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The age of chivalry reigns again

Victoria Brown, 7, is a participant in the youth boffer competition.

By Brenda Rees, PencilNews correspondent

LOS ANGELES – Looking to be a knight in shining armor? Harboring a secret desire to be an elegant damsel in a flowing dress? Searching for a good sword fight?

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HAVE WE got a place for you.

Every weekend across the country, knights, squires, assorted royalty and peasantry feast, fight and make merry at perhaps a public place near you.

These weekly tournaments, or “tournies,” are where skilled artisans display their handiwork, singers and dancers perform, and costumed fighters use swords, shields and rapiers in a competitive battlefield setting. Calling all Errol Flynn and Braveheart wannabes.

“It’s a big picnic in the park where we bring our families, put on our play clothes and see our friends,” says Sara DeLeeuw, a “chatelaine,” or official greeter for newcomers for the Society for Creative Anachronism (SCA) Southern California chapter.

Youth boffers fight in a competition in the Kingdom of Caid.



Brenda Rees / PencilNews

Dedicated to recapture the ambiance of the time period from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance, the SCA is filled with history buffs and people who seriously embrace the

spirit of nobility with a hearty dose of fun.

“There is a lot of Monty Python-esque jokes that get flung around here, especially on the battlefield,” says DeLeeuw, who adds that the SCA tends to focus on the “fun parts of the era like the feasts and costumes, but leave out the plagues, lice and beheadings.”

Unlike local Renaissance fairs – which are for-profit events catering to onlookers in jeans and sneakers – the SCA “tournies” are meant to be faithful recreations of medieval events where skilled fighters battle for honor under the watchful eye of the king, queen and their court. Just like Civil and Revolutionary War buffs who reenact historical battles, SCA members bring to life a chivalrous era, full of color and pageantry.

The SCA is an international group that's been around since 1966, with more than 24,000 paying members and an estimated 1 million other active participants. Here in the United States, the country is divided into geographical kingdoms, baronies and smaller designations. The kingdom of Caid, for example, stretches from Southern California to parts of Nevada.

Queen Luciana of Caid addresses the children at a recent tournament.



Brenda Rees / PencilNews

Followers get involved for many reasons – they can study and practice ancient crafts, sciences, sports and traditions. The group attracts a diverse crowd, including police officers, lawyers,

teachers, mechanics and even air traffic controllers.

And kids and teens get involved in all aspects of SCA.

For every adult workshop or event, there is usually a youth version. Some of the ongoing workshops for Caidian kids and teens are in heraldry, weaving and costume making.

And, of course, there is the popular youth boffer fighting that attracts both boys and girls who want to emulate what their parents do on the battlefield. Children as young as 3 have participated in the sport. Not every kingdom, however, offers youth boffer fighting.

“It’s a lot of fun,” says 9-year old Christopher Stoner, a regular youth boffer fighter in the kingdom of Caid. “I get to hit people and don’t get in trouble for it.”

But Christopher’s father, William, says that sport is not about aggression – it’s about humility, honor and duty. William coordinates the youth boffer fighting for Caid and stresses that safety is vital during competitions. “They’ve got helmets, elbow pads, neck protection, groin protection,” he says. “We constantly check the weapons to see if they are safe.”

In youth boffer fighting, when contestants are walloped in the leg, for instance, they must acknowledge the hit, “pretend” to lose the leg and then return to fighting – on their knees. A blow to the head, of course, means victory for your opponent.

Organized only a few years ago, the youth boffer tournaments in Caid are a reflection on the increased number of families that are SCA members. “Our first event had only 5 or 6 kids,” says William. “Our last big war had probably 125 kids competing.”

Teen-agers are also finding their place within the organization outside of the youth boffer arenas – classes or “collegiums” focus on crafts and activities geared toward their age group. Teens chat on a SCA Web site about their projects, exchange ideas and make friends.

Many families say they are proud of the lessons that SCA is teaching their kids. “The emphasis here is on how we treat one another, the dignity and honor we can bestow on those around us,” says Bobbi Scoville, current queen of Caid. “And plus we have a lot of fun doing it.”

To learn more about the Society for Creative Anachronism, check out their national Web site www.sca.org.

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