

Chivalry Not Dead in Chapel Hill

by Brendan Smith
Staff Writer

Remember those medieval days when knights and nobles engaged in swordfighting, feasting and general merrymaking? A little before you, time, perhaps? Well, not to fear, this tradition has been rekindled and lives on at Chapel Hill and in other chap-

ters of the Society for Creative Anachronism (SCA), an international non-profit organization whose goal is to educate people about the life and culture of the Middle Ages. Along with other medieval activities, the Society for Creative Anachronism sponsors tournaments where armored warriors meet on the field of battle and "lay on."

The chapter of the SCA in Chapel Hill is known as Kapellenberg, German for "Town of the Chapel." The chapter is made up of more than 50 members, about 10 to 15 of whom are UNC students, according to Sonja Dolgorukij, the seneschal for Kapellenberg. In medieval times, a seneschal was a steward who managed his lord's estate. Although Dolgorukij is not responsible for any castle, she said that she is responsible for leading SCA meetings and is "the link between real life and SCA life." Kapellenberg is part of the kingdom known as Atlanta which includes North Carolina, South Carolina,

Virginia, Washington, D.C. and part of Maryland. Atlanta is ruled by one king who is chosen by "right of arms." Any warrior wishing to be king must defeat all challengers on the field of battle in order to be crowned king. There are more frequent than these special tournaments are tournaments where warriors and knights fight each other for prizes, practice and fun.

A tourney is a double elimination tournament composed of matches between armored warriors fighting with sword and shield, two swords or pole arm. All armor must pass SCA regulations which include the requirement that all participants wear helmets with face guards. It would be unchivalrous to poke somebody's eye out. "Obviously you can't buy your armor from K-Mart," stated Dolgorukij. Some suits of armor are homemade from pieces of thick leather, while more traditional metal suits are forged by armorers in the SCA. Most weapons are made of rattan, a type of non-splintering wood which is wrapped with duct tape for safety. Sean Gulick, a warrior known as "Gideon" in SCA circles, said that "the absolute worst injury" he had heard of in a match was a broken bone.

Warriors begin a match by saluting the crown of Atlanta. No one seems to know exactly where the crown is, but most warriors just bow and wave their swords in the audience's direction. A referee called the marshal then tells the warriors to "lay on." Now all hell breaks loose as the two warriors attempt to shish kebab each other.

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The Society for Creative Anachronism features... photo by Brendan Smith of the Phoenix

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Warriors begin a match by saluting the crown of Atlantia. No one seems to know exactly where the crown is, but most warriors just bow and wave their swords in the audience's direction. A referee called the marshal then tells the warriors to "lay on." Now all hell breaks loose as the two warriors attempt to shish kebab each other. Blows are called either light (glancing blows that wouldn't penetrate armor) or good (blows that would theoretically pierce armor and cause severe bodily damage if real swords were used). Good blows are hazards to a warrior's health and may result in his or her "death." Good blows to either an arm or a leg cause the loss of that member, while a blow to the head or torso causes "death." Ever heard of a knight without any arms or legs? It happens in some matches highly reminiscent of the Black Knight scene in Monty Python's "Quest for the Holy Grail." In a tourney on Oct. 15 in front of the Forest Theater, Gideon received good blows to his legs and right arm, forcing him to fight on his knees with his left hand while holding his right hand behind his back. Needless to say, he received the coup de grace shortly thereafter.

"I had a guy cut off both of my legs and both of my arms," said Dolgorukij. The only thing she could do to her opponent was make derogatory remarks about his moth-



The Society for Creative Anachronism features tournaments between members to determine who will be king. photo by Brendan Smith/The Phoenix

er's footwear, but she chose not to since that would be unchivalrous.

A match ends when one knight receives a death blow to the head or torso or is forced to concede (e.g. after loss of arms and legs). The winner of a tourney sometimes receives a prize which may be a goblet, some rich fabric or some other appropriate medieval gift. A tourney is often followed by a feast—a good excuse for a party—where medieval food is served in courses called removes.

After viewing a tourney for the first time, freshmen Mike Semonsky and Vance Huskins had varying opinions about the fighting style. "It's an art form. I really admire them for trying to keep it alive, a part of history," said Semonsky.

Huskins was not as impressed. "It was kind of flamboyant... They kind of just hack at each other. It's easy to see how somebody might get hurt," he said. Both agreed, however, that

fighting was not the only thing interesting about the SCA. "It's so much more than just fighting. It's not superficial at all," said Semonsky. "Fighting is less than half of what you do," said Huskins. Besides other things, "you learn how to make bread," said Huskins.

The SCA is involved in "all aspects of medieval culture pre-1600s," stated Chandel Hesselgrave, a tourney organizer. And Dolgorukij said, "People look at it as if it's all fun and games, which it is, but everything we do has some historical basis." Weapons, fighting techniques and medieval names such as Kapellenberg are researched for authenticity. Some members also participate in cooking, weaving, and making costumes and armor. Dolgorukij said that some SCA members even grow their own herbs for cooking and raise their own sheep for weaving wool, but most in the society are just "weekend warriors."

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Letter Policy

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ANSWER TO TODAY'S PUZZLE

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