire. Soon their mother, Alden Pentdragon, entered the kitchen from the living room. She was holding an empty coffee mug, whose printed image was wearing away. The sound of a morning news broadcast came in through the doorway. The panel on TV was discussing how no one should be surprised at the latest public opinion results for a senator with an upcoming re-election. They then cut to a short clip advertising how the station had reduced commercials. Their mother said, "Aliya, if you would like, please join me for a walk this morning since you don't have work until this afternoon."

Aliya agreed, "Sure."

She went back upstairs and changed into her swimsuit, she then put a knee-length skirt and tank top on top of it. She hurried downstairs and put a granola bar into her mouth. The artwork on the big box of bars proudly had a stamp saying, "twice as much fiber for half the price." She met her mother in the living room. They pulled on their socks and sneakers before exiting their house. Most everyone was inside at nine o'clock on the summer Saturday morning. The exception was a husband and wife with young children who beamed to sky with a look of accomplishment that they were enjoying outdoor merriments, while their children sat on the play structure looking bored. After a few blocks

of walking they arrived at the trailhead that led up to the top of Mount Erika, the biggest hill on Stonehaven Island. Aliya stepped over the familiar rock that she had stepped over dozens of time throughout her years. She remembered the first time she climbed to the top of Mount Erika. She was five years old and her father, William, wanted to carry her up. She was adamant to walk the mile to the top herself and succeeded in walking both ways. Halfway up Aliya and her mother broke through the tree line. The top half on the mountain was covered in grass instead of trees. She looked at the familiar park restroom that was on the trail at this point. It was such a subtle glance as she knew perfectly well it was there and what it looked like. The day she climbed to the top with her father for the first time, was the happiest day of her life, because it was Aliberto's one-year birthday. Her first younger brother, Destino, died a few days before his one-year birthday. Both Destino and Aliberto were born incredibly small and frail. They both suffered from the same rare illness. She knew when Aliberto lived a whole year that he had lived longer than Destino. Aliya's first memory was crying when Destino was shot from the sky aboard a tiny hot air balloon at his funeral. She had always feared the same would happen to Aliberto.

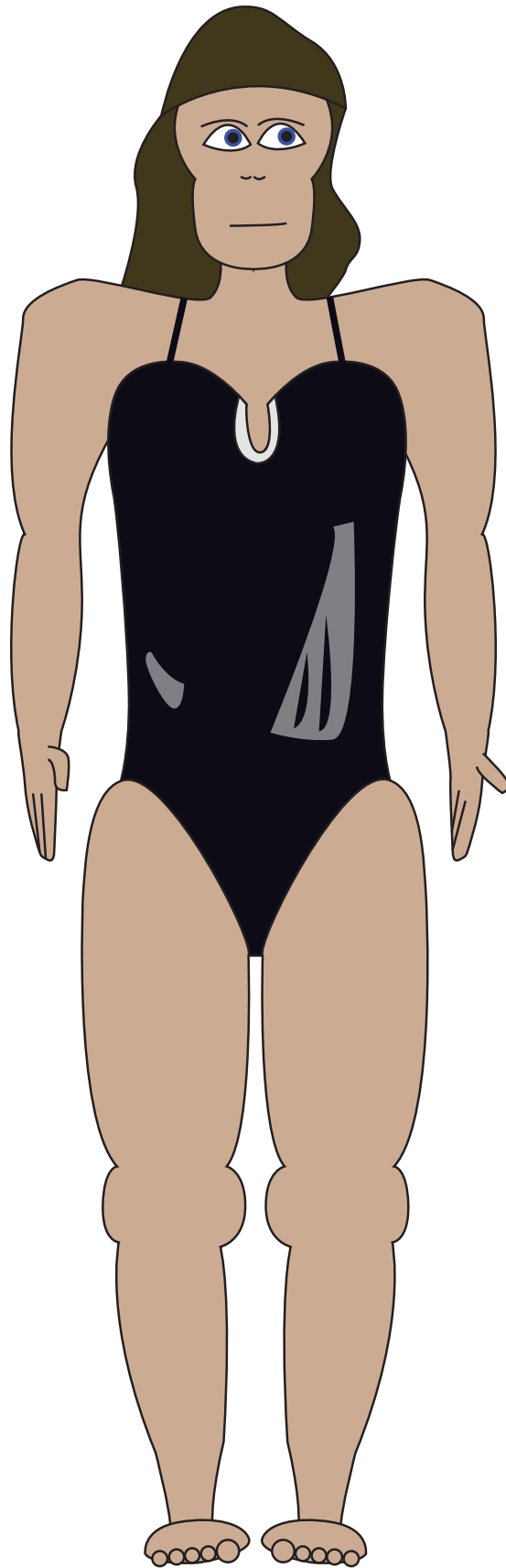
At last Aliya and her mother arrived at the peak. There were the remains of Stonehaven Castle, which had been the capital building of Stonehaven Island in the time of legend. The stone walls were half their original height and the ceilings were missing. In between the walls were piles of rubble from the upper stories that had collapsed. It was believed the

collapse was due to the older and less strong building methods and that no one in modern times should be alarmed when looking at the ruins. Aliya remembered what her father told her the first time she had seen the ruins. He had said, "Many believe this castle collapsed due to how it was built, and while that is true, it collapsed because the King who built it and his successors didn't lead with the wisdom to make it stronger. Knight means servant, wizard means god, witch means goddess, magic means power, but of all the positions in Updraftia, king or queen is the most important. There is a reason a castle floats in the sky and not a wizard's spire, or a knight's fortress, or a witch's hut. King and queen mean leader. A queen must lead her kingdom with wisdom. When she doesn't people sink to the coldest and darkest depths of the Ocean of Tears. A queen must be wise, so her people stand free from the many hardships that haunted them in the age of legend."

Aliya and Alden looked over the vista, which was obscured with clouds, as it was most days, being on a mountain peak on an island that was floating in the sky. They then walked the familiar descent down the mountain. Aliya and her mother parted as Aliya headed toward the swimming pool.

Aliberto and Morheiss were walking to the park with a kickball. Morheiss was grudgingly staring at Aliberto. Before arriving at the park, Aliberto said, "My sister said there is cake at the pool. Do you want a slice?"

Morheiss said, "No, that is high in calories."



*Alina Pentdragon*



Aliberto said, "OK. This will only take a moment."

He peeled off from Morheiss and entered the hot and muggy public pool building. Aliya must have seen him enter and started walking toward him. She had deep brown hair and ocean blue eyes. She wore a black one-piece swimsuit with a silver ring at the chest. She handed him a paper plate with a slice of cake on it and a plastic fork. He ate it then disposed of the plate and fork. Morheiss was outside. He pretended not to notice Aliberto exiting the building and then pretended to jump with surprise when Aliberto stood next to him. His expression was angry and cold. Aliberto asked, "What is it?"

Morheiss said, "I think I'm going to go study. Enjoy playing with a ball without me."

Morheiss tossed the ball to Aliberto and started walking away. Aliberto went to the park and played with many kids who were eager to play with anyone with a ball, as they did not bring any.

That night Aliberto sat down to eat dinner. His mom had made salmon as their going away meal and Aliberto was eager to eat it. When all four of them were seated, Alden asked, "How was your day, sweetie?"

William replied, "My office didn't get our report turned in on time so Sarah blamed me. Jason was supposed to write the report, but he didn't know if it was fit to include mention of our new employee. Well, instead of asking me if it should be included he decided not to write the report. I get called midday saying I should report to Sarah's office and I don't know why. She starts yelling to me about the missing report. I tell her it

is my fault. After that I ask Jason why he didn't submit the report and he tells me he wasn't sure about including the new employee. I know very well he was in the next cubical all morning and why he didn't just ask me if the darn new employees should be mentioned instead of just not writing it, I'll never know."

Alden replied, "I am sure he meant well."

William spat, "The whole thing is beyond me. It would have been so simple for him to get an answer if he had just talked to me. I think, he was just being lazy."

Aliberto then asked, "So what time are we leaving?"

William asked, "Pardon?"

Aliberto asked, "What time are we leaving for Helios Park tomorrow?"

His father replied, "You are too young, and as the Red Knight you are a target. I let you go before we knew you are the Red Knight, but now it is safer for you to stay here."

Aliberto banged the table with his fist. He cried, "You, untrustworthy piece of..."

Aliya said, "Mom and dad just want to keep you safe."

Aliberto argued, "That is easy for you to say. You were allowed to go at twelve. Mom, what do you think?"

Alden replied, "I don't think you are mature enough either."

Aliberto asked, "What do you mean?"

Alden answered, "I don't think you can keep yourself out of trouble, you are too inexperienced."

Aliberto argued, "Then let me experience."

Alden argued back, "You know too little to do well without your parents."

Aliberto yelled, "I know, where I am heading is school, isn't it? I can learn to make it without you."

He then asked, "When can I go?"

William replied, "Sixteen, take it or leave it."

Aliberto spat, "Sixteen, I'll be as old as Aliya."

Aliberto said, "All of you are allowed to do whatever you want. Here I am not allowed to go hunting, I am not allowed to go sky sailing, I am not allowed to go camping, despite probably being good at those things. All you ever do is protect me. I can take care of myself. I don't need a big brother watching me constantly. I want to decide things, I want to make my own mistakes, I want to be free. I don't want to be all of your puppet."

William argued, "In order to decide things you need to show you can make good decisions."

Aliberto argued, "I can make good decisions, but nobody ever listens to my decisions."

Aliberto stood up. He remarked, "Just let me go and I will be fine."

William said, "Seventeen. I told you, take it or leave it."

Aliberto snarled, "You, anti-knight."

Aliya and Alden gasped. William stood up to and angrily yelled, "I know this is my fault, but you should watch your tongue."

Aliberto stormed upstairs. In his bedroom he picked up his trunk which

he had finished packing and tried to throw it against the wall. Due to its weight, he couldn't. In anger at his small size he kicked the trunk and stubbed his toe. He felt so angry at his parents. He didn't know how to love them, or rather he didn't know how to let himself know he still loved them. Every time he thought of being happy with their decision and apologizing to them he felt an anger rise in him. He didn't know why he had so much hatred and unhappiness. He laid down on his bed, rubbing his stubbed toe. A tear started to form in his eye. He put his head against the pillow and covered the sides of his face, so nobody would be able to hear him cry. As he cried he started to feel better. He thought of children elsewhere who hadn't had three meals that day, unlike him. He felt pleased for his parents for always loving him. He felt a shiver run up his spine that one feels when they hear of a great knight's heroics or a wizard's moving speech. He saw his parents as magical as wizards in that moment. He had always viewed them as just other ordinary people, but while this emotional, he saw them to be as special as wizards. But, he knew he couldn't tell them he loved them so much, for how could he say something that emotional? He went to bed with his teeth unbrushed and dried up tears on his face.

The next morning, he felt extra exhausted. His heart felt heavy and he didn't want to face the day knowing he would have to ignore feelings of envy with Aliya leaving and not him. He had a dream that Aliya had boarded an airplane and left Stonehaven for the Academy. After graduating she decided not to come home ever again, and he never saw

her again. While she was boarding the airplane Aliberto was begging her to come back. In the dream he felt lonely with his sister disappearing down the runway, leaving him running after her and yelling. He was glad when he woke up to discover how ridiculous that was and how Aliya would never just leave home forever. He heard footsteps coming from the hallway. The door swung open to reveal his mother. She had a sunken and sad look on her face. She said, "We changed our mind, you do get to go."

Aliberto sighed, "What?"

He was trying to sound like he didn't have raised expectations. His mother replied, "Dad felt bad for not letting you go and has changed his mind. You do get to go to the academy."

Aliberto quickly put back in the trunk things he had taken out before going to bed last night. When he went downstairs his father was angrily throwing some of Aliya's things against the wall and screaming to himself. Aliberto looked down to see Aliya's trunk on the ground, spilled open like it had been dropped. Their mother was telling him, "I know you are upset but throwing her things won't undo it."

Aliberto hid from the violence by going into the dining room. A few minutes later Mr. Pentdragon came walking by carrying Aliya's trunk repacked. He looked up at Aliberto, only to look away like he was afraid to tell him something. Soon all four of them were in the car with the trunks in the back. The neighborhood disappeared from view as they pulled onto the island route. Aliberto's home of twelve years soon

became a speck in the distance. They were heading to the coast. Aliya knew how to fly a hot-air-balloon as part of her knight's training and it was the most affordable form of transportation between islands. Plus, the Pentdragon's suspected, it was a more secretive mode of transportation than with an airline. As Aliya and Aliberto stood in the office of the rental dock their parents hugged them goodbye. Mr. Pentdragon was in a hurry to get home to watch a Skillball game. Alden said to Aliberto, "Whatever you learn the next year, never forget how much we love you."

Their parents disappeared into their car and it backed out of its parking spot and was soon gone. Aliberto and Aliya sat down on two metal padded seats while the rental company readied their balloon. Leaflets lined the room about how much safer balloon travel had become in the past decades.



6



## *Afloat by a Thin Sheet*

Once upon a time... Updraftia was a poor and death-filled place. Without an effective way to travel between the islands, islanders relied only on each other. Dragons were too deadly to travel with between islands, pegasi and griffins too rare, and brooms only worked for witches. Most islands had no knowledge of metalworking and many not of agriculture. Death was plenty as the economy didn't allow for increased survivability. Then, the Great Progression happened. Cyprus the Progressor learned

how to weave silk from worms to make balloons and how to form chi from tea to power these balloons. The economy expanded nearly five-billion-percent in one year after his invention. He died rich, but that was small compared to the riches he left for the world- a means to travel, a means to learn, a means to trade, and most of all a means to progress into the modern era.

Half an hour later, another employee entered the waiting room. He was wearing blue jean overalls. He said, "The canoe is ready." The employee at the front desk, who was dressed in business casual, announced to Aliya, "Aliya, your rental is ready."

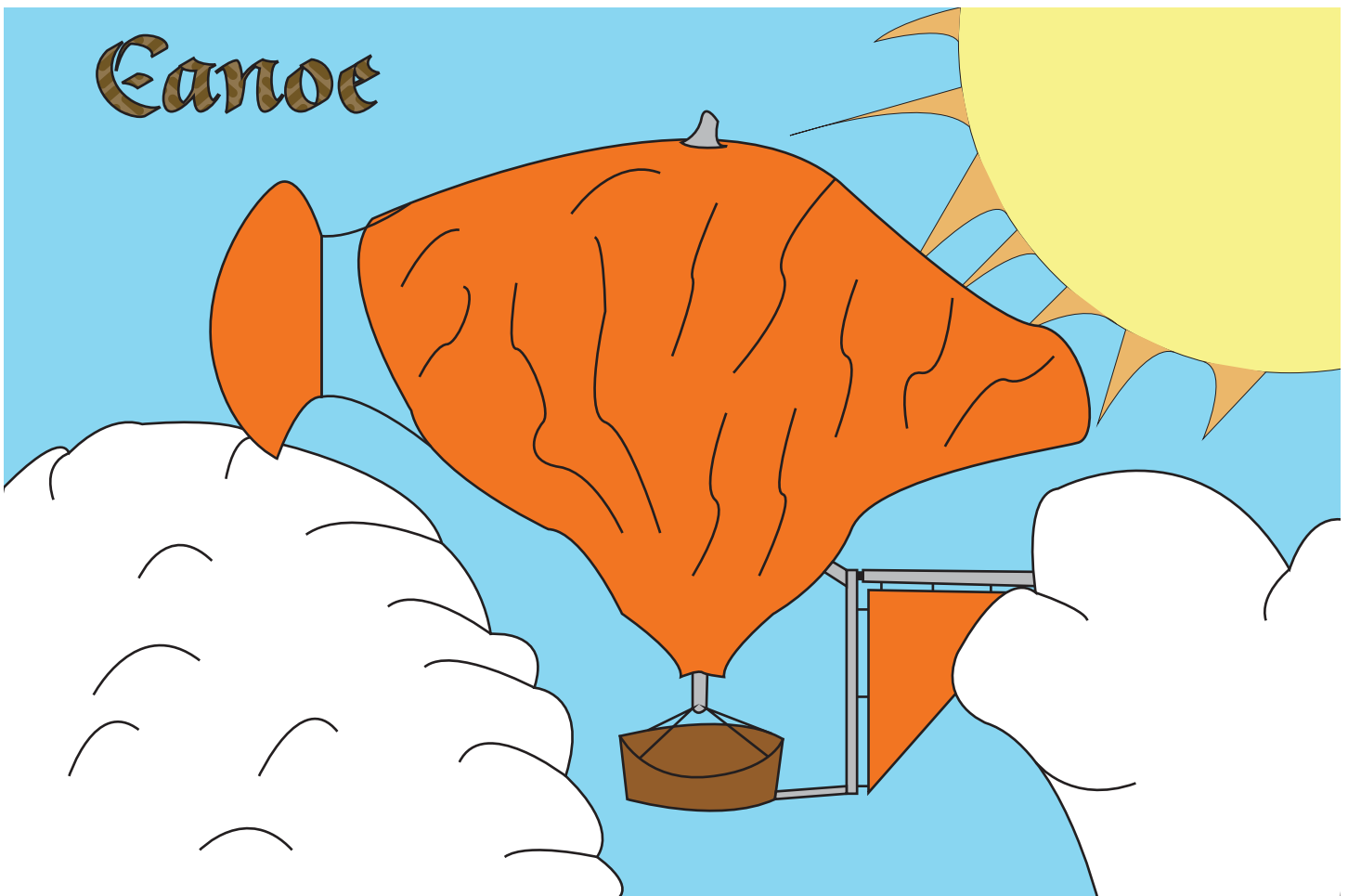
Aliberto and Aliya put their belongings on a luggage cart and were led onto the sky-dock by the employee in overalls, who was pulling their cart. He led them to a small balloon. It was a canoe, or balloon that could hold two people and supplies for two people for a week of wilderness. It was pulling on the rope attached to the dock, which was the only thing keeping it from floating away. The wind and upward lift of the balloon heaved on the rope, it was ready to go. Aliya insisted she load her and Aliberto's luggage, instead of the employee, who kept trying to help saying it was the company's policy to be helpful. At last Aliberto got in. He had never been in a balloon in the sky before. He was so excited that his parents had let him sky sail. He felt so cool, like he was in a nomadic balloon gang. Balloons were the oldest, slowest, and least safe mode of transportation between islands. They were stripped down to be light and efficient. Sky sailors were also seen as intelligent as, because the islands



moved, it took great navigation to end up on the right island. Although, with the advent of Global Positions Systems, it was easier than it had been in the time of legend. Long ago, the only way to go between islands was on a witch's broom, on a pegasus, griffin, or on a dragon. Then, in the time of legend, a man named Cyprus the Progressor learned how to weave silk from worms into balloons and learned how to make chi as fuel. Chi is pure black tea leaves that had been steeped in near-boiling water and cooled into a gelatinous substance, called chi. When put in a metal barrel that was pointed upward into a balloon the balloon would fill with hot air and rise. A single pound of chi could last for dozens of hours. Tea was the sacred crop of Updraftia, without it, civilization would have no trade, modern economy, and satisfactory life would not be possible. Chi was also used as fuel for airplanes. In the time of legend, invading another island was near impossible. A single flaming arrow could shoot down an entire ship of twenty sailors from the sky. There was a famous battle, the Battle of Flaming Arrows, where it took the lives of four-hundred knights for a single balloon to make landfall on the island of the Dark Wizard Ethicus the Cruel. Those knights who most certainly drowned to the bottom of the Ocean of Tears are honored each year at the Festival of Mercy, named after the knight, Cerdo the Merciful, who was the one to imprison Ethicus, sparing his life, even after his own wizard had been killed by the dark wizard. His celebration in which small handheld balloons were lit with candles and pieces of paper with thanks and prayers for the end of wars. The balloons were released to rise in the

sky, until they get too high. Thus causing them to burn up, and fall into the coldest, deepest depths of the Ocean of Tears, so the deep ocean ghosts of the dead knights may read them and know Ethicus had not returned.

Balloons were so fragile that large birds of prey, such as hawks and eagles, could knock them from the sky by accidentally flying into the fabric, which was now mostly nylon instead of silk. In many parts of Updraftia people could face some sort of punishment for wafting a stick in the general direction of a balloon, even if the projectile only went a few feet. Even if someone was not tried for this crime, it was certainly looked down upon. Balloons represented the fragility of human life. Chivalrous described each person as a balloon, each one can be defeated



so many ways and their life choices determine where they end up.

Each control used for navigation had a symbolic name. The large sheet of nylon supported by aluminum struts, that was the rudder, and was controlled by a wheel called the “king’s wheel.”

The rope that raised and lowered the sail was called the, “The wizard’s cleat.”

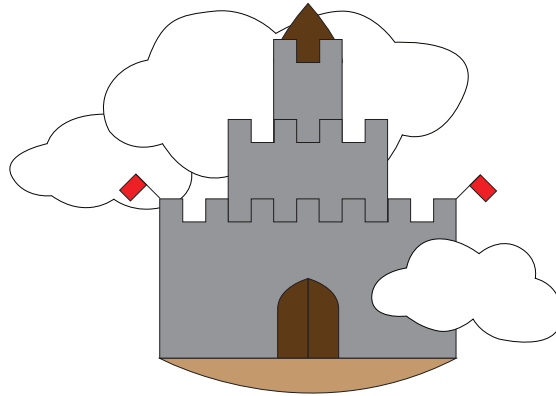
Wizards had an ability to pull knights in directions against their will, so it was important to be able to retract the sail if the winds were unfavorable.

The rope that was adjusted to pull the sail’s boom to a different angle was called the, “The knight’s tact.”

By pulling this, the angle of the sail could be adjusted. This could even allow a sailor to sail into the wind by going in zig-zags.

Not every balloon had a rudder or a sail, but every balloon had a Red Knight’s Cap. This was a lid at the top of the balloon that could let hot air out when opened and keep hot air in while closed. Without it the balloon would be forced to choose between facing the Ocean of Tears or the burning up in the higher atmosphere. Chi, once ignited, could not be put out. Airplanes and jets dealt with this by letting the burning fuel release somewhere other than the engine. Balloons had too few options of where the burning fuel could go to allow this.

Aliya untied the rope from the cleat on the dock and the balloon began to drift upward. She stood at the controls. Aliberto could feel the wind in his face and he knew he was free. Free to make his own choices and be a moment from death.



7

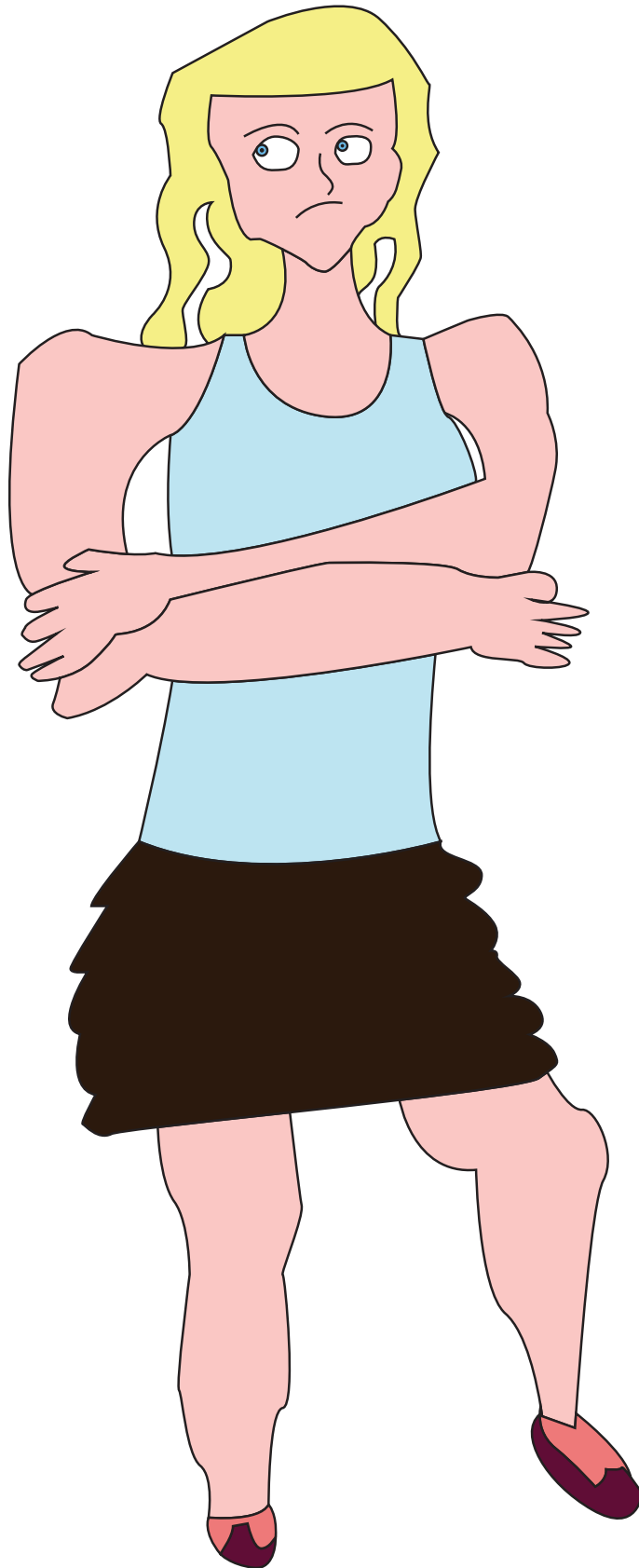


### *Devil in the Details*

Aliberto woke up in a light beige-colored hotel room. After eating breakfast at the hotel, he and Aliya left. Aliya had put on her suit of armor as she had one, Aliberto wore just his tabard on top of a deep blue sports shirt and jean shorts. He had been to Reme multiple times on school tours and on family vacations. They could've walked to the Helios Park, but due to the inconvenience of their luggage and the problems that it might cause, they decided to get a taxi ride. Helios Park had many

statues, it got its name because in the center was a stone that had the rune engraved on it that was the symbol for the arch-witch Helios. How the stone received the mark was a mystery, but it had happened a very long time ago. In the age of legend, there were attempts to break apart the stone for building material, but the stone only broke the metal tools. Rebellious individuals had attempted to dynamite the stone, but to no avail. The stone does not chip, weather, nor corrode. It knows no weakness. Strangely enough other stones that witches and wizards had engraved with the same rune have not received the same invincibility. It is called the solar stone because it is associated with the positive energy of the universe. Today there was only a small crowd of people near it. Despite its symbolic importance, children were allowed to climb on it because there was no known way to damage it. They walked past the stone to the cherry tree grove. It was not the right time of years for the cherries to be in bloom and the grove was very desolate, except for a gardener spreading mulch. After passing the cherry trees, they arrived at the east gate. It was a large red brick gate with wrought iron bars, that were open, as it was after sunrise. Climbing up the sides of the gate were carvings of a series of animals. At the bottom were the insects and at the top were the worshiped mammals, such as lions, horses, wolves, and tigers. In the middle were all the birds, below them reptiles, and below them, fish. At the top center was the crown of species, the pegasus, placed between two dragons breathing fire on her. Pegasi were the symbol of the Reman Empire. The ancient Reman Empire existed

before balloons, so pegasi were considered sacred as they allowed for travel between islands. The Roman Empire was said to have its hooves to the ground, representing truth, but its wings to the sky representing knowledge. The theory of the animal kingdoms was created during the age of reason. It ranked each animal kingdom and each animal in order of its virtues. The theory was looked down upon by modern scientists for being overly romantic and lacking evidence. Aliberto saw Strike and Savanna gazing up at the east gate. They were both wearing their identical tabards, the academy's emblem and the Pupils's family crest. Strike, instead of being in his suit, was wearing camouflage shirt and sweatpants. They saw Aliberto and waved to him as he approached. He then saw Morheiss sitting at a bench. Aliberto's view of him had been obstructed earlier by a bush. He was wearing his white and orange wizard's hat and a t-shirt with a popular movie franchise on it. He was talking to a very pretty and curvy girl. She had long and wavy golden blonde hair, peachy skin, and teal blue eyes. She was dressed in a white tank top shirt and wore a black skirt with many layers of ruffles. On top of that she had a tabard, also with the school crest on it, and her Griffin family crest. She looked serious as she was scolding and spitting something at Morheiss. Strike was bitterly looking at them, then at the gate when she would look up. Morheiss glanced up at Aliberto with a look of disapproval and disinterest. He went back to talking. She seemed angry at him with her nasty expressions but was not yelling. Aliberto felt disowned by Morheiss's recent disinterest in him. He figured he shouldn't



**Katherine Beauty**

interrupt them. Soon someone else showed up. He wore a light teal synthetic sports shirt and black basketball shorts. On top of this was his tabard, it was tied poorly at the waist and had a ram family crest below the castle floating in the sky. He was black-skinned and had short black bushy hair. His mother was telling him something from the driver's seat as he stepped out of the passenger's seat. Aliberto saw what he assumed to be a younger brother sitting in the back looking sad at his brother leaving. The boy had an assertive step to him as he slammed the passenger seat door closed. He then swung open the trunk of the vehicle and lifted out a large suitcase. He waved bye to his family, who then drove away. He saw Morheiss talking to the pretty girl and soon swarmed her too. They did not seem to know each other based on the boy loudly and proudly stating his name to be, Dominis Witches. Her eyes darted angrily at him. He smiled broadly and sat next to her. Morheiss, with a dignified look, stood up and left the bench, as if girls were below him. He strode over to Aliberto and said, "Well, if it isn't the Red Knight, Alex. You of all knights should know to bow to a wizard."

Aliberto bowed and said, "You are my wizard, to you I follow."

It was customary for knights to do this to wizards regardless of if they were actually in service to them. Morheiss put on a look of grandness and esteem. He then said, "You I fight for."

Aliberto knew what this meant. It was the customary way for a wizard to say, "at ease" to a knight. Aliberto got out of the bowing position and excitedly said, "Hi, Morheiss. We ballooned here."



Aliberto really wanted to tell the story. Morheiss looked disinterested. He leaned up against a snake on the gate and pulled a phone from his pocket. He became immersed in it and soon drowned out needing to look at Aliberto. Soon another car pulled up. It took a while looking for a parking space on the crowded city street before a boy and a woman, who Aliberto believed to be the boy's mother, stepped out. The boy had clumpy chocolate brown-colored hair and gray eyes. He had a crazed look on his face. His family crest was a bull. He had a trunk, which Aliberto could see, through a clear window put there for the consumer to find things more easily, was neatly packed. He carried it to the only bench and sat down next to the pretty girl. She glanced at him, gave a slight nod, and then looked back to Dominis. Dominis walked over to the boy, who attempted to ignore him. Dominis pushed the boy off the bench. The boy landed in the grass and yelled, "What was that for!" The girl looked at Dominis with an angry expression, as if bent on hearing his answer. Dominis said in a fake foreign accent, "He wa on da bench."

The girl stood up and walked away toward Aliberto, Aliya, Savanna, and Strike. Strike was gazing seriously and coolly at her. She rolled her eyes at him. Savanna happily said, "Hey, it is nice to meet you, what's your name? I am Savanna Pupils."

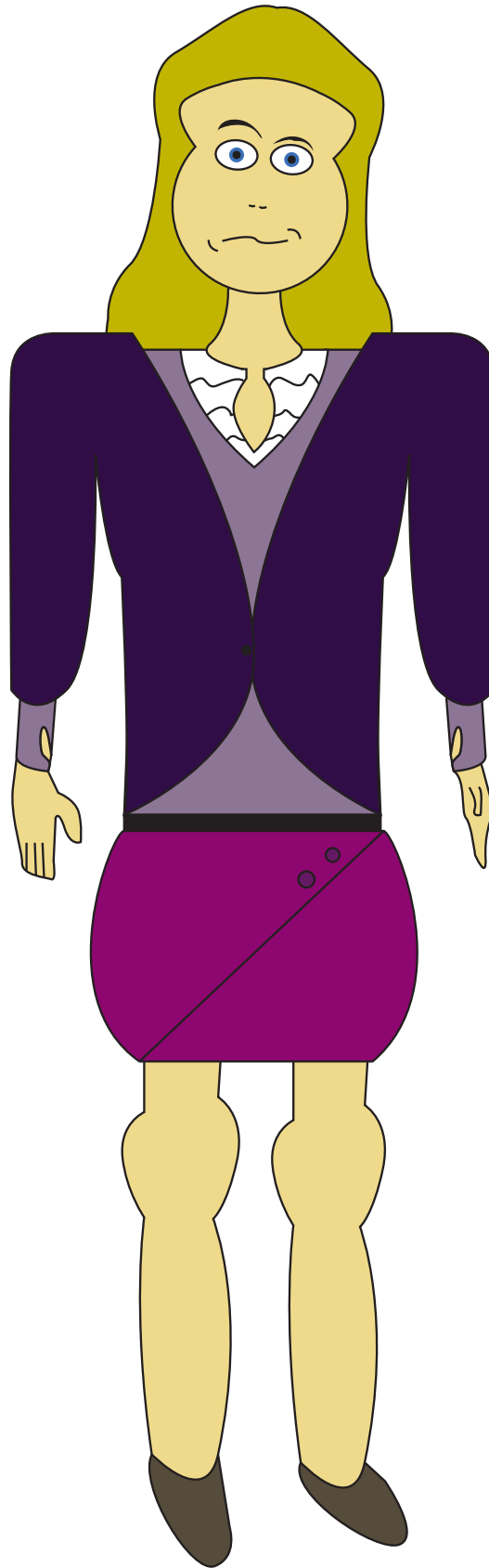
She seemed to get along well with Savanna as she stated back, "Katherine Beauty."

Aliberto said politely, "My name is Aliberto Pentdragon, but please call me Alex."

She looked neither angrily nor happily at him. Aliya nodded but did not speak. Dominis now followed Katherine to the crowd of students with the same over-zealous political smile. The other boy was now joined with his mother on the bench. They seemed to get along well, and he wasn't embarrassed by talking to her with other teenagers around. Within the next few minutes another girl and another boy showed up. The boy, Olsittam, talked loudly to make sure he would be heard and swung his arms around as he spoke. His family crest was a sheep. He was a dozen or so pounds overweight and had black hair in a crew cut. The girl, Rosa, had dyed orange hair and looked slack-jawed most of the time. Her family crest was a wolf. She looked confused at the conversations and didn't seem to engage in them much. Soon a cherry red rental car showed up. Out from it stepped a girl, the most beautiful girl Aliberto had ever seen. He was as slack-jawed as Rosa as she walked stately from the car to Katherine. She had golden blonde hair and golden tan skin. Her eyes were deep blue, like the ocean. She was tall for her age and narrow. She wore a light purple blouse, and a dark purple suit jacket. She also wore an orangish-pink tight-fitting skirt. She didn't wear a tabard and instead wore a wizard's hat. It had the same green and red coloration as Totus's, as well as the same pegasus. She didn't ask anyone to bow to her despite her being a wizard, but Olsittam did regardless. He said, "You are my wizard, to you I follow."

She immediately replied, "You I fight for."

Olsittam got out of the bowing position looking serious, like he



Sophie Beauty-Totaltruth

would rather be bowing than being bowed at. She then hugged Katherine. They seemed to know each other. She ignored Aliberto's apparent confused look as she joined the conversation about online fantasy skillball, which Katherine was having none of, saying it was a waste of time.

Soon they began to hear the rumble of an overhead vehicle. They glanced up to see what Aliberto knew, from Aliya, to be a COW. It was an aircraft that the Sons and Daughters of Witches Knight Academy used as a transport aircraft. It was a jet, but the engines could be pointed downward; in case the situation should arise, it could take off or land vertically. The engines pointed downward and hot air began to blow them in the face. At last it landed on the pavers. Steam began to leave the back hatch as it swung down. Inside there was a pilot as well as a man, who looked to be in his late fifties. The man had tan blonde hair that was turning grey in some areas and that came to a square shape in the front. He wore aviator glasses and a suede tan button up shirt and a red tie. His only facial hair was an, I-know-what-I-am-doing mustache. He looked at the new students with a somewhat sad, unflinching expression. He unbuckled his seat belt from the seats that ran the walls of the cabin. The pilot looked frozen in place as if deep in thought about what to do next. The pilot decided to get out of the pilot's seat and join the man. The pilot looked to be in his late teens. He had sleek looking jet-black hair and tiny black-tinted glasses that covered his eyes. He wore his suit of armor which looked to be polished to an extreme. His tabard had

a panther family crest on it. The older man said, "Hi, I'm Professor Shadowsee. The other one here is our ace pilot Jupiter Deepgood, he is the Odyn, which is what we call our guide to first years."

Shadowsee glanced at the students with a disinterested smirk that had elements of professionalism. There was a glimmer of inspiration in his eyes as he then said, "We need to make sure everyone is here before we go. I'll say your name, then you say if you are here."

He began, "Morheiss Ahoatamname."

Morheiss smiled and raised his hand with a glow about him. Professor Shadowsee continued, "Soweapia Badtrike."

Aliberto glanced around, as did everyone else. None of them seemed to have met someone named Soweapia. Nobody gestured to themselves. Professor Shadowsee then said, "He doesn't seem to be here. Moving on, Katherine Beauty."

Katherine raised her hand modestly with a relaxed look. Professor Shadowsee then said, "Sophie Beauty-Totaltruth."

The girl Aliberto couldn't get over raised her hand with a scolding face and a judging brow aimed at Shadowsee. Jupiter had a smug smirk on his face as he nodded his head up at each name called. Shadowsee then said, "Olsittam Divconcs."

Olsittam, looked narrow-eyed into the distance as if he saw something no one else did, raised his hand and quietly said, "Here."

Shadowsee then continued, "Victor Firelight."

The boy who had been sitting with his mom darted his hand up and

yelped, "Here."

He had been observing the COW with great interest and looking intently at the controls. Professor Shadowsee then said, "Aliberto Pentdragon."

Aliberto raised his hand. He spoke his rehearsed line as Dominis snickered, "I prefer it when people call me Alex. I find Aliberto to be a bad name. Aliberto I am not."

Shadowsee asked, "Why don't you like the name Aliberto?"

Aliberto replied, "It is a bit old fashioned."

Professor Shadowsee then said, "Many great people in my lifetime have been called Aliberto, you should be proud to be called the same thing as them."

Shadowsee glanced back down his clipboard with relaxed neutral looking lips and a raised brow. He then continued, "Savanna Pupils."

Savanna tossed her hand up and said, "Here, I'm over here."

She did so modestly with an air of positivity. Professor Shadowsee then said, "Strike Pupils."

Strike raised his hand and had a serious looking expression on his mouth, but relaxed and non-stressed eyes. Shadowsee then said, "Dominis Witches."

Dominis raised his hand expressively and smiled broadly. Sophie asked, "What are we going to do about Soweapia?"

Professor Shadowsee replied, "I guess we should wait."

Jupiter looked angry at waiting as he took out and unlocked his phone. They moved their belongings into the center of the cabin of the COW

and strapped them down to d-rings anchored to the cabin floor.

Half an hour turned into an hour. Jupiter pulled out a box of cigarettes. He advanced one out halfway with his thumb and pointed it at Aliberto. He asked, "Want one?"

Aliberto replied, "Oh, no thank you."

Jupiter took the one cigarette out for himself and lit it. Shadowsee said, "There is a statistic that you are nine times more likely to get a respiratory disease if you smoke."

Jupiter hummed, "Eh."

Morheiss asked, "What do we do if he doesn't come?"

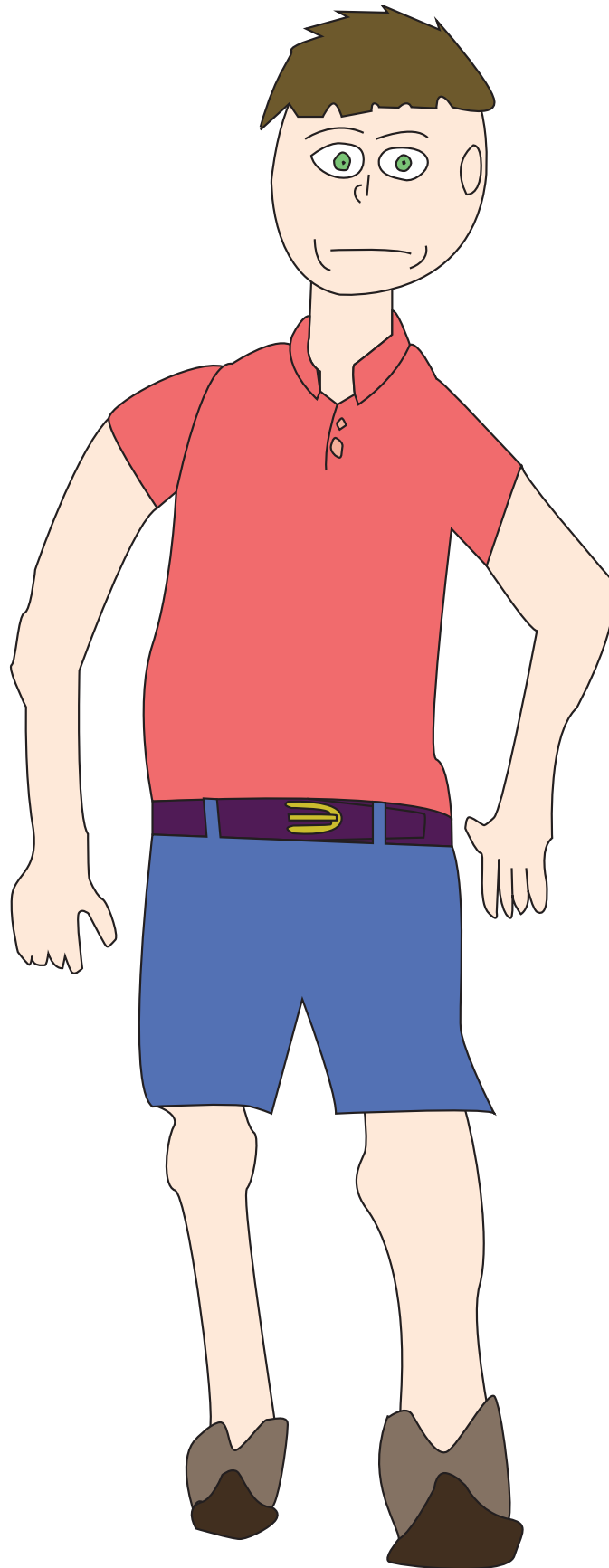
Shadowsee replied, "We will give him another half hour, then leave regardless."

Victor asked, "Do you have his phone number?"

Shadowsee asked, "You think calling him might help?"

Jupiter gave an angry shake no from his phone. Ten minutes before they were set to leave, a large luxury SUV with dents all over it pulled up. A boy with frizzy brown hair and very light green eyes got out. He didn't bother getting his belongings out of the vehicle. He had a school tabard on and had a hamster family crest. He just stood still, staring at the COW in amazement and slack-jawed as if it were Miss Reme. Soon his father joined him. His father had lost a great deal of his orange hair to male pattern baldness. He got out of the driver's seat and stared at the COW also. Morheiss yelled, "Hey, are you Soweapia?"

The boy replied, "Yeah."



**Soweapia Badstrike**



Dominis yelled, "Come on, we are all waiting on you!"

Jupiter yawned. Soweapia took his trunk from his dad and carried it into the cabin of the COW. Aliberto asked, "What took so long?"

Soweapia replied with a relaxed mouth, dropped eyelids and a foggy look in his eyes like it wasn't that big of a story as he said, "It was such a lovely day so we decided to walk here, but my mom's heart rate got too high so we had to go to the hospital."

Soon he waved his father goodbye and sat down. They all returned to the seats along the walls of the cabin and buckled the seat belts. Jupiter got back in the pilot's seat and flipped a switch. With a slight rattle the back hatch buzzed closed. Aliberto asked, "So which island is the academy on?"

Aliya replied, "It is on its own island. A rogue island."

Rosa asked, "What is a rogue island?"

Victor quickly replied, "An island that isn't bound by the gravity of other islands; it moves free of orbital rotations. Sometimes they have their own propulsion and can be piloted."

Soweapia excitedly asked, "Is the academy's island one with piloting?"

Aliya's replied, "Yes. Its movement is controlled at the bridge."

They soon were on the other side of the island that the City Reme was on. It was a forested area, but a section of the forest was missing. Katherine angrily stated, "That's terrible."

Sophie replied, "It's nothing to worried about- it was used to build

houses."

Soweapia merrily said, "It'll grow back. Where there is an acorn, they'll be a mighty oak."

Soon they were past the forested area and no longer above the island. Below them was the Ocean of Tears, but it was not visible through the layer of clouds between them and it.

They spent many hours in their seats. Soweapia really had to go to the bathroom since he had not gone since last night.

At last they arrived at the castle floating in the sky. It took up the entire island. It had three layers of walls ascending the hill on all five sides. Along the outermost wall, hundreds of canoes were anchoring with students disembarking. The COW circled around the granite castle until it was at the castle's back. At the back was a long bridge protruding to nowhere extending from this side of the castle. On the bottom of the bridge were arches that had floating pieces of earth at the bottom. On the one side of the bridge touching the castle was a large steel gate that looked like a hanger door. The COW began to land on the half bridge, which seemed to be a runway. It slowed completely before arriving at the massive steel door. Jupiter got on the radio at the controls. He said into it, "COW six, pilot Jupiter Deepgood requesting entrance into the hanger from the on duty Nantucket."

Soon the voice on the other end replied, "Please transmit password."

Jupiter replied, "Not great to be back twenty-eighteen."

The voice on the radio replied, "This is Gregory Pouncer as on duty Nantucket, your entrance has been approved."

Soon the giant steel doors began to rattle open. The cabin walls of the COW made the noise difficult to hear but Aliberto was sure it would be incredibly loud if he were outside. A runway taxi vehicle emerged from the hanger. It secured a boom to the front of the COW and pulled it inside the hanger. The hanger, while large, looked much too empty to have a fleet of aircraft in it. Then Aliberto realized they were pulled onto an elevator. The elevator began to lurch upward until they were taken to a room the perfect size for the COW. The taxi vehicle pulled them into the room before untethering itself, returning to the elevator, and disappearing down it. Jupiter flipped a switch and the back hatch swung down. They got out and saw that there was a door opposite the elevator in the room. Soweapia ran through the door looking for a bathroom. Jupiter chained the COW to the floor to prevent it from shifting with possible movement of the island. In the room was a large luggage cart. They loaded all their belongings onto the cart, which barely fit everything. Jupiter asked, "Aliya, do you mind taking this to the first-year dormitories?"

She agreed and left the room with the luggage cart. Aliberto asked, "What are the rest of us doing?"

Jupiter replied, "Castle orientation."

Aliberto then asked, "Without Soweapia?"

They waited half an hour for Soweapia before deciding to start

orientation without him. Jupiter led them from the room they were in through the door, into a hallway. It was made of stone on the floor, walls, and ceiling. He led them down the hallway. Shadowsee was trailing them from behind. At the end of the hallway they turned right into a spiral staircase. He led them up the staircase at least five floors. By the time they made it to the top, their hearts were racing. Aliberto felt like fainting. At the top, the hallway they arrived at was a four-way intersection. In the hallway was a knight in a suit of armor with a deer on his tabard. His head was shaven bald and underneath his armor, visible, were brown monk robes. He and Jupiter passed each other subtly waves. Shadowsee said, "Jupiter, since John happens to be here, why don't you introduce him?"

Jupiter sighed, "Fine."

He then stated, "This is John Monk, the school's first monk student."

Dominis asked, "How can you be a monk and a knight? Monks are nonviolent and being a knight is violent?"

John explained, "I can fight, just not to the kill."

Jupiter led them away to a long and narrow room at the end of one of the hallways. It had a solid steel wall on one side with steel hatches that could be hinged open to reveal very thick glass. They peered out the glass and saw they were above the massive hanger door. Salembourgh was there in her witch's cap and yellow long sleeve shirt. She gave a nod to them when they entered, thus stating she noticed their arrival. There

was also a skinny frail looking black boy there. He looked like a lollypop with his large round head on a tiny stick of a body. He was sitting on a chair positioned with an array of controls. He had a headset on that was plugged into one of the controls. His tabard had a hawk crest on it. Salembourgh began, "I am fairly sure all of you know who I am, but just in case you have forgotten I am Belle Salembourgh, headmistress of the academy. I will be joining you on your tour. Gregory, why don't you tell them about your station?"

The black boy began, "This is the gatehouse. I am Gregory Pouncer, Nantucket of the academy. Nantucket is the gatekeeper, I decide who is allowed in or not."

He then angrily squealed, "If you sleep in class there is no way you will be allowed back in. I mean it this time."

Jupiter was smirking, like it was OK to sleep in class. He then led them out of the gatehouse, back into the hallway. Salembourgh now followed them. They went down the hallway until they were back at the four-way intersection. Instead of going down the steps they came up, they went in the other direction down the hallway. They passed a door with the red cross for medicine on it. Jupiter explained, "This is the medical ward, come here for ER care, doctor appointments, and medicine classes. Also, all students are required to have a position to keep the castle running. You may apply for a job here at the beginning of the second week of classes to be a healer. Think about what job you want as we continue orientation."

Next was a room next to the hanger filled with parts and tools.

Jupiter explained, "This is the jet maintenance ward. This is where you are expected to come and apply to be a jet maintainer."

The boys pushed aside the girls to get a better look. Dominis asked, "Where do we go to be a pilot?"

Jupiter replied, "You need to be a third year or higher to be pilot." He seemed to have a tone of anger in his voice about this. Continuing down the hallway Aliberto noticed through a window that they were nearing one of the high towers of the castle. When they arrived in the tower it looked to be an entrance of an office tower with a front desk, fireplace, and vaulted ceilings. Jupiter explained, "This is the government tower. Each grade of the academy elects a student to represent them called a baron. The king is elected by all grades. Our current queen is the Princess of Ocean City, Princess Odeta."

Morheiss's eyes glowed at the reveal of positions with illustrious names. Salembourgh scolded him. Princess Odeta was the princess of the Atlas house, which was the Royal House of Ocean City. Odeta meant the color ocean blue. Jupiter continued, "The first floor of the tower is the gallery. The second floor is the council room where the barons, queen, and bureaucrats gather once a week. The third floor has meeting rooms that can be reserved. The fourth floor are offices for the bureaucrats who are heads of each department. The fifth floor are the offices for the barons. The top floor is the royal suite, where the king's or queen's office as well as his or her living quarters are."

Jupiter then led them out through the other end of the gallery. They entered a hallway with a series of arches on the left side and three doors spread evenly on the right side. Jupiter explained, "Here are the dormitories. Each grade gets a different floor, starting from the bottom and going up based on grade level."

He led them down a large spiral staircase until they arrived at the first floor. At the bottom, instead of there being window arches, there were door arches that led into a tranquil looking garden with a pond in the center. The garden also had a fire pit and many park tables and benches. Despite this being the bottom floor Aliberto thought it was alright being that close to the tranquility garden. Jupiter pointed to two doors on the hallway that were next to the series of arches. He said, "Those are the boys' and girls' showers."

He then led them inside the middle of the three doors opposite the arches. He had to unlock the door with a key card before entering. Inside was a common room filled with couches, tables, and a rather unusual assortment of chairs. The chairs included a porch swing, a barber shop chair, a bench made from a tailgate, and ones carved out of trunks of trees. Also, in the room, was the luggage cart. Jupiter issued the new students key cards as well as walkie talkies. Hallways extended from the common room on both sides, which led to dormitory rooms. He then instructed them not to pick out their rooms until they got back, and they had to continue with the tour. This angered Victor, who kept trying to claim a room and get some of his belongings off the luggage rack.

They continued down the arched hallway until they arrived at a t-shaped intersection. They turned right at it and now on both sides of the hallway were doors. Jupiter explained, "This is the academic ward. Classes are held in this section. Teacher's offices are on the top floor."

He also said as a job they could apply to be teachers' assistants. At the end of that hallway was another ward. Jupiter led them inside a room, the armory. It was filled with every type of weapon a knight would use. It was also filled with all sorts of armor. It was like an entire department store, if a department store carried every part of armor with multiples in every size. The girls eagerly tried on armor along with the boys. Once everyone was wearing armor that fit them (except for the wizards Sophie and Morheiss) they left. Despite Aliberto wearing only leather armor and not chainmail or steel plates, he could hardly move. His muscle deficit was worrying him with the physical demands of being a knight. Next to the armory was a large circular room that resembled a coliseum. It had rows of seats along the outside and a large pit filled with sand in the center. Jupiter called it the sparring arena; it being called that made Aliberto even more nervous. Next to the coliseum was a weight lifting room. Jupiter explained, "Totus doesn't think treadmills makes people fit so all we have are weight lifting setups."

He also explained they had to get five-hundred hours of physical training in each year to advance. Jupiter then led them to the dining hall, which was the other way down the t-intersection. He also showed them the kitchen, which was next to the dining hall. Inside was a knight who



looked to be three-hundred-pounds. He had chubby cheeks. He also had blonde hair, which was in a comb over. His armor looked greasy and he was holding a half-eaten cheeseburger. He introduced himself, "I am Liam Phillimore. I am the Kitchen Master, you can apply here to work and get extra dessert."

Totus was also in the kitchen. All of the knights bowed, although Aliberto grudgingly, to the old wizard and said, "You are my wizard, to you I follow."

He took partial notice and said, "To you I fight for."

He then returned to talking to Liam, "Liam, you better get into shape or you won't graduate. You didn't get your gym hours in last year and you are terribly out of shape."

Liam replied, "I hate going to the gym and I don't need a degree to be a restaurant chain owner."

Totus replied, "Yes, you do. Education is the path to be being a professional."

Jupiter led them away from the conversation and showed them the janitorial office in case they wanted to apply for the cleaning staff. He said many first years ended up being janitors as older students earned the more exciting jobs due to their qualifications. Beyond the dining hall they arrived at a ward that interested Aliberto. It was the recreation and entertainment ward. It had fields and courts, indoors and outdoors for all the popular sports, including skillball. It also had a video game arcade, movie theater, and swimming pool. Aliberto's eyes glowed with

the possibility for applying to work in this ward. Jupiter said, "Our old Recreation and Entertainment Department Head graduated last year so we are looking for a replacement."

Sophie looked excited too. Katherine rolled her eyes, Aliberto could tell she wouldn't spend time in this ward. Jupiter then led them across the skillball field. Once across they were back to their first four-way intersection. They went down a different hallway and arrived at a large shop. Jupiter said, "This is our engineering department. The shop is ten thousand square feet. Apply here to work as an engineer."

Victor proudly stated the name and purpose of every exotic stationary tool they passed. Jupiter then led them back into the hallway and showed them a staircase. He said, "The staircase leads down into the base of the island where the engine room is, which has additional positions."

They arrived back to the four-way intersection. They went down the last hallway which led to another tower. He explained it was the hotel tower for visitors to lodge in, as well as the teachers' quarters. They then went through the lobby until they were at another hallway. At the end of the hallway was the entrance to the narrowest, but also tallest tower. There climbed at least twelve flights of stairs before they arrived at the top. Aliberto felt incredibly faint, but he didn't want to show any weakness, as the others already didn't believe in him. At the top it looked to be the bridge of a military airship. There were seats with controls everywhere as well as monitors, radars, and a navigation system.

There were only two people at the controls. One was a grey-skinned looking serious boy. He was steering a large wheel with many levers next to it. He introduced himself by saying, "I am Remactum Wawulauchsin. I am the welsh, or helmsman. Welcome to the bridge."

Salembourgh explained, "We seem to have a problem at the council meetings with coming to a decision on where to take the castle. Remactum gets blamed when we end up in a place that the students don't like. He has trouble reminding the council they didn't decide on a destination."

Remactum didn't argue with being criticized and politely nodded his head, indicating that he was listening. The other boy was sitting at another panel with a headset on. He took it off and began, "I am the aether, or chief communications officer. I gather information about what to say on the daily announcements from our school's leaders. I make sure mission briefings and mission reports are thorough. Sometimes to communicate you need to think outside of the box with what piece of information might fall through the cracks."

Jupiter dismissed them to go back to the first-year dormitories to claim their chambers. In the gallery of the government tower Soweapia was sitting on a chair looking exhausted. He exclaimed when he saw them, "This academy is so confusing. It is impossible to find anything."

They led him to the first-year dormitories. They discovered there were six two-person rooms and Jupiter had told them no co-ed pairings were allowed. Soweapia exclaimed, "Can I get the one next to the

showers, so I don't have to walk as far?"

Victor shrieked, "I am going to room alone."

Soweapia said, "No rooming alone allowed."

Victor yelled back, "There are seven boys. One boy gets to room alone."

Dominis spat, "It should be Soweapia, he is a mess, nobody wants to tangle with him."

Victor replied, "But..."

Savanna said, "I guess I will room with Rosa. After all, it would be unfair to separate Sophie and Katherine."

Morheiss stated, "I will room with Olsittam."

Aliberto felt shocked, he thought they were best friends. Olsittam agreed, "OK, I'm fine with that. It would be an honor, my wizard."

Dominis said, "I call Strike, he doesn't seem to cause any trouble."

Strike agreed, "OK."

Aliberto then said, "That leaves me and Victor."

Victor squealed, "I told you, I'll be the single."

Dominis barked, "Na ya won't."

Victor replied, "But..."

Dominis interrupted, "But nothin'."

Dominis pushed Victor toward a room. Victor got his trunk from the luggage cart and carried it to a room. Aliberto followed with his trunk.

When he entered the room, Victor spat, "I told you, I am rooming alone."

Aliberto replied, "No, you aren't."

Aliberto replied, "No, you aren't."

Victor yelled, "Get out of my room!"

Aliberto replied, "It is our room."

Victor threw his laptop with so much force onto one of the beds it nearly broke and stormed out of the room mumbling angrily. Aliberto began unpacking his trunk and placing items into the armoire. Soon he heard arguing in the hallway. He went out into the hallway to find Strike arguing with Olsittam. Olsittam stated, "We need to trade rooms. I can't be three doors from the end of the hallway, that is the devil's number."

Strike argued, "I already unpacked. I am not going to move after being settled down unless I absolutely have to."

Dominis said, "I am OK with switching."

Morheiss said, "Never mind, Strike, you will be moving into a larger room."

Strike then said, "Fine, if it is a larger room, then I can move."

Aliberto said to Morheiss, "They respect you."

Morheiss replied, "I am born with respect, I am a wizard."

Victor eventually came back to the room but insisted Aliberto stay on his side. That evening they gathered in the dinning hall. The first-years sat together, as none of them felt comfortable dining with older students. At last Jupiter and Shadowsee showed up. They sat down with the first-years. Rosa requested, "So Jupiter, tell us about your family."

Jupiter sighed and said, "I never met my parents."

There was a silence. He continued, "The orphanage staff said I was

the son of a nun and a high monk. My parents would get in trouble with the other monks and nuns if it were found out they bore a child together, so they sent me to the orphanage. Some people of the book they were, sitting in a room with the lights turned out all day, silently not doing anything wrong. It is better to be with your family, even if it is a bumpy ride, than it is not to."

Rosa said, "Oh, I'm so sorry."

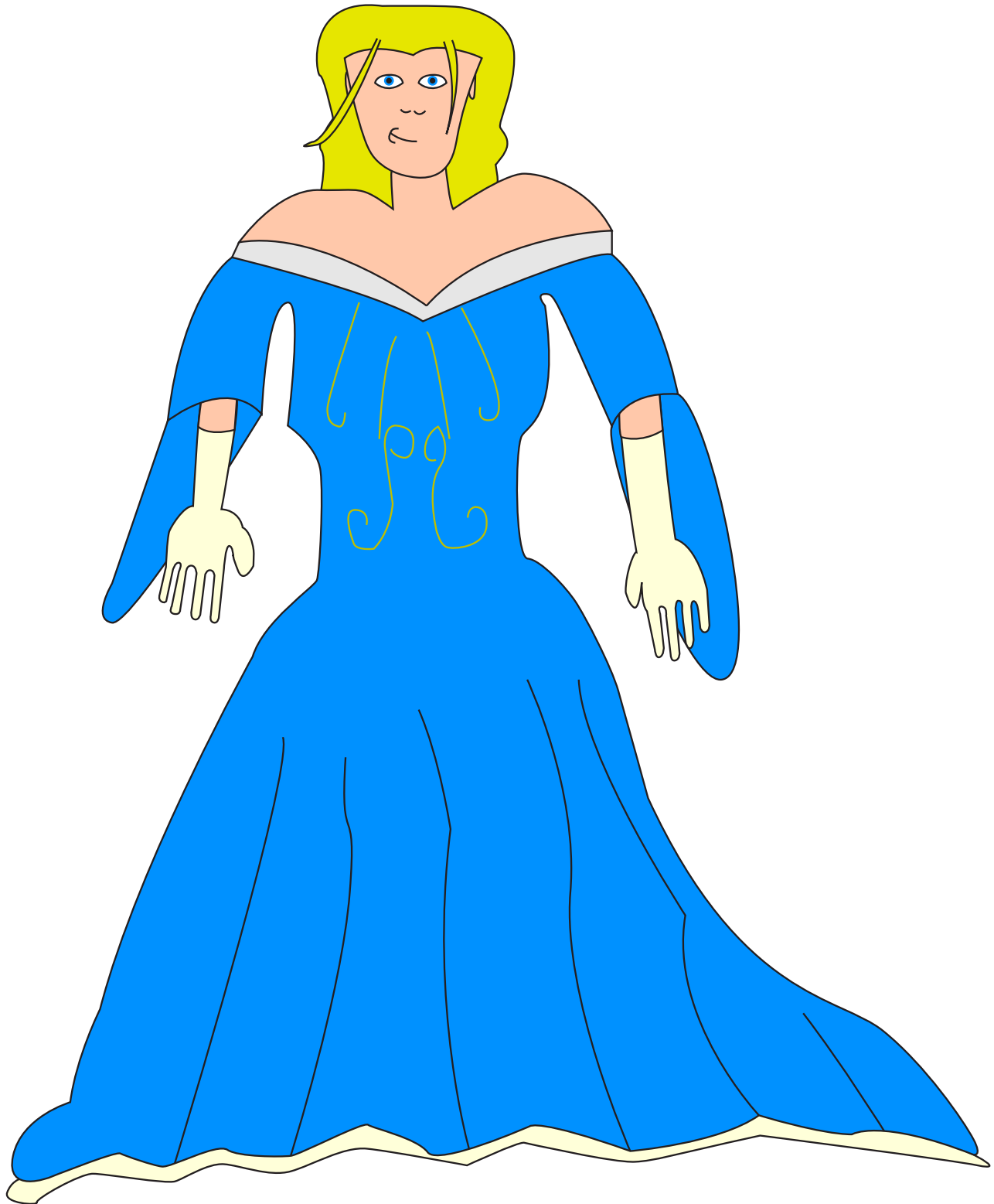
Jupiter then said, "Shadowsee found me while visiting orphanages to recruit orphans to the academy."

Jupiter then asked Liam for an old bottle of wine, which he paid for, as students were required to pay for alcohol. He poured some into his wine glass. He then gave a wine glass to Shadowsee and asked, "Want some?"

Shadowsee replied, "That wine was made thirty years ago. People twice your age have put off drinking that for at least a decade. You shouldn't drink wine that old every night, you should only save it for special occasions."

Jupiter mumbled back, "I drink what I want."

Shadowsee poured himself a younger wine. During mealtime, a boy came onto the stage that was at the end of the dining hall. He was short and small, while not as much as Aliberto, had dirty blonde hair and blue eyes. He smiled broadly as he spoke and had an air of cheeriness. He said, "To those who don't know me, I am Lugobi Popps, school announcer. We have a few announcements. Classes begin tomorrow,



*Princess Odeta Atlas*

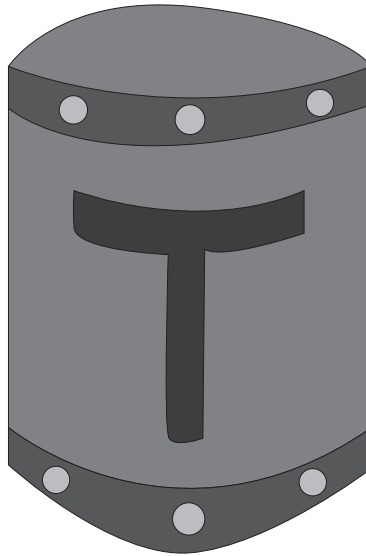
your baron is to report to the academic department head's office to pick up schedules for your grade between six and seven o'clock tomorrow morning. Electives don't begin until next week. First-years must report to a seminar here in the dining hall at one o'clock on Tuesday to be educated about their elective options. Department heads looking to hire should submit to Princess Odeta the request help form on the academy website. The position of Entertainment and Recreation Department Head is available. Those interested should fill out the application on the council's page. Now time for opening year remarks from Princess Odeta."

Lugobi stepped down from the stage. A girl, who didn't wear armor, but instead wore a silken ocean blue dress stepped onto the stage. Her eyes matched her dress. She had a heart shaped face and warm blonde hair. She began, "To those of you who don't know who I am, I am Odeta Atlas, Queen of the Academy as I was elected to be this year at the end of last year."

She paused, then continued, "But anyway, I believe each of you can succeed this year even if it may not seem like it. Ah, yeah." She finished and let them eat.

After dinner, Aliberto felt exhausted. He clambered to his room and fell asleep.





8



## *Soul Searching*

A hooded figure sat on the floor in the middle of a small room with a cobblestone floor. His face was almost completely covered in shadows, but a peaceful smile could be made out. His legs were crossed, and he was praying. The robes were brown and rough and tied with a rope as the belt. He seemed to be a poor monk, but he was the high monk- Nomalis, which meant in ancient speakish, "He who was born without sin."

The wooden board and batten door clanged with someone

knocking on it from the other side. Nomalis spoke warmly and happily, "Enter."

A boy, sixteen, entered the room. He wore green camflouge parachute pants and a white tank top. He had tan eyes and his hair was a black mullet. He sat down next to Nomalis. The lighting in the room came from many candles that surrounded the walls. The boy's name was Templar, which meant, "He who was born with sin."

Templar had lost his soul to a dark wizard four years ago. Then he joined Nomalis because Nomalis could find his soul. Without the magic of a wizard his only hope of finding it would be to become star-crossed with it by chance. He asked the wizard, "You summoned me?"

Nomalis replied, "The Red Knight was discovered."

Templar asked coldly, "And what does that mean?"

Nomalis spoke warmly and full of hope, "I need the Red Knight's spirit to work at finding spell to find your soul. Capture him and your sins will be forgiven and your impurity as the Black Knight will be reversed. You shall become the White Knight."

Templar asked, "Where was he seen?"

Nomlis replied, "His name is Aliberto Pentdragon, he lives on Stonehaven Island."

Templar stood. He turned around and left through the door. He put on the round dark cylindrical helmet he was holding. He walked down a flight of stairs and arrived at the Cantafruit Monastery courtyard. In the center was a statue of Chivalrous. Monks were gathered around it



Templar

praying and looked to be on the verge of crying. He felt nothing as the stone statue stood there, unmoving, unmeaningful. The moment was anything but poetic. While most followers of Nomalis had waves of emotion at the poetry of Chivalrous, Templar felt nothing. Knights' souls are what attracts them to the charisma of wizards. Without one, Templar felt the world lacked poetry and meaning. It seemed just to be a long line of depressing and irrational events. He wanted to feel beauty every time he looked at the statue, or at the view of the Ocean of Tears from the high tower, or when he read the works of the masters- but instead he felt nothing. He had hoped for so long some emotional stimulus would invigorate him, but he had since lost hope. Every day when he went to bed they seemed meaningless. Templar knew he should not grow too fond of trusting Nomalis, who after all was a wizard, and wizards were not meant to be trusted. Templar followed Nomalis because the wizard who stole his soul, Trygge the Gluttonous, and him were arch-enemies. Templar made haste and passed the statue.



9



## *The Law of the Conservation of Energy*

Victor was in the common room early the morning of the first day of classes when Shadowsee entered. Shadowsee explained, "I'm in a rush to get to class. Hand these out to your grade." Shadowsee handed Victor a stack of papers, then left. Victor looked at the first page and saw it was the schedule for Morheiss. He flipped through the other pages and saw they were each of their schedules. Soon, the first-years slowly gathered in the common room. Victor held up the stack of paper and said, "Here

are your schedules."

Dominis said, "No way, our schedules are in the Academic Office."

Victor handed out the papers to the persons with their name on them.

Dominis said, "I am not trusting anything you give to me."

He ripped his schedule in half. Just then Jupiter entered the common room. He said, "Oh good, you all have your schedules."

Dominis looked down at the two halves of paper on the floor then picked them up and lined the ripped edge up to see his schedule. Aliberto's schedule read:

When	Course	Instructor	Classroom
M, W, F: 8-10 AM	Alphysics YR1	Carloman	4D
M, W, F: 10-12 AM	Piloting YR1	Loften	1A
M, W: 1-2 PM	Martial Arts YR1	Butterman	Coliseum
M, W, F: 2-4 PM	Work		
T, R: 8-10 AM	Battle Strategy YR1	Shadowsee	1C
T, R: 10-12 AM	Leadership YR1	Offwhite	3A
T: 1-2 PM	Biology	Candlepasser	2A
T: 2-4 PM	Undecided Elective A		
R: 1-2 PM	Wilderness Survival	Shrubwalker	4E
R: 2-4 PM	Communications Protocol	Nutters	3D
F: 1-2 PM	Undecided Elective A		

Soweapia looked at his schedule and exclaimed, "Mine is broken. No day of the week starts with 'R.'"

Savanna said, "By process of elimination and the order they are in that must be Thursday."

The first-years compared their schedules to find them identical, except for Morheiss's and Sophie's who had magic with Totus all day every day. Aliberto looked at the clock and saw it was breakfast time.

He packed his bag with what he would need before lunch. At breakfast Soweapia decided to play pickup kickball outside while the others finished eating. Aliberto arrived at room 4D around eight o'clock. The door was locked but he could see the light was on from under the door. He and the other first-years waited. Soweapia had yet to rejoin them when the door opened. Out from it rolled an old man on a wheelchair. He looked to be in his eighties or nineties. He had fluffy slippers, a flannel button up shirt, and aquamarine hospital pants. Aliberto had seen him in the dining hall but assumed he was a visitor, not a professor. He was skinny and boney. He had a pale face with strong lines going down from the sides of his eyes to end of his face. He had a scolding look as he examined nine of his new students. His lips were pressed together tightly, and his eyes were looking bloodshot. He said, "Come in now." He turned around his wheelchair and rolled back into the classroom. He rolled to the chalkboard on his electronic chair and started writing his name. The chalkboard squeaked as he wrote, "Professor Nordic Carloman."

In the back of the classroom there was a student witch who was somewhat overweight. She had black hair and brown eyes. She looked dismissively at the class while on her phone. Carloman turned his chair around and said, "I am Professor Nordic Carloman."

He was pursed-lipped and looked angry as he spoke. Dominis stood up and walked to the pencil sharpener. He began to turn the crank when Carloman asked, "What are you doing?"

Dominis replied, "Sharpening my pencil."

Carloman spat, "Don't while I'm speaking. Is it that hard to stay seated?"

Dominis walked with as swag back to his seat. Carloman said, "You think alphysics is a power you can use to get your way in the world. Alphysics is a tool, not a toy. Have you ever heard the story of Solvar the Infinite?"

The class sighed. It was a popular children's fairy-tale to teach kids right from wrong. Carloman continued, "If we are blinded by the light of what seems to be a solution we cannot see when we are wrong. There is always a flipside. Alphysics moves energy from one object to another. Not even the Red Knight, as powerful as he thinks he is, can create energy."

Aliberto felt anger rise inside of him. How dare someone who just met him judge him like that. Aliberto raised his hand. Carloman spat, "You have something important to say?"

Aliberto asked, "Can you get into the lesson?"

Dominis snickered. Carloman replied, "I don't have time to deal with your need to defend yourself."

Carloman then continued, "This is the Law of the Conservation of energy, that energy is never created nor destroyed, only moved and transformed. This is to say there is no magical end all. Humans must decide the fate of humanity. To be a knight means to be a servant, but as humans, you can so easily behave as balloons, ungrounded and fragile."



Knights are cursed to be both humans and servants. The human side of us makes mistakes, to correct these mistakes the souls of knights seek wizards to forgive them, a brown-nose's attempt to continue to feel righteous. Each of the six forms of energy in alphysics deals with an element of regret. Which energy a knight can use is determined by which form of regret is strongest in that knight. But there is one knight every generation who has so much of every energy of regret that he or she can control all six energies. This is the Red Knight, he who keeps man where it fairs best."

Carloman rolled over to an overhead projector on a desk. He flipped it on then said, "Venus, turn off the lights."

The witch in the back of the room, who Aliberto guessed was the teacher's assistant, tucked her phone into her gym shorts and nonchalantly swayed over to the light switch and flipped it. Carloman took out a transparency slide. Dominis was snickering at how old fashioned this was. Victor was observing the overhead project with much fascination over how it was built. Carloman begin writing on the slide with a brown wet erase marker, "gravity."

He said, "Gravity deals with the weight of a situation. A gravity knight can move mass from one object to another."

He wrote "mass" on the slide. Then he continued, "The weapon a knight uses to hold the energy while it is between the objects is a flail." He wrote, "Flail" on the slide. He continued speaking by saying, "Gravity knights feel regret with their decision having a big impact. If they believe

the impact of a decision is big, they will decide with a heavier heart. Don't mind the pun."

He asked, "Who here had the orb glow brown when they were interviewed?"

Nobody raised their hands. Carloman said, "Moving on." He took off the one slide and put on a blank one. He switched out his brown wet erase marker for an orange one. He wrote on the empty slide, "heat." This was followed by the words, "temperature" and "ax." He explained, "Heat deals with desire. Heat knights can have great inner struggle due to this desire. They are more aware than other knights of how close they are to acquiring things that are valuable to them."

He then asked, "Who here did the orb glow orange for?"

Dominis and Rosa raised their hands. Carloman put on a new slide and wrote in yellow, "motion", "newtons", and "sword." As he was writing this the door opened and Soweapia entered. He said, "Sorry, I didn't know where the academic ward was."

Carloman spat, "Fine, just don't cause a distraction as you sit down."

As Soweapia sat down, Carloman explained, "Motion deals with extensions of yourself. This can be daily communicating, works of art, works of engineering, political speeches, kissing."

The class giggled. Carloman said, "Don't tell me you won't be doing any of that."

He continued, "A motion knight can feel good or bad about these extensions. They may try to cut themselves off by severing their

extensions or these extensions may help them feel connected to others."

He then asked, "Who here did the orb glow yellow for?"

Strike politely raised his hand. Carloman put on a new blank slide. He wrote in blue, "potential", "calories", and "mace." Carloman explained, "Potential energy deals with what we could be. Potential knights have the most extreme personality as they try to live up to an identity to perfection."

He asked, "Who here did the orb glow blue for?"

Katherine and Olsittam raised their hands. Rosa asked, "Should we be taking notes?"

Carloman replied, "Only if you think you need help remembering what I'm saying."

Katherine and Savanna took out notebooks and started writing. Soweapia closed the notebook he had just opened and put down his pencil, as if certain he would remember everything. Carloman put on a new blank slide and wrote on it in green, "sound," "decibels," and "halberd." He explained, "Sound is the spectrum where beliefs exist. Sound knights have a strong affinity for belief systems. They must guard against arrogance as they are especially prone to it."

He then asked, "Who here did the orb glow green for?"

Nobody raised their hands. He then put on a last blank slide and wrote in purple, "light," "lumens" and "saber." He explained, "Light deals with enlightenment, don't mind another pun. The light spectrum is where knowledge is discerned. Light Knights are enlightened

individuals."

He then asked, "Who here did the orb glow purple for?"

Savanna and Victor raised their hands. Carloman then asked, "The two that haven't raised their hands. I know the one next to me is the Red Knight. What color did the orb glow for the one over there?"

He was pointing to Soweapia. Soweapia replied, "Brown sir, so I must be a motion."

Carloman said, "No, brown is gravity. You would have known this if you were here earlier."

He then instructed, "Venus, get the weapons."

Venus strutted over to the closet and opened it up. Carloman instructed, "Everyone get a weapon for your energy. Red Knight, you get two different ones of whatever is left."

Everyone got their correct weapon, except for Soweapia who got a sword, to which Katherine corrected him to a flail. Aliberto tried to get a flail and a halberd as they seemed to be in the greatest quantity after the other students took theirs. He couldn't lift the flail, so he substituted it for a saber. Carloman instructed, "Venus, get the brick and a feather."

Venus opened up a cabinet and carried a red brick and a feather onto a desk. She also handed Carloman a flail. He used both hands to point the flail at the brick. A brown stream of light left the brick and entered the flail. The brick began to levitate off the table and around the room. The class of first year's oohed and awed. The flail continued to glow brown. Carloman then swung it at the feather. The brown light left

the flail and entered the feather. He instructed, "Try to lift the feather now."

Dominis hurried to the feather and tried to lift it. It crumbled under its own weight when he got it off the desk. Carloman asked, "Does anyone know what I did?"

Most of them shouted, "You moved the mass from the brick to the feather."

Carloman said, "Correct," then asked, "You, the gravity knight, try."

Venus placed another feather on the desk. Carloman moved the mass back to the brick from the broken feather. Soweapia pointed his flail at the brick. Brown light began to leave the brick for the flail. Soon the brick was levitating again. Soweapia's flail was now glowing brown. He swung it toward the feather. He missed, and the brown light entered Carloman's flail. Carloman let go as the extra heavy flail landed on the ground and chipped up some of the wood. Carloman said, "It is quite alright. This happens a lot to first-years."

Carloman took Soweapia's flail and restored everything to the correct mass.

Carloman then instructed, "Venus, get the candle and the cup of water."

Venus went into the cabinets and got a candle out. She also filled a glass of water from a water bottle. She placed both on the table. She handed Carloman a lighter. He used it to light the candle. He asked, "Who here is a heat knight again?"

Dominis hurried to the candle ahead of Rosa. Carloman said, "Go ahead."

Dominis pointed his ax at the candle. The flame began to die as a stream of orange light left it and gathered on the head of the ax. When the candle was completely out Dominis swung the ax at the glass of water. The orange light shot from the head of the ax and landed on a piece of paper. The paper burst into flames. Carloman shouted, "Venus!"

Venus took out her wand and pointed it at the flames. She murmured, "Suppressor."

A stream of water left the tip of her wand and smothered the fire.

Dominis shouted, "Let me go again!"

Carloman said, "After everyone else goes."

Dominis angrily stepped away from the desk. Carloman relit the candle with the lighter. Rosa lifted her ax to the candle. Orange light left the candle as the flame began to fade. When the candle was completely out, and her ax was glowing orange, she swung it at the glass of water. The orange light entered the glass and the water began to steam, until the orange light was completely used up. Carloman shouted, "Dominis, stop it!"

Aliberto looked up to see Dominis pointing his ax at Carloman. He then saw Carloman patting his sleeve which was smoking. Everyone scolded Dominis. Dominis stopped. Carloman ordered, "You, detention, here, Saturday at nine."

Dominis angrily stated, "Aw man, really?"

It continued like this until everyone had the chance to practice with their energy. At last the only one who had not gone was Aliberto. Carloman took out the glass prism he had for the light knights, Savanna and Victor, as well as the tuning fork he had in the event any of his students were sound knights. He explained, "Alex, what I want you to do is point your halberd at the tuning fork when I ring it, then tap your halberd to your saber, then point your saber at the prism."

Aliberto nodded yes. Carloman hit the tuning fork against the edge of the table. He held it up as it rang. Aliberto aimed his halberd at the tuning fork. It grew silent, although still moving, as a green light moved from it to the halberd. Once the halberd had all the green light it in, Aliberto tapped it against the saber blade. The green light began to drain from the halberd into the saber from where they touched. As it entered the saber it went from green to purple. The class was awestruck. He then slashed the saber at the prism. The purple light left the saber and collided with the prism. The prism began emitting a rainbow of colors like it had for Savanna and Victor. Carloman said, "That is the Red Knight's power. The power to use all the energies and to convert one energy to another."

After class they walked to their ten o'clock class in the hallway.

Dominis complained, "Why did I have to get detention?"

Savanna commented, "I think he let you off easy considering you were trying to set his clothes on fire."

Their next class was piloting with Professor Loftin. He was a young professor in his twenties. He had silky black hair in a dome cut and was

skinny. The boys in the class complained when they found out for the first semester the only goal was to get international sky sailing licenses. Many of them had been on a balloon before and were hoping to learn to pilot battle aircraft. Every time the students began to question Lofton, he would make an allusion to how rebellious sky sailing was viewed as to keep them loyal.

After lunch they had martial arts with Mr. Butterman. Aliberto didn't like it as he was the target of many of Mr. Butterman's commentary on being unmanly.

After martial arts their schedules were marked for, "work." As none of them had jobs yet they did homework in their common room. Soon Morheiss and Sophie returned. Both had ganders now, as they were issued in class. Sophie's was oak, like her uncle's, and Morheiss's was cherry. Morheiss angrily went to his room to which Sophie explained, "He is upset because Uncle Totus thinks poorly of him."

On Tuesday, first thing after breakfast they had battle strategy with Shadowsee. He kept that same detached smirk, but also had a tone and posture of seriousness and professionalism. He shined the brightest when answering questions with his well-crafted answers even on short notice. He also didn't mind when students asked them, which throughout the first class became more and more frequent. Even Dominis didn't have room to complain.

After battle strategy they had leadership with Professor Offwhite. He had his name already on his first computer slide which was, "Aren



Offwhite," to best use their time. He wore armor, just like the students, and a tabard, with a wolf family crest on it. He also had black greying hair, with no balding, and had a beer belly. His teacher's assistant was a fourth-year named Gaelin Kittaptonen.

After lunch they had biology. The instructor was overweight, had a large gray fluffy beard, and his grey hair was balding. He had his teacher's assistant, which was John Monk, hand out their syllabi, which his name was written on as, "Pete Candlepasser." For the second part of class they did lab safety interactives on their computers while Candlepasser smiled with a contented look at his screen.

On Thursday they had their last new classes. First was wilderness survival with an instructor named Ewwei Shrubwalker. Aliberto could tell the class didn't have much material to it as Shrubwalker made jokes often to make the lecture last longer.

After that was communications protocol. All students had to pass communications protocol to graduate. It taught different protocols that chivalric orders might use. The instructor circled her name, "Huntress Nutters" on the board multiple times to stress how important it was to get it right. She required them to take notes on exactly what she wanted them to. "No more, no less" as she said. For the second half of class she graded their notes as they read from their protocol handbooks. Everyone got bad grades. Even Katherine had lost points for writing something down in the margins which wasn't required. She argued, it was stifling her education because she wanted to research more about what she had

written after class. Soweapia got the worst score of them all. He glanced at his score once, then put his notebook away without complaining. Aliberto suspected he was used to getting scores like that and was content with getting the same score all year. A second-year named, Johann Bandstrayer, had failed the class the previous year, even though Aliberto was sure he was smart enough, and was in it again with them. He and Dominis became instant friends. They found it incredibly funny to murmur, "Butternutter" behind Nutters back.

After class Strike said, "She is overly particular."

To this they all agreed.

Throughout the week Aliberto and Morheiss hadn't spent time together at all. It became apparent to Aliberto that Morheiss's new best friend was the always loyal Olsittam. Aliberto instead started spending time with Soweapia for free time spent on homework and Sophie for free time spent on sports. On Friday, the nine new knights had their electives seminar. The options were medicine, engineering, forensic science, and cyber-warfare. Victor, to nobody's surprise, chose engineering. Soweapia wanted to do cyber-warfare, but his mother convinced him on the phone engineering would be the easiest. Aliberto chose engineering to be with Soweapia and because the instructor who spoke for it at the seminar seemed decently tolerable. Olsittam also chose engineering, although he wasn't thrilled by any of them. Strike chose forensic science because he liked trying to solve puzzles. Katherine chose cyber-warfare as she was concerned about prostitute trafficking on the dark web. Savanna chose

cyber-warfare because it seemed to be the most practical for a modern knight. Dominis chose it because he liked the instructor, who was a handsome stern looking man with spiky gray hair and tiny black-tinted glasses who looked like a government operative. Rosa was the only one to choose medicine.

Before electives began, they had to find jobs. Sophie interviewed with the council to be the Department Head of the Entertainment and Recreation Department. She met in private with Princess Odeta after getting the job. Odeta, regretting afterwards, said to her, "You got the job because the council thinks you are a younger and thus an easier student to manipulate than the older more qualified candidate."

Odeta then got very nervous looking and made Sophie pinky-promise not to repeat what she had said. Being Sophie's friend helped Aliberto, as he got a job in her department. Savanna and Strike, after not being hired elsewhere, got jobs as janitors. Strike occasionally complained about the amount of work it was to clean the pool, but he was happy to have a job. Savanna said, "I am just happy to be a part of things."

Katherine, to nobody's surprise, got a job as the school's charity fundraiser. Soweapia landed a job as jet maintainer; Aliberto secretly thought the department head didn't screen him enough and should have picked Savanna instead. Dominis shortly after joined Soweapia in that department. Victor was very happy after he got a job in the engineer shop, to which Aliberto was sure that department head was feeling

annoyed by a flood of ideas from Victor. Rosa got a job as a nurse in the medical ward, a requirement for the first-years in that ward. Olsittam got a job as Mr. Butterman's teacher's assistant, for which Aliberto was thankful it wasn't him. Morheiss was chosen by the council to be temporary First-Year Baron before they would elect their permanent one in early December. According to Jupiter he managed to get the position through agreeing to side with the council on everything. Regardless of how he got the job, Morheiss walked with an extra jaunt after getting the title next to his name. Each department got a teacher as an adviser. For the Entertainment and Recreation Department this was Candlepasser, someone whom Aliberto felt perfectly happy with spending more time. He felt pity for whichever department head had Nutters, which he later found out was the Nantucket.

Aliberto had his first engineering class the next week. The instructor's name was Fredrick Eiwampski. He had crazy gray hair which grew from his face backwards like he had driven too long on a motorcycle and never combed his hair back. He was easy enough to understand in lectures. After their first lecture, he instructed, "Go to the shop."

None of the students moved. He then asked, "Why aren't you moving?"

To which the class stood up and began gathering their things to go to the shop. In the shop, he would give clear and concise instructions once and then ask why nobody listened. This, admittedly, made the class

begin to listen.

Soon August turned into September and Aliberto was spending all his free time with Sophie and or Soweapia and not Morheiss.



10



## The Merchant Knight

Hamdam was once an island full of farms and wilderness. Then a merchant named Mercatoritt came along. He invented a new system to finance businesses. This was joint stocks exchange. It allowed a great many people to invest in a company, thus allowing the company to progress. Hamdam quickly became the banking center of Updraftia. Mercatoritt came to live in luxury, but some saw him as self-serving and greedy.

Mercatoritt was fifty-four years old. He was large and rotund, yet handsome. He had short clumpy brown hair and hazel eyes. He was in his office figuring how to cut overhead when an employee of his entered. The employee reported, "The lot we acquired when Garth Forge failed is twenty-five acres and filled completely with armored vehicles. We are going to make a killing selling them to a wizard in Reme or Ocean City."

The young employee started jumping around with excitement at the idea of getting a multi-million-dollar bonus for being in charge of the project. Mercatoritt replied, "Stay under control. We haven't sold them yet. On your way out try and contain your excitement in front of our clients. Acting like a rich jerk isn't good for business."

The employee left and Mercatoritt went back to his spending reports. Soon a young boy, about eight, entered the office. He was Robin the janitor. He had fiery orange hair and pale skin with freckles. He asked his boss, "See, today is my birthday. I was wondering if I could steal away a little to go home with my family for a short while."

Mercatoritt leaned on the back two legs of his chair. He said, "Success requires hard and top-notch work. You are a cute boy but to be successful you need to be tough."

Robin explained, "I see. It's just that my mum is making carrot cake and she does the frosting right. She uses real butter, not that low-calorie stuff everyone is using now."

Mercatoritt agreed, "You may go. So long as you bring me back two slices of cake."

Robin merrily skipped out of the office. Mercatoritt went back to the report, remembering accurately where he had left off.

That afternoon his secretary came into the office. She said, "A monk sent by Nomalis wants to see you."

Mercatoritt sighed, "This means trouble, doesn't it? Send him in."

The secretary left and came back with a man dressed in monk attire. The monk began, "I was sent by Nomalis. I have heard on excellent authority you have inherited a large cache of armored vehicles. My wizard, Nomalis, is interested in buying them from you for one-million posseshavs."

Mercatoritt said, "That is ounces on the posseshavs, what a wizard and Reme or Ocean City would easily spend."

The monk argued, "Yes, but they are not a charity. We are."

Mercatoritt argued back, "I think you are more like an empire than a charity."

The monk replied, "Your company promised to build a certain number of houses for the poor this year. The year is almost over, and you are not on schedule to build that number of houses. You are a hypocrite, you need to redeem yourself."

Mercatoritt argued, "Redeem myself for not building houses for the poor by selling war vehicles ounces on the posseshavs to the White Empire? Your definition of redeem is far different than mine."

The monk argued, "If you donate to us, then Nomalis will advertise on social media that you donated more than anyone in history."



Mercatoritt insisted, "I run a business. I'm not here to make friends. I am here to progress Updraftia."

The monk turned around and left the office in anger. Robin walked into the office. He had been waiting on the monk to leave before entering. He placed a paper plate with two pieces of carrot cake on Mercatoritt's desk. Mercatoritt happily ate his cake.



11



## *Crown of Fajia*

Once upon a time... King Sylpho the Treacherous ruled over the Green kingdom. He hated making rules for his subjects. One of his subjects, the gravedigger, became tired of digging, so he started dumping the bodies in the town's well. Everyone in the town started getting sick from the infected water. One day a wizard, Janava the Honorable, came along. He saw what was happening and advised Sylpho to make it illegal to dump bodies in the well. Sylpho didn't want to make

any rules, it was against his beliefs, and told Janava he wouldn't. Then he sent his wizard Culten the Rebel, after Janava. Janava led a revolution against the king and a new King, Fletcher the Ruler, was coronated after the defeat of Sylpho and Culten. Fletcher made dumping bodies in the well illegal and dug a new well. Soon after the kingdom became healthy again.

Liam opened the door to the dimly lit relic room. Soweapia followed him in. Liam said, "This is where I come to avoid going to the gym." The room was covered with shelves of various relics, enchanted objects, and the like. They laid down on the floor after closing the door behind them. Soweapia took out his phone, which had a cracked screen, and engaged in it. Liam took out a plastic dish of glazed apple slices and began eating from it with a plastic fork. They soon heard motion from behind them. The door began to swing open. Liam quickly shoved the plastic dish into the gaps in his armor. He accidentally hit a shelf, which rattled. Glass marbles fell from the shelf. They hit the cobblestone floor and shattered. Out from them emerged tall skinny people with pointed ears. Liam exclaimed, "Not good, not good."

Soweapia asked, "What?"

The door swung open to reveal Totus and Lugobi Pops. Totus exclaimed, "Chaos elves!"

He quickly waved his gander and one of the relics on a shelf came flying to him. It was a crown with a medium gray crystal on it. He took it and started running away as fast as possible before he could explain.

Liam started running toward the door, Soweapia following him. When they arrived at the door instead of exiting through it, they reemerged into the other side of the room of the room they had left. Liam said, "OK maybe that was a fluke."

He tried again but the same thing happened. Lugobi started running down the hallway, or at least tried to. No matter how fast he ran he stayed locked in place, as if he were on a treadmill. He said, "While I enjoy getting my running exercise this is not good."

Savanna was in the tranquility courtyard when Totus ran up to her. He showed her the crown and said, "Only the crown of Fajia can control chaos elves. Quick, put this on."

She put on the crown and asked, "What are chaos elves?"

Salembourgh was at the picnic table with Savanna and said, "Chaos elves are magical creatures who cause chaos with the operations of things. They must be free if Totus brought that to you."

Totus said, "Yes, they are free. Most of the chaos elves obey whomever is wearing the crown. You must give wise orders, so we can trap them again."

Savanna asked, "Why do I have to be the one to wear it?"

Totus explained, "It only works on people of a certain degree, I know you have the potential to be one of those people."

She said, "I can do this better if you advise me."

Totus nodded yes. Savanna ordered, "Nobody can leave the island without my permission."

The gray diamond strobed white two times. Totus said, "Chaos elves can be trapped by drawing a circle in the sand around them."

Savanna looked worried and said, "Then we need to round them up to the coliseum. There is a football game going on now, if we go to the sports field, we should be able to find enough knights to help us do that."

Her and Salembourgh stood up. They ran to the sports field.

Katherine was there protesting with a big sign that said, "Change Concussion Rules Now." A third year named Bartholomew Dungus Marauder strode over to her. He said, "Hey, I'll sign your petition if you dance for me."

Katherine roared, "Not going to happen, numbsuckle!"

Soon there were thunderous noises from the bleachers. They looked up to see one of the student's skin had turned lime green. The game stopped as everyone looked panicked. Salembourgh cast a spell with her wand to amplify her voice and announced, "Chaos elves have been set free. We need to draw circles in sand around them to contain them."

Many elves ran onto the field. Everywhere people's bodies were changing into all sorts of things, animals, plants, fabric. Savanna ordered, "All elves go to the coliseum."

They didn't obey. She asked, "Why didn't that work?"

Totus explained, "How do you define an elf? There is no definite definition."

Savanna ordered, "Everyone with pointy ears, go to the coliseum." Some of the elves obeyed. Others transmuted their ears into elephant

ears. One of the elves turned Bartholomew's head into a head-sized sausage. Salembourgh ordered with her amplified voice, "Knights, use your alphysics to force them into the coliseum. Everything will go back to normal if we trap them."

The knights began to fight back using a barrage of alphysics. Soon the elves were forced off the field. The students continued to force them closer to the coliseum, except Bartholomew. Strike asked, "Bartholomew, aren't you coming?"

He yelled back, with his sausage head, "No way, one of the elves was eyeing me funny, I just know I am going to get eaten."

Katherine ordered, "Just come on."

Savanna had an idea, she yelled, "All, go to the coliseum and then don't move!"

Gregory Pouncer squealed from the crowd, "Dictator."

The elves started walking to the coliseum. The knights followed them. The elves were standing as still as they could physically. The knights drew circles around the still elves. They shrank and became encased in crystals. Most of what had been changed went back to normal, but the bridge tower was still a baguette. Savanna stated, "I don't understand."

Totus replied, "Remember how I said, 'Most chaos elves obey the crown of Fajia'? Not all do. There is one chaos elf, called Skurk, who doesn't. In order to gain the ability to disobey, he had to add a stipulation to his power; there is always a flipside. The flipside is, his magic grows

more powerful when people disobey the wearer of the crown of Faji and but grows less powerful when people obey the wearer of the crown. Once he loses all his magic, he is easy to trap. You must give wise orders and they must be carried out in order to stop Skurk."

Students were gathered around the three of them, listening intently. One of them, a fifth-year named Lenivy Peasants, asked, "What do you order, you one with the crown?"

Savanna ordered, "All student knights, search the island until we find him, or I say otherwise."

The students left the coliseum and began searching the island. After an hour it had gotten dark. Soweapia said to Savanna, "He is good at hiding."

Savanna grimly said, "He doesn't have to follow orders. He might have left the castle without us realizing."

A second year named Paul Tachpachiwi nervously asked, "You mean that criminal is loose on Updraftia?"

Katherine said, "Let's go look for him."

Savanna said, "Professors Salembourgh and Totus, if you see fit, see if you can use a finding spell to locate him."

Salembourgh agreed, "I will, but the spell will take a few hours."

Katherine argued, "We don't have a few hours. We need to go looking now."

Strike argued, "No, with his magic he could have turned himself into a fighter jet or something really fast; if so, he is long gone. If we know

where he is before we start looking, we will fare better against him."

Savanna ordered, "All student knights, do as you see fit. I suggest rest. Nothing wrong with a good night of sleep behind us when we face him."

Strike said, "I suggest listening to music or watching tonight's Skillball game on TV."

Bartholomew snapped, "Listening to music is a terrible idea when that thing is loose."

A six-foot-seven-inch third-year, named Andrew Wunita, said, "I once played organ for the Ocean City Orchestra, when the organist came down with food poisoning. Tonight can be music night in the Dining Hall, I will play for all of you."

Many students went to the dining hall and danced as Andrew played an allegro piece. Sophie danced happily to the music. Bartholomew was complaining to Savanna and Strike about just sitting around listening to music while the world was in peril. Katherine joined the argument on Bartholomew's side, saying that responsibility was a knightly virtue. Soon Savanna and Strike managed to shake them. Katherine said, "Savanna ordered us to do as we saw fit. We see it fit to find him. If we disobey her, we make Skurk more powerful."

The two of them left the dining hall and went to the hanger. They both boarded a HAWK, or one pilot, one passenger fighter jet. Bartholomew was a pilot. They flew from the island unnoticed, except for Gregory, who was in the gatehouse.



Half an hour later John Monk was in the Knights' Gallery meditating and avoiding watching Sophie dance, in fear it would seduce him. He also had his ears plugged with wax so he wouldn't hear the lively music. He came to the same conclusion as Katherine and Bartholomew that not doing as he saw fit would make Skurk more powerful. He left the island on another HAWK, not realizing that the other party had already left. Savanna soon realized Katherine and Bartholomew were no longer pestering her about needing to go searching. She tried calling them on her walkie-talkie, but they wouldn't answer. Odetta soon approached her and reported that Gregory told her that two HAWKs had left. Totus said, "We can't have people leaving the castle whenever they feel like it."

Savanna realized where she went wrong. She got on the microphone and ordered, "Everyone who is currently on this island, don't leave the island without my permission and do as you see fit as long as that includes staying on the island."

She then announced, "I am looking for a volunteer to find them and tell them to come back."

Paul quivered, "Not me, I hate long flights in the dark, what if I get into an accident."

Sophie volunteered, "I can use the GPS on the fighter they took to locate them on my broom. I love nighttime rides."

Savanna said, "I give Sophie Beauty-Totaltruth permission to leave the island."

Sophie left the great hall. In her place Salembrough emerged from

the hallway. She had a map in her hand. She unrolled it on one of the tables. It was a map of an island called Windfall. Circled on it was a mountain peak called King's Bluff. Salembourgh pointed to the circled part and said, "This is where Skurk is."

A fourth-year commander named Roberta Bellum roared, "I can lead a mission to take care of him. He's a criminal, he needs to be stopped."

Savanna said, "I agree, I give your mission team permission to leave the island. Who were you thinking of bringing?"

Roberta said, "You need to be there Savanna, as well as Totus and Professor Salembourgh. Andrew Wunita is a skilled fighter, he should also be there. The Red Knight should also go, he is the most powerful. Any other volunteers for the mission?"

Gregory announced, "I'll go."

Soweapia also agreed, "I will also go. Fighting is fun."

Lugobi smiled and rhetorically asked, "I will also go, the more evil in the world we defeat the better, right?"

Lenivy Peasants also volunteered by asking, "Why should he get to break the rules when we must follow them?"

Savanna ordered, "All students of this academy who are staying behind: if Sophie, Katherine, Bartholomew, and John return before we get back, tell them to report to King's Bluff on Windfall Island."

They all ran to the hanger and boarded a COW. Aliberto asked, "How are we to find this island?"

Totus replied "GPS."

Lugobi commented, "I didn't learn how to read a map, only to use GPS. This makes me feel so spoiled."

Totus said, "Not a moment to lose, it will work out fine, we just need to get going."

Andrew took to the pilot's seat. The COW left the hanger as fast as possible and jettisoned toward Windfall Island. The GPS worked as it should, and they arrived at Windfall Island at sunrise. Lugobi was used to getting up to start every day at this hour, so watching the sunrise helped wake him up. A chaos elf was standing on the mountain turning trees into giant fireman poles. The COW landed, and the crew hurried out. Savanna ordered, "Totus, if you see fit, transmute the ground into sand."

Totus tapped the ground with his gander and the dirt floor of the forest turned into sand. Amazed, Savanna said, "Wait a minute. I can just give orders you don't mind following in order to weaken Skurk."

Savanna ordered, "Gregory, clap your hands."

Gregory clapped his two hands together. Many of the fireman poles turned back into trees. Soweapia ordered, "Quick, draw a circle, he is weak."

Totus said, "Weaker, yes, weak no. Err on the side of caution. We need to keep weakening him before we get closer."

Just then Skurk transmuted himself into a wizard. He murmured, "Unessisaro Bull Ineffecto."

Savanna ordered, "Soweapia. clap your hands."

Soweapia did as instructed. None of the trees changed. Soweapia commented, "I don't understand."

Salembourgh said, "Skurk has changed the rules of his magic. Unnecessary orders no longer weaken him."

Totus said, "You cannot be a good leader if you rely on unnecessary orders to keep the illusion of obedient followers."

Savanna ordered, "Andrew, distract Skurk. Soweapia, make a circle in the sand for us to force him into. All other knights on this mission, sneak up on Skurk from behind."

Andrew drew his mace and started charging at Skurk. Skurk, now an elf again, picked up a rock. He transmuted it into a lance and started charging toward Andrew. Right before being punctured by the lance, Andrew did a front flip over Skurk and landed behind him. Skurk turned around but was then tackled by the other knights. Skurk transmuted himself into smoke and flowed between the arms of the knights. When he did this many of the fireman poles turned back into trees; his magic was running out. Savanna didn't know how to fight smoke, which could just elude their grasps.

Soon a HAWK came swooping down from the sky. Next to it was Sophie on her broom. Savanna's walkie-talkie buzzed. She heard Katherine's voice say, "We are here. What do you want us to do?"

Soweapia asked, "Where is John?"

Savanna lamented, "Of course, they must have left separately."

Savanna then ordered, "Katherine, Bartholomew, use your HAWK

to blow the smoke on top of the circle.”

The HAWK swooped down. It turned around and pointed its jet engines at the smoke. The smoke blasted toward the circle that Soweapia had drawn. It was about to go into the circle, but with a flash turned into a stone wall. Skurk’s magic was up, he flashed back into an elf and fell into the circle. He, like the other chaos elves, became entrapped in a small crystal ball. The broom and HAWK landed. Katherine and Bartholomew got out of the HAWK. Soweapia asked, “How did you know we were here?”

Katherine replied, “The order Savanna gave to the other students. They told us where to find you.”

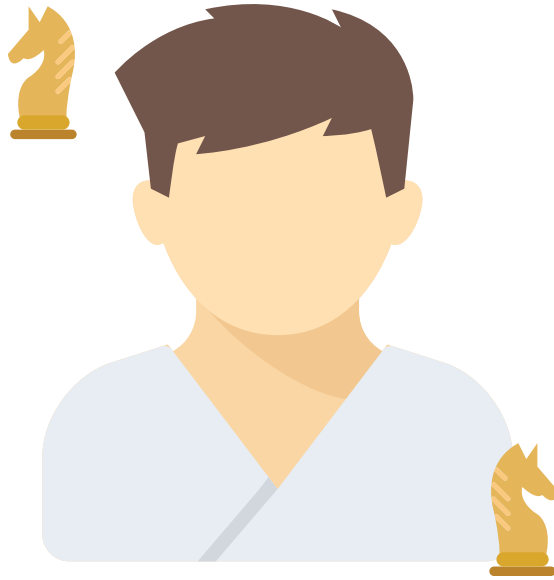
Totus asked, “What did you learn from this leader?”

Savanna took off the Crown of Fajia and handed it to Totus. She said, “Elves not being well defined taught me orders need to be well defined and clear or else those who follow them won’t obey. Me making the rule for my subjects to do what they saw fit and then some of them leaving the castle taught me, that before making rules, the situation needs to be researched. The spell Skurk cast taught me, rules should not be used as an artificial measure of one’s success. Lastly, I learned rules must be obeyed, as that is the only way to weaken those who don’t follow them.”

Gregory spat, “Dictator.”

Soweapia asked, “I wonder where John is?”

Totus replied, “Who knows.”



12



## Athlete Knights

Katherine was on the microphone in the dining hall during breakfast fundraising. Her causes were food for the Brown Kingdom and funds to help rape victims with legal costs. She was doing a successful job as the school's charity fundraiser. Most students had given money multiple times to at least one cause. Strike thought it was only because of how attractive she was, though. He had given a few Posseshavs to last week's cause of homeless shelters. She soon grudgingly put down the

microphone when Lugobi approached her on the stage. Lugobi picked it up and began, "A few announcements. Our pegasi arrived yesterday. This year we will have our first skillball team in ten years. Team tryouts will be held Saturday morning at nine on the skillball field."

Katherine rolled her eyes. She thought it was a waste of time and money. Lugobi continued with the other announcements while the students payed little attention and discussed only skillball.

Saturday morning came and after breakfast many students gathered at the skillball field. Andrew Wunita was the captain, as he had experience with pegasi. Many of the candidates struggled with the pegasi. Once on their backs, they could hardly control the winged-horses. Andrew had to chase down some of the candidates a few times. The only candidates to control their pegasi with success were Strike, Sophie, and a third-year named Audell Herrow. Andrew decided which winged-horse was best fitted for each player. He decided to keep Frosting, who was the snow-white steed with teal legs, for himself, as they had known each other for a while and he had good control over him. He gave Strike and Sophie, who were both tall for their age of twelve, the two colts. Strike's was jet black, had teal eyes and was named Antar. Sophie's was hazel with speckled brown spots on its back and named Arlo. Andrew assigned Audell to a brilliantly white mare named Claire. The three new players spent the afternoon bonding with their pegasi, as this was important for controlling them in a game.

September rolled into October as they trained. The leaves began to

turn from lime-green to yellow, orange, and red. It became cooler and early morning practices meant they could see their breath. They were getting better. Strike often complained about not being passed the ball often enough though, which was true, he was the team's least valuable player. Andrew was the team's most valuable player as he rarely missed hitting the ball with his bat and he had great accuracy with it. Behind him in value was Audell. Audell lived and breathed the game. He had two TVs and his laptop in his dorm room, so he could watch three games simultaneously. He couldn't decide which team's logo to wear each morning, so he made a shirt with multiple teams' patches sewed on. He also ordered stickers of his favorite teams to put in bathroom stalls. Most students and teachers found his obsession over it annoying, even those who liked the sport, like Andrew. Sophie had natural talent, practiced diligently, and was dedicated to perfecting her drills. Then one October day they would have their first game. It was an away game at another Knight's Academy called Garth. Garth didn't have a field, so the game would be held on a minor league field on Garth Island. The team had to pick a name as the Sons and Daughters of Witches Knights Academy didn't have a mascot. At the meeting to decide it Sophie suggested, "The Professionals."

Audell suggested, "The Very Speeding Lions."

Strike suggested "the Red Knights" as their school was the one that had the Red Knight attending. Andrew suggested, "the Hansons," after his favorite battle in the war of the divided wizards' council, which was



a war he knew more about than most experts of the topic. At last they decided to go with Sophie's idea, after Totus appeared at the meeting and showed interest in the name.

The team boarded a COW with their four pegasi and left for Garth Island. They gathered in the dugout before the game and nervously gave their pegasi water. None of them had ever played in a game of this scale before. Even Andrew was nervous, despite being as talented as professionals. At last the announcer began, "Today the Garth Gardeners are facing the Sons and Daughters of Witches Professionals. Playing for the Professionals are Andrew Wunita and his steed, Frosting."

Andrew shot out the visitor's dugout on Frosting. The announcer continued, "Sophie Beauty-Totaltruth on her colt, Arlo."

Sophie shot out of the dugout into the airspace above the field. The announcer then said, "Audell Herrow on his mare, Claire."

Audell merrily pranced onto the field riding Claire. The announcer finished their team with announcing, "Strike Pupils on his colt, Antar."

Strike solemnly entered the field. The announcer then announced, "Playing for the Gardeners are Fosco Hades on his steed, Monster."

A boy rode out on a giant black steed that could best be described as evil looking. The announcer then announced, "Rosina Soto on her pony, Daisy."

A small girl rode out with much difficulty on a tiny tan pony that looked like it belonged in a trick competition and not a skillball one. The announcer then said, "Quinton Nutters on her pegasi, They."

A person rode out who was somewhere in the middle of the gender spectrum on a dazzling brown mare. The announcer finished when he announced, "Barrack Kingwine of his colt, Windstriker."

Both teams lined up in the middle facing each other, they were flapping their wings to stay midair. Soon the starting bell rang. On one side of the middle of the field was a giant sling shot. Three teenagers pulled it back and let go. A leather ball shot out. It flew toward the middle of the field. At each end of the field were large goalposts that resembled bubble wands, with how they extended from the ground with tiny scoring holes at the top. The ball raced to the center of the field. Andrew and Fosco scrambled toward it. Andrew hit the ball with his bat and directed it toward Sophie. Sophie scrambled to advance the ball. When the ball arrived to her she tried to advance it to Strike, figuring he wouldn't get much playing time. Strike swung and missed. The ball went past him and fell to the ground, this meant it was out of play. A ball boy dashed out onto the grass on a bicycle and collected the ball with a grabber on a pole while the three teenagers loaded another ball into the sling shot. The players reset. Skillball got its name because it required more than just hitting the ball; players had to aim the ball at their team members and goals. The balls, once hit, also moved very fast. The game would not be possible without pegasi. They were the only way to arrive at the ball's destination before it and have enough time to get ready to hit it. Even with pegasi it required great skill.

This ball also raced to the center of the field. Andrew and Fosco

once again raced toward where it went. The ball would go to different places due to small changes in how the three launchers released it. This requires the starters to be ready to react to where the ball ends up before the other team's starter gets to it. Andrew once again beat the less talented Fosco to the ball. He sent it to Sophie once again. She was the more skilled of the Professionals two advancers. This time she was open to send it directly to Audell, who was the team threader. Audell got ready to score. Once the ball arrived he heroically sent it into the goalpost. Starters were usually the players with the best reaction times and threaders were the ones with the best aim. Advancers had to be fast because they would have to race across the field to be blockers if the opposing team's starter got the ball. Audell stood on Claire and did his happy dance. He realized he had lost his footing and was about to fall off. He let himself fall back into the saddle to prevent this. The teams reset as the ball boy collected the ball that went through the goalpost while the launchers reset. Strike ordered, "Andrew, please pass the ball to me. I want to play."

Andrew said, "That would be unwise. Sophie is more talented. If she is open, I would rather pass to her."

Sophie argued back, "Come on, let him play, even if he is bad." The argument ended when the launch bell sounded. The launchers released the ball and again Andrew beat Fosco to the ball. Andrew slammed it to Sophie. She tried to advance it to Strike but Quinton shot toward Strike and blocked him from getting the ball. She advanced it to

Rosina. Rosina missed the ball. Strike wondered how she ended up on the team, she seemed out of her league. The ball boy collected the ball and the launchers reset. They were back to the first ball the ball boy had collected. The players got ready for the launch. Andrew kept his habit going of beating Fosco to the ball and then advancing it to Sophie. Sophie was getting better about not advancing it to Strike unless he would remain open, but Strike was getting more argumentative about never getting the ball from Andrew. At half-point the Professionals led five to zero. Half point was not half-time as the game was played for a hundred launches, not for a set amount of time, which would be difficult with all the stop and go in the lightning fast game. They were at fifty launches and gathered in the dugout getting their horses to drink. Strike was arguing with Andrew saying that he should pass the ball to him. Audell was cheering loudly, flailing his arms and throwing open electrolyte drink bottles into the air. He seemed like a kid on a sugar rush that they were winning. Soon they heard a new voice over the announcement speakers. It said, "This is Monk Nomalis. It is Sunday, the sacred day. You should be at the Knights' Gallery and not a stadium. Right now, people in the brown kingdom are facing starvation and being raped while you sit back in your plush chairs, eating unhealthy comfort food, and drinking overly-sweetened drinks, while watching other people work-out. The Knights Academy sports league has gone on long enough, enough is enough. Sports have no purpose in society. Everyone here is going to be purified by me."

They heard commotion outside. They ran outside and their pegasi followed. Outside the Gardeners were fleeing into the sky on their pegasi. Audell said, "Giving up before your statistics get even more damaged. That's cheating."

They looked at the stadium seating. Crowd members were being handcuffed by knights in suits of armor. Many were trying to escape but the exits were blocked by more knights. Sophie said, "Sports make Updraftia a better place, not worse. Skillball has been part of Updraftia's culture since pegasi were first tamed; it connects us to the past. Athletes entertain and inspire people through dark times. He can't convert all these people just because they have found little enjoyment in dark times. These people should be considered humans before sinners. That man is evil."

The four Professionals agreed to use alphysics and magic on their pegasi to help as many spectators escape as possible. Sophie grabbed her gander from the dugout. Andrew grabbed his mace. Audell grabbed his saber, as he was a light alphysicist. Strike grabbed his longsword. They mounted their pegasi and shot into the sky toward the stadium seating. They flew over to where knights with swords were blocking the largest exit. Sophie used a spell to make the exit larger so more could get through at a time. Audell pointed his saber at the midday sun. A purple light gathered on the blade of his saber. He then slashed it toward the knights. They began panicking as Audell had moved sunlight into their eyes. The crowd pushed the blinded knights aside and began fleeing the

stadium. Other Unyielding Warriors who were handcuffing the crowd soon took the place of the blinded knights. One Unyielding Warrior, a light knight, used his saber to gather the sunlight Audell had sent to their eyes. He slashed the purple aura toward Strike. Audell raced in front of Strike on Claire and caught the purple light with his blade. He would not have been able to do that without his skillball training. Audell sent the light back to the knight who had sent it. They were busy sending the same energy back and forth in a duel. The Professionals realized that, because they had longswords, the Unyielding Warriors were motion knights. Luckily there wasn't a large amount of motion around them to be redirected. Unyielding Warriors rolled in a clapper, which was a big device that used a gasoline piston firing to create motion. The operator turned it on. Strike stuck out his longsword toward it. The large ball of steel attached to the piston fired. The ball stopped as yellow light dashed from it into Strike's sword. His sword glowed with the many newtons of energy stored in it. He slashed at the piston instead of the ball. The yellow light shot toward the piston. The piston bent into a tangled mess as gasoline began to leach from it over the electronic controls. The clapper was soon in flames, Strike had cut off the source of energy for the Unyielding Warriors. Andrew, despite having many talents, wasn't very skilled at alphysics. He was draining the Unyielding Warriors potential energy, enough to make them faint, one at a time. He was running out of vessels in which to put the potential energy. He would collect enough calories from a knight, so the knight couldn't move, then fly down to the

grass and give the grass the energy. The grass was growing ten feet tall in the places to where he moved the calories. At last many people were out of the stadium, they had either been captured or managed to escape through the opening the Professionals made. The Professionals flew out of the stadium to where trucks were being loaded with handcuffed spectators. The trucks saw them. One of them that was full began to pull away. Strike ordered, "Forget the one that is leaving, focus on the other six."

Sophie added, "Good for more people outweighs good for less people."

Another truck, completely loaded with people, began to pull away. Strike pointed his sword at the front bumper. The truck froze in place despite the driver giving the vehicle gas. As he did this, the yellow light on Strike's sword grew. It was eventually too much for him to hold. The sword began to vibrate as it was beginning to leak motion. Strike used all his muscle power to slide the sword away from pointing at the front bumper. The truck began to move forward at last. Strike swung his sword at the back axle of the truck. The shipping container on the back of the truck, which the prisoners were in, fell to the ground with the axle of the truck split. Strike still had some newtons left in his sword. He sliced it at another truck's engine. The engine block shot from the front of the truck onto the ground. Strike was out of energy in his sword. None of the other trucks dared to move in fear Strike would collect the energy. Soon armored military vehicles began to roll in. The crowd looked panicked.

Strike shouted to them, "Those vehicles have the Garth flag on them."

Strike was right. Knights emerged from the armored vehicles. Each vehicle had about twelve knights. In a well-practice sequence, these knights, with flails, moved the mass of their vehicles to the trucks. The trucks' suspensions began to bend with the additional mass that had moved to them. Eventually the wheels popped off. The remaining Unyielding Warriors were captured. After all the spectators were freed, a man in a wizard's hat approached the Professionals. He had bronzed skin and glossy black hair. He said, "I am the Wizard Olympus. Many of the people you saved told my knights about your heroism in saving them from being converted. Thank you, young athletes. You are what athleticism is about, pushing boundaries, outdoing what is thought possible, encouraging others to push their limits, both physically and morally."

TV trucks soon arrived. The Professionals had to fly away on their pegisi to their COW to avoid the attention.





13



## *The Magic of Knowledge*

Aliberto was in bed dreaming about his mother's homemade macaroni and cheese when he heard the buzzing of his walkie-talkie. He groaned and sat up in bed. Victor had also been woken up and was searching for the light switch next to his own bed. He flipped it and Aliberto grabbed his walkie-talkie. He pressed the talk button and said, "Hello, Alex Pentdragon here."

The voice on the other end belonged to Totus. Totus said, "Hi, this is

Totus. Meet me in the hallway as soon as possible."

Aliberto put on his armor over his cotton sleeping shirt and basketball shorts. He slid on his shoes and entered the common room. Soweapia was the only one there. He was sleeping on a couch like he was most nights now because his dormitory was too close to the shower to get a good night of sleep. Aliberto moved past him and entered the first floor hallway of the dormitories. Totus was there, as well as Audell. Audell was carrying a box of electrolyte sports drink. Totus said, "This is very important. Come with me."

Totus led them to his office, which was on the top floor of the academic ward. Salembourgh was also in his office. Aliberto thought they were more than just coworkers with how they were always around each other. Totus sat down at his desk and said, "Alex, this is Audell Herrow, Audell this is Alex Pentdragon, the Red Knight."

Audell put down the box. There were only two chairs opposite the desk, so he sat on top of the box. Salembourgh sat down on one of the remaining chairs followed by Aliberto. Salembourgh explained, "Alex, There was a wizard named Fedora the Knowledgeable. He was a very knowing wizard, but his magic wasn't very powerful. He knew more about magic than any person to ever live. His ghost sometimes gives visions of the most powerful spells that only he knows to living people. Audell had one of these visions earlier tonight in his sleep. He came to Totus, who, after hearing the vision, believes the spell is to destroy the Flipside."

Aliberto asked, "I don't understand. Isn't there always a flipside?"

Totus said, "Yes, there is always a flipside. The magic the spell involves uses the forbidden power of Deteaching. It destroys knowledge of the flipside to all except the caster of the spell."

Aliberto asked, "So this magic is bad?"

Totus explained, "My witch and wizard students know power has two sets to it. Magic is power that solves problems when used, like knowledge of the Flipside. Forbidden Powers are powers that create problems when used, like Deteaching spells."

Aliberto asked, "This is dangerous, how?"

Totus asked, "Imagine you didn't know about the Law of Conservation of Energy, how would you perform alphysics differently?"

Aliberto thought about it and said, "I wouldn't be able to understand where energy comes from and I wouldn't be able to use it without just getting lucky."

Totus added, "Think about in politics, if people couldn't see flaws in the logic of their beliefs. If only one person knows about the flipside, that wizard would become too powerful to be stopped. Everything has a flipside, except the Forbidden Powers, they have no flipside."

Salembourgh said, "Now the only people alive who know this spell are Audell and Totus. If Audell were to be captured by a wizard and given truth telling potion then Updraftia would become rather unenjoyable to live in. This is where you come in."

Salembourgh reached into her pants pocket. She pulled out two

rings. One had a yin shaped diamond on it and the other a yang shaped diamond. She explained, "Alex, you are to be Audell's body guard. These are partnership rings. If you tap the diamond three times with a fingernail it lights a path to the complementary ring. Alex, Audell, you are to wear these at all times, during skillball games, even in the shower. If the emergency alarm goes off find each other. The council knows to not give you two orders during an emergency, though they don't know why. Naturally, this is to stay top secret. If word got out about the spell, it would just make Audell a bigger target. If a student wizard were to interrogate Audell, the emergency alarm wouldn't sound, therefore the only protection for this is secrecy."

Totus said, "Sometimes it is best to keep things a secret."

Aliberto asked, "Why me?"

Totus nodded his head and stated, "I trust you."

Aliberto then asked, "What about the sports drink?"

Audell said, "Nothing this was just my ruse to escape to Totus."

Salembourgh said, "You are free to go."

Aliberto went back to the first floor of the dormitory ward, now wearing the yin ring. When he opened the door Sophie and Soweapia were there, both awake. Soweapia asked, "Victor told us Totus wanted you urgently, what was it about?"

Aliberto said, "We need to talk in private."

Sophie responded, "Victor already left, he wanted to get to work early in the engineering shop."

The three of them went to Aliberto's and Victor's room, Victor was gone like Sophie had said. Soweapia and Aliberto sat on Aliberto's bed. Sophie sat on Victor's bed. Aliberto explained everything that had happened that night, short of the macaroni and cheese. Sophie asked, "Why did you tell us? You know I am a wizard."

Aliberto said, "Totus is up to something. I need help figuring out his plan."

Sophie exclaimed, "He is my uncle, I trust him!" then asked, "If he knows the spell, why would he have you do all this?"

Aliberto explained, "I don't think he knows it yet. I think he thinks Audell will learn the spell and then tell it to him."

Sophie asked, "Then why did he ask you to be Audell's body guard?" Aliberto explained, "I think he is panicking so close to getting so much power, in fear it will fall apart. He told me he trusts me, so I would trust him."

Sophie stated, "You are being ridiculous."

Aliberto begged, "Please Sophie, don't tell him about this conversation."

Sophie sighed, "Fine."

The next evening Aliberto was studying in the tranquility courtyard when Totus walked up to him. They greeted each other, and then he ordered, "Come with me to my office immediately."

Aliberto felt so angry. He trusted Sophie, and she betrayed him. He quickly packed up his books and was fuming as he stormed through the

halls to Totus's office. Inside, Totus sat down at the desk and kicked his feet up onto it. He said, "Sophie told me you told her about that actual business of our meeting."

Aliberto's hands were clenched. He couldn't recall ever feeling more betrayed. Totus insisted, "I am sincere when I say you should trust me." Aliberto didn't know what to say. He didn't want to trust Totus but he didn't want to say that either. Totus said, "You must have a lot of confidence in Sophie, she is a wizard you know, and wizards are not meant to be trusted, especially by knights."

Aliberto chuckled slightly on the inside. He couldn't escape the irony. Totus asked, "Why do you trust her so much?"

Aliberto realized he no longer trusted her. He had liked her because she was pretty, but that was all just a wizard's spell over him, a knight. Now she could be on her way to learning a Forbidden Power. Totus said, "Remember, I told you it is sometimes best to keep things a secret." Totus then said, "You are free to go."

Aliberto stormed from the office. He found Sophie at her desk in the Entertainment and Recreation Office. Andrew was there discussing online fantasy skillball, to which he was the regional leader. Aliberto yelled at her, "You told him, didn't you!?!"

She raised her hands, ready to brace his anger. Aliberto slapped her across the face. He realized he shouldn't have done that to a girl. He couldn't bare to look at the pink mark on her cheek. He kicked over a wastepaper basket and screamed as he walked over to the door to the

to the office. He was fuming once again as he moved back to his dormitory. Students were sliding out of his path in the hallway, looking scared. Victor was at his desk with his laptop open, looking at a schematic for some project in their dormitory. Another school engineer, Neesoph Peteless, Mr. Peteless's nephew, was sitting on Victor's bed going over the design with him. He glanced nervously at Aliberto. Aliberto went to his bed to discover it was covered in many schematics and spreadsheets. Neesoph nervously stated, "I'll move these. We are almost done, aren't we Victor?"

As Neesoph packed up the papers, Victor replied, "No, we still need to decide if we are going to use screws or nails for the outer sheath."

Neesoph apprehensively said, "I just remembered, I left my calculator at the shop. I need to go get it."

Neesoph picked up his bag and left the room. Victor yelled after him, "Hey, where are you going?"

Victor seemed slightly happy that Aliberto was the one upset and not him for once. Victor closed his laptop and followed Neesoph out of the room with it. Aliberto laid down on his bed. The whole situation was terrible. Everything felt so depressing, like tiny teeth gnawing at him. The light seemed to be sucked from the room, despite it being sunny outside the window. It was as if the light of the universe was no more. Aliberto was sure he never wanted to leave the room. Soweapia entered the room half an hour later. He said, "I heard you slapped Sophie, the whole school is talking about it. Andrew is telling everyone who asks. He

is smart, but he has the social skills of a rock. I can go get dinner for you if you want."

Aliberto thought, "missing dinner would just make other students ask more questions." Aliberto was sure he wanted to leave the room. Aliberto insisted, "No, I'll go."

Soweapia stated, "No, its fine."

To this Aliberto jumped up. He hurried with Soweapia into the hallway before Soweapia had the chance to take ownership of the idea of him getting dinner for him. Nobody sat with Aliberto and Soweapia as they ate. Soon Katherine came from the kitchen with her lunch tray. She sat next to Aliberto and said, "I heard you hit my cousin."

Aliberto didn't speak. She said, "Physical abuse resolves nothing."

Aliberto asked, "Where is Sophie?"

Katherine asked, "Why, do you want to hit her again? Boys can't control their bodies."

Aliberto heard a voice from behind him. It said, "I'm right here." He turned around. Sophie was there with her lunch tray. No mark was visible but that didn't sooth Aliberto, if anything it only made it worse. Katherine asked, "Are you sure you want to be around him? We could get you a restraining order."

Sophie snarled, "Buzz off, I can take care of myself."

Katherine insisted, "No, I am going to stay, witnesses are good." Sophie rolled her eyes and sat down opposite Aliberto. She said, "I hope you learned something from all of this."



Aliberto mumbled, "I'm sorry. That I hit you."

Sophie replied, "I accept your apology."

Aliberto was sincerely wondering if he was a good person. He asked, "Sophie, do you think I am a good person?"

Sophie replied, "The people who answer that for you, should be those who know you best, not strangers."

Aliberto felt somewhat happy with her answer.

As October crept into November Aliberto began to feel happy again. But a new development kept him from moving past the incident entirely. Bryce Buttermann, the son of the martial arts teacher, Mr. Buttermann, began a chant when they would see each other that went, "Aliberto the Red Knight, it is his favorite color, he brands girls that color."

His posse would join in and laugh along. Red wasn't even Aliberto's favorite color, but he thought this wouldn't make a worthy rebuttal. Despite this upsetting him, Sophie didn't spend less time with him and Katherine eventually stopped hovering around them when they were together, despite still disapproving of their friendship. Aliberto was happy to have Sophie still as a friend, but he was happier she forgave him. Then one November morning Aliberto looked out the window next to his bed to see all the leaves were gone from the maple trees. It was so foggy that none of the windows that normally looked over the sky on the island had any view other than solid white.

One night Aliberto was playing poker with Dominis, Johan, and Strike in the first-year common room. Olsittam said playing poker was

sinful despite them not betting anything. Soweapia was sitting next to them, although not playing himself, as he was struggling to complete an assignment. He was stuck on a question about what unit of measurement went with light alphysics. Aliberto partnership ring lit up while he was looking at his cards. Sophie was at the showers, so he only had Soweapia to help him. He pointed to the ring and said, "Soweapia."

Amazed, Soweapia said, "Wow, it glows."

Aliberto blurted out, "It's not the glowing, Audell must have triggered his ring."

Soweapia and Aliberto shot up. They grabbed their weapons and ran into the hallway. The ring was emitting a soft red line. It curved around the bends in the hallway. They ran as fast as they could, following the line, and came to a hallway in the training ward to where Audell was lying on the ground. Professor Nutters was kneeling on the ground next to him. Audell was screaming, "There is a hole in my head! Please, somebody help! Get a surgeon, get the helicopter, find a firetruck!"

Nutters scolded, "Stop having such a short fuse, your hair is missing, nothing worse."

Audell said, "Yeah, but it really hurts not to have hair there. I feel like a sixty-year-old-man."

Aliberto asked, "What happened?"

Nutters said, "Audell was being attacked by an invisible opponent until I came along and drove off the mugger."

Aliberto asked, "Who was it?"

Nutters replied, "I don't know, they escaped before I could reveal them."

Nutters then said, "Come on Audell, let's take you to Professor Salembourgh."

The four went to Salembourgh's office. Audell was talking about leaking brain juice onto the floor. Soweapia had his arms crossed and was angrily saying that if Audell was leaking brain juice he would not need to convince them of it. Salembourgh dismissed Nutters and Soweapia and called Totus from the adjacent office. Audell explained everything, now realizing that all that had happened was he lost hair. Aliberto added, "We have no idea who did it. It must be a wizard, they are the only ones who would have a use for the spell Audell knows."

Salembourgh said, "There are only six wizard students."

Totus added, "While, I don't believe this was the work of Sophie, I want to mention she is the only wizard that I know to know of our secret."

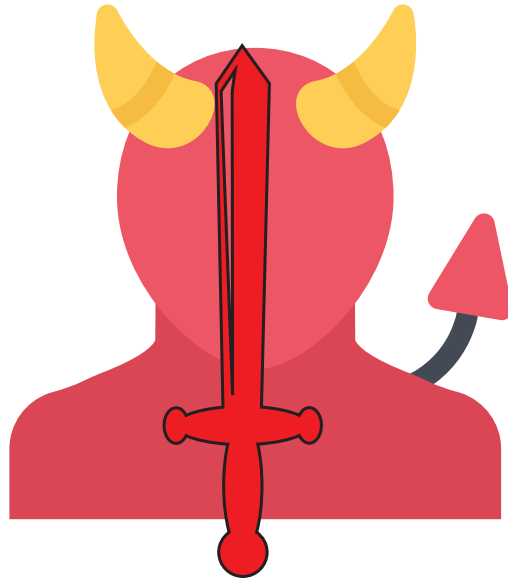
Aliberto felt terrible, if he hadn't told Sophie she wouldn't have possible accusations against her. Salembourgh agreed, "I don't think it is Sophie either. Aliberto, from now on either Totus or I will be Audell's body guard 24/7, please hand over your partnership ring."

Aliberto did as instructed. He trusted them to protect Audell, but he didn't like not knowing about any developments in the situation.

Salembourgh then said, "Alex, you are free to go."

Aliberto left the office. On the way back to his dormitory he passed

a bathroom and heard a flush. He didn't think much, but inside was Audell's hair flushing down the toilet.



14



## *Deepgood*

Nomalis was deep in meditation in his candle-lit cell. He was trying for the forty-eighth time to meditate into the underworld. He had a spell book out on ancient necromancy. Despite his best effort he couldn't get in, until now. He spent hours meditating and finally he got through to the underworld. His spirit entered the lava filled scenscape. Demons slowly started approaching from all sides. They were red skinned people with pointy tails and horns coming out of their heads. Their mouths were

watering and they looked hungry. Nomalis stated, "Please, I can help you."

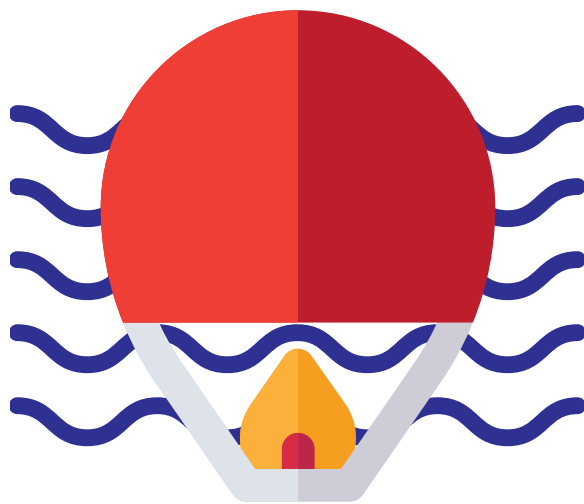
One demon asked, "You are a monk, why do you want to help us demons? There are laws about Forbidden Powers"

Nomalis replied, "Those laws are for stupid mortals who come from foreign lands. My father is the Great Wizard in the sky, the laws of wizardry don't frighten me."

Another demon asked, "But doesn't that make you sinful to partner with us?"

Nomalis replied, "My last name is Deepgood. It doesn't matter if I break the rules, I will always have a deep good."

The head demon smiled and asked, "What are you thinking?"



15



## *Festival of Mercy*

William Pentdragon was sitting in an armchair watching TV. His back was to Alden Pentdragon, who was reading a magazine and merrily humming the to the harpsichord on the radio. The house felt so empty without children for the first time in sixteen years. As it was Saturday, they were both enjoying a drink. A few minutes later Mrs. Pentdragon looked at the clock, then closed her magazine and turned off the radio. She went upstairs to shower before she would get ready to go to a

friend's house for a Festival of Mercy party. With both of their children now at the academy, they could spend more time enjoying themselves. She did miss Aliya and Aliberto though. She looked at a picture on her dresser of the four family members that was taken last summer. She looked first at Aliberto, then Aliya, sadly. She then moved on to the shower. Meanwhile, Mr. Pentdragon had a broad and sincere smile like a proud grandparent. Most of the time before he was angry and closed off from his kids, now he missed them greatly and was beginning to warm up to being more patient with them. The sports announcer for the Festival Skillball Bowl said, "What a beautiful day here on Reme for the Festival of Mercy, we couldn't ask for a better day for today's Festival Bowl."

Mr. Pentdragon heard the doorbell chime behind him. He stood up and turned off the TV, since it was about time to depart. He walked to the door with a content swagger. He opened it to reveal a knight in a suit of armor. The knight had the Unyielding Warrior crest on his tabard. William gasped. The knight said, "I am Templar, sent by Nomalis to capture the Red Knight. Where is he?"

William spat, "Now listen here, you can't just come to my home and expect me to give up my only son."

William tried to punch the Templar. Templar blocked William's punch with the cuff of his armor. He then pushed William with great force. William fell to the ground. Templar and his six squires entered the house. They heard footsteps charging down the stairs. Alden emerged



from the doorway in a tan bathrobe and was clutching a skillball bat. She ran over to William, who was trying to stand back up. She swung the bat at Templar's helmet. The wooden bat shattered into dozens of splinters when it hit the helmet. Templar shouted, "Arrest them!"

The six squires surrounded the Pentdragons. They grappled and then handcuffed them. They then forced them to the ground on their knees. Templar stated, "I am a good knight, I want to show you mercy. Tell me where the Red Knight is and I won't kill you, just take you hostage."

Alden growled, "You monster, we will never tell."

Templar spat, "You are gluttonous and selfish people who cannot be tolerated. I spend every minute of my life trying to become a more selfless person. If I find him, I get my soul back and will become the White Knight."

William stated, "I know we are gluttonous but please, take us hostage, don't kill us. You are a knight, show us mercy, it is the Day of Mercy, right?"

Templar angrily spat, "I know no mercy."