

Miranda Ten Broeke

Age: 17
Occupation: Student at SUNY Ulster,
Co-Director of Bootleg Adventures

More than just Child's Play

If you happened to see an evil witch, a dashing knight, or a fairy godmother strolling through High Falls this past weekend, you don't have to worry for your sanity. They were characters in an amazing fantasy game, run by local teenagers from our area. Miranda Ten Broeke, a 17-year-old student at SUNY Ulster in Stone Ridge, and Eliza Reynolds, a 15-year-old high school student from Accord, are the current directors of Bootleg Adventures, a group that has been running one-day Adventure Games at Camp Epworth in High Falls. The girls are aided and abetted by group of friends from Accord and Stone Ridge, as well as from other parts of Ulster and Dutchess Counties. We caught up with Miranda Ten Broeke, who spoke with us for the group.

Q: You and the other kids who run Bootleg Adventures are Staff in Training at the Wayfinder Experience. What is Wayfinder?

A: The Wayfinder Experience is a camp. It has all the camp-ish elements — sports, arts, crafts, outdoors, fun workshops, and (of course) community. But the thing that really separates Wayfinder from other camps is the Adventure Game.

Q: What is an Adventure Game?

A: Remember when you used to play dress-up in your backyard with your best friends? Remember how much fun you had? That's what this is. A bunch of good friends, of all different ages, who allow themselves to drop their guard and just play. I mean, there's usually some sort of mythological background. And there's always a moral, a villain who must be defeated, great battles, comedy, tragedy, and heroic quests. We're not all just running around aimlessly, with no structure. Someone writes backgrounds and characters and quest lines. The cool thing about Adventure Game is the idea of being another person in another world with a problem you have to face and overcome.

Q: Why is becoming another character so enjoyable?

A: I've played a curious alchemist, a jealous sister, a tiny annoying fairy, a brave warrior, a monster with an axe, a queen, a stealthy rogue, a southern belle, an old wise shaman, a horrible orphanage warden, a cowgirl, a flamenco dancer and an elf from the Elven Mafia. With every one of those roles, I've learned something about myself. I've cried and lost family members. I've died. I've been evil and I've been the epitome of good. I've been the most powerful and the least powerful. I've been very wise, and even once or twice said profound things that I couldn't have said as myself. I've been in love, and I've been in war. I've gotten to experience things that I'd never experience normally. And the whole time I've played these other characters, I've felt totally safe. When we call "Game" at the end of the Adventure, I'm back to myself, only I've learned more about who I am.

Q: Could you tell me a little bit about the game you just ran at Camp Epworth?

A: This last game was based on Fairy Tales by the Brothers Grimm. It was very fun and very funny. Putting Puss n' Boots, the Fairy Godmother, Hansel & Gretel, Cinderella, Snow White, Dashing Prince Charmings, Big Bad Wolves, Chivalrous Huntsmen, and other Grimm characters into a "palace" together can have an amusing outcome. We had dragons, bad fairies and the Grimm Brothers themselves, running around, fighting, being awakened by True Love's First Kiss. Ah, it was great!

Q: Explain what happens during a typical day at Bootleg Adventures.

A: A lot of the day is spent leading up to the Adventure Game—creating your character, getting costumes, learn-



(L-R) Eliza Reynolds and Miranda (Moo) Ten Broeke—Co-directors of Bootleg Adventures.

ing swordplay and all that. Then there are the workshops. We teach improvisational theatre. There are team and community building workshops. And capture the flag, with swords. That is always amazing. And then there is the Adventure Game. It's an action-packed day and every minute is wonderful.

Q: You mentioned the swords. How do you simulate battle in your games?

A: We have play-safe, foam swords. And we have sword duels and battles. 'How to use a Sword' is one of the workshops we teach. Again, it's all in how much you're willing to play and use your imagination. It might sound weird, but it's very fun to die a dramatic death because you were stabbed with a sword by your archenemy!

Q: What do kids get out of Adventure Gaming?

A: I guess I'll have to ask a question to answer the question: Why is it that only small children are allowed to play games? As you grow older, play becomes something forbidden. You must stop playing and focus on what's important. But playing is important. In Adventure Games, I've learned to deal with very difficult situations, overcome my fears, and understand the importance of using my imagination. Not many camps would just say "Hey, you! Come play with us. We'll accept you no matter who you are. All you've got to have is an imagination." No, scratch that last part. You can always rebuild that old imagination of yours, that you may have lost somewhere in your life.

The next Bootleg Adventures game is tentatively scheduled for April 15th at Camp Epworth, but the date has not yet been confirmed. Check for updates, and for information about Wayfinder's summer camps, at www.wayfinderexperience.com. Bootleg Adventures is free for first-timers and \$35 for veterans of the Wayfinder Experience. But for every newcomer a veteran player brings to the game, he or she gets a \$5 discount.

—Compiled by Elaine Lee

