

Andrew Miller

Professor Wood

English 1301

February 2, 2013

### Chasing a Dream

The first time I saw a dream catcher I thought nothing of it; bad dreams go in, good dreams come out. It was just some old Indian myth, but now, the dream catcher means something completely different to me. Back when I was a freshman in high school, I joined a Live Action Role-Playing society, or LARP, called Amtgard. Amtgard is a game that incorporates the medieval genre with the fantasy genre: wizards, knights in shining armor, dragons, trolls, and pretty much anything else one can think of in the fantasy and medieval genre. We would all dress up in medieval style clothing, called garb, and don our weapons and shields, and go out to the grassy fields and just, pretty much, beat up each other with them. The weapons were made of PVC pipe wrapped up in foam padding and duct tape, so that we would not hurt each other with them.

Inside this LARP society there are multiple groups: Claw Legion, Saracens, Corsairs, and Golden Lions, just to name a few. I was part of the Saracens. The Saracens themselves, being classified as nomads, were divided, even further, into tribes. The tribe I belong to is called Tribe of the Dream, and our symbol is the dream catcher, which is given to full members who pass initiation.

Our dream catcher was built differently from normal dream catchers. The outer ring and webbing were the same, but beads were mixed into the webbing with one's personal

colors along with the red and black colors of the Saracens. Instead of feathers hanging down from the bottom of the ring there were bells. The dream catcher represented the ideas of the tribe. The circle of the dream catcher symbolized love and how it is never ending. The nylon webs represented family and how they connect one's life to another. The beads are one's personal flair that he or she brings to that family, and the Saracen's colors connect individuals to the whole. The bells stand for honor; the honor to be upfront and not sneak around behind anyone's back. One cannot sneak if he or she is jingling with every step. This was the foundation of ideas that Tribe of the Dream followed.

In Amtgard we would, periodically, take camping trips called Events. An Event lasted two to five days, and people from all over the United States would come. I remember the first Event I went to with the tribe. We arrived at the camp site in the middle of a hot, humid day. Summer was on the verge of ending, and autumn was upon us, though it seemed summer was not leaving without a fight. I recall walking around looking for a suitable campsite, the smell of pine rushing to my nose, and the fresh air, free of pollution, filling my lungs. I could hear the sound of pine needles crunching beneath my feet with every step I took. I paused for a moment to take in the scenery and the smells surrounding me; I mean it was my first time camping after all. Just then, the silence was broken as I heard the soft jingling of bells from a dream catcher coming up behind me as Brian, the tribe leader, trotted up. "This is a great spot for us!" Brian proclaimed, thrusting his hands out as though to present some great discovery. "Help me with the tents, lackey!" he said, patting me on the back. *Lackey* was the name of the position given to someone still in the initiation phase for tribe membership. The tents were military GP tents, huge, green, and terribly heavy—I hated those tents. When I think back to

our camp setup I see how it resembled a dream catcher. A large pavilion tent was placed over the center of our encampment. This is where we would gather to hang out with family in the middle just like the webbing was in the middle of the dream catcher. Three GP tents and a smaller, but just as heavy, command tent along the sides of the pavilion formed the outer ring that held the webbing in place. The inside flaps of the GPs facing the pavilion were rolled up and tied off; under the GPs were our individual tents set up for our sleeping area.

After three hours in the grueling heat and humidity, our camp was finally set up and evening was quickly approaching. The evening was pretty mundane. As I sat staring into the campfire, watching the embers rise out of the flames only to fall back down in ash, I started to ponder my relationship to those who shared the campfire with me. Amtgard was just a game, yet the people sitting around the campfire with me were not just other gamers, they were something more. I just did not know what they were at that time. The rest of the evening was filled with laughing, story-telling, talking, and drinking until the wee hours of the morning. I had finally decided to call it a night. As I made my way to my tent for some much needed rest, I still searched for the answer to my question. Who were these people to me?

The next morning came and the women of the tribe were already up cooking breakfast by the time I woke up; honestly, I do not know if it was the smell of food or their incessant laughing that woke me, but I was up. The rest of the morning was filled with small skirmishes, tournaments, bardics, story-telling, and catching up with old friends until the big war.

The big war was the main event of the whole trip; it was the reason to go. The tribe had decided to do something grand to stand out. We all dressed up in pink camouflage. The women of the tribe had spent countless hours making the clothes for all of us just for this one

glorious day. The women wore pink camouflage bikini tops and pants, which we called poofy pants. The pants were baggy and loose fitting. Elastic bands were sewn into the waist and ankles of the oversized pants similar to parachute pants. Pink camouflage poofy pants and tabards, basically a six-foot rectangle of fabric with a hole in the center for the head, were made for the men, except Wayne, who had a pink fur tabard because he played a barbarian in the game. Brian, Josh, James, John, Wayne, Chris, and Justin put on their belts, all of which had their dream catchers hanging from them, and as a unified force we all walked to the field of battle. At this point I had not yet earned my dream catcher. I remember the cheers, laughs, and whistling we got as we all walked into view of the battlefield and to our team's side. We waited for the start of the battle.

When the referee yelled, "Lay on!" which signified the start of the battle, I remember the roaring sound of feet racing across the field, as though a wild herd of horses was thundering through our battlefield. The two sides charged each other, yet over the roar of the crowd and the stomping of the feet, I could distinctly hear the jingling of bells coming from the dream catchers on my tribe members' belts as they rampaged through the crowd, leaving a wake of destruction wherever they passed. We worked as a team; pushing the line of battle back over and over again, and, eventually, winning the battle overall for our team. The rest of the night was lost to eating and many alcoholic beverages, but every campsite that night recalled the story of "Pink Chaos!" That is what they had named us.

Eventually, the event came to a close. After a weekend of fighting, drinking, and getting little to no sleep, we had to break down the campsite and pack up and go home. Tension was high and everyone was annoyed easily, mainly due to a lack of sleep. Arguments and bickering

could be heard all around. It was then that I thought to myself, “Good god, this is like a holiday with my family.” It was at this point when I realized the answer I was looking for at the campfire—this was my family. I remember overhearing Brian once say that “family is who you choose.” I knew at that time, without a doubt, these people would be with me until the end of days, regardless of if I wanted them there or not, and it made me smile. After breaking down our camp we decided to meet up at a local restaurant and have one last meal together before we all drove our separate ways home until the next event. Unfortunately, that event never came. That was the last event Tribe of the Dream ever went to.

Here I am twelve years later. I never actually got my dream catcher, but I realize now that I do not need a dream catcher to know that I am a part of this family. I know what it stands for, and I still stand by the ideas I learned from that event so many years ago. Every time I see a dream catcher now it reminds me of the time in my life when I realized who my family was, and also of the events that led me to that discovery. Family is who I choose, and I choose them.