

## **On being a Cadet**

By Warder Mateo Montero De Madrid

*Written as Cadet to Warder Jock McKee*

A little under six years ago I was sitting at the UW stock pavilion next to a friend of mine who went by the name Chandler. His real name was Aaron, but as I would soon find out, folks in the Society he was introducing me to go by other names when playing. I was sitting watching the fencers do their fencing thing one evening among the din of rattan on steel.

Anyway, this tall bald fellow came up to me that night and said "Hey, you wanna learn to do this?"

I tentatively said "Sure!"

So then he brought me outside and had me advancing and retreating, taught me a couple parries, and an attack or two. I was totally hooked. But this Doctor, as he called himself, had something else in mind for me.

Later that night I'm back on the bench and he sits down next to me with a serious expression on his face. He asks "So, you want to be my lackey?"

Immediately, without hesitation, I exclaimed "Yeah! That'd be cool!"

He responded just as quickly with "No! Let me tell you about it before you jump in!" And tell me he did (at great length), about what he would expect from me as his lackey, and what I could expect in return. I still agreed to the job.

The reason I tell this tale is to illustrate something – the special link of service between student and teacher. This agreement happened long before the Bronze Ring was even a glimmer in the eyes of the community. Jock understood something - perhaps from his martial arts background, perhaps from his mundane past. He understood that a person learns best when there is obligation involved from both student and teacher.

For years I rose through Jock's "ranks". I spent a year as his lackey, hauling his gear and cleaning his blades, and in general being playfully hazed by him and his friends. This role allowed me to meet all sorts of people, it gave me a role in the society, and it also taught me some good things about hard work and dedication to the art. In exchange, Jock taught me how to use the rapier, and he taught me a lot about honor, chivalry, and service. He also taught me all sorts of things about the society and the game we play. Furthermore, we became very close friends.

Around this time, Jock's mundane life caused him to move to St. Paul, MN. I struck out on my own, learning from all sorts of people and doing some teaching of basics when the need arose in the Barony. This time was my tenure as a Lieutenant, and I still (and always will) considered myself Jock's student, no matter who I was learning from at the time. I was grateful to my other teachers, but my loyalty was always to Jock.

Why do I talk about all this? Well, I feel I have been Jock's "Cadet" since my first day in the society. Though at the time there was no such order as the Bronze Ring, We have had a unique student-teacher relationship throughout the years. And that to me is the core of being a Cadet, or Ward, or Student (with a capital "S").

My position as a Cadet means a great deal to me. It is a responsibility to my self, my Warder, and the other fencers I interact with. Being a Cadet means I need to be progressing in my skills along with passing what I know on to anyone who asks. It means I have a special relationship with Jock that is symbiotic. If I screw up, it affects him, and vice versa. If we do well, we can both be happy about it.

Being a Cadet, to me, is *\*not\** the next step in becoming a Warder. I look at it as just another added responsibility, a target for other Warder's Pokemon-style fantasies of pitting their little monsters against Jock's, and as a sign that I am to be watched even closer than before I bore the red scarf. It is not a stepping stone, just something else to wash on Sunday, and something more to think about when I am on and off the field.

The second you look at your red scarf as a path to promotion, you have defeated the purpose of dedication inherent in the job (that's just my opinion. Many a cadet disagrees with me). Dedicate yourself to the art, and to honor and service, and leave the awarding of shiny bits to the Crown.

Being a Cadet, to me, involves some very important things.

- 1) You are working with a teacher whom you admire for some reason, and who sees potential in you. In exchange for your dedication and trust, that teacher is showing you not only how to fight, but the other aspects of the society you may not have experience in. Learn from them. Listen to them. You are with them for a reason.
- 2) You are learning how to pass on what you have learned. Knowledge is useless unless it's passed on. Learn to teach what you can. It's a skill like any other.
- 3) There is *\*some\** kind of quasi-fealty involved. I know. I used the "F" word. Student-teacher loyalty is important. Jock encourages me to go out and learn from any

resource (living or dead) I can get my hands on. And I do so. But I am always Jock's Cadet.

4) You are representing your Warder/Don/Whatever on and off the field, all the time. Also, he/she represents you all the time. That symbiotic relationship is *\*very\** important in the SCA, where ethical slips can be the death of thee. Don't be an ass. If you are an ass, expect your Warder to kick it.

5) You are responsible for making sure that you do not make a fool of yourself, and that you don't let your Warder do the same. So, if your warder is into his cups, and is about to do something he will regret in the morning, it is your job to politely extract him from the situation. It happens to the best of us when uncle vodka rears his ugly head. Except for Jock - he can do no wrong, and I have never had to extract the man from anything. No, Really.

Also, God forbid, if your Warder's chivalry slips, if victory overcomes his more noble sensibilities, it is your duty to let him know that. You are to keep each other honest, because everyone is human, and it helps to have someone there you trust to call you on your BS, and who can trust you to do the same. Do not allow your own chivalry to slip because of some harebrained idea that you need to win tourneys in order to show prowess. Expect to be thrashed quite soundly or worse should you walk down that most slippery of paths.

6) It is your job to serve. Serve your warder, serve your barony, your principality, and your kingdom, and the rapier community in whatever way you can. It is your job to learn. It is your job to learn that the job of learning will never end, no matter how long you play this game.

7) It is your job to have fun keeping your Warder on their toes. Some places have a fine tradition of Cadets playing pranks on their Dons. I, for one, would encourage more of us Cadet and Cadet-Like folks to perpetuate that tradition here in the Midrealm. :)

I don't know if this answers any real question or not, but that's what this is all about to me. I love being a cadet to Jock, and I have loved it since my first day in the SCA, even before cadets "existed" here.

If you are not a cadet now, and wish to be so, do not go out of your way to pursue a Warder. Simply embody what it is you believe is best in a rapier combatant and likely one of them will find you.