

*Note: I wrote this article as a letter to the various email lists of the Middle Kingdom, in April of 2002.*

Unto all whom this message comes does Andrew Blackwood MacBaine the Purple, Rapier Champion to Ragnvaldr and Arabella II send greetings, and apologies for the duplicate postings.

In nine days, I will give up the tabard of the Middle Kingdom Rapier Champion. Road to the Isles was my last full event as Champion. As I prepare to step down, I thought I would gather my thoughts and write some things out. This will probably be a bit long, so if you're not interested, now is the time to hit that delete key! :)

Being Rapier Champion has been a dream of mine for years -- approximately seven years and ten months, actually. We have had very good Rapier Champions, good Rapier Champions and Rapier Champions whom I feel have missed opportunities to shine. Now, I'm not interested in naming names -- that's not nice, or appropriate. In addition, I'm not sure it's the Champion's fault in every case. But there HAS been variance. So when I set out to do this job, I wanted to be the Paragon of Rapier Champions -- to do absolutely everything that a Rapier Champion should and could do if that Champion had unlimited time, resources and energy. Since, actually, I had none of those, I of course failed miserably in my quest -- but I did the absolute best that I could.

One thing that we have never had is a reasonable description of what the Rapier Champion DOES. I don't expect my concepts here to be definitive, but I do have some thoughts in that direction -- and I will refer to my own experiences throughout this document. Other Rapier Champions will have had different experiences -- and if you seek the Tabard, I suggest you talk to more than one of us. Heck, I may have done so poorly that I might be a Champion to NOT talk to. And, of course, we must always remember that it really doesn't matter what's put down on electrons, because the Royalty will make their own decisions -- as they should.

Now, there are at least two ways of becoming Kingdom Rapier Champion -- win a Tournament, or be chosen by the King and Queen. If you are picked by the King and Queen to be Rapier Champion, hopefully They've already discussed with you what They will expect -- or at least They know you're willing to do the job (while Ragnvaldr and Arabella had not told me before They called me up in court, They knew that I would do it in a heartbeat)! But if They decide to "pick" via a Tournament, there are things that every fencer should know BEFORE they swear that oath.

If you're going to fight in the tourney, be prepared to win. Just like with Crown, don't fight to show off, don't fight to impress that Warder, don't fight because you were told to do it by subliminal messages in Covington Cross reruns. Fight only if you're prepared to fulfill the requirements of the position.

1) At a minimum, the Rapier Champion should go to at least one event a month. You obviously need to be at the event that you're made Champion at, and you should be prepared to go to the next Coronation, so that you can be dismissed as part of the staff. If it's a summer reign, you should be able to go to Pennsic. If it's a winter reign, you should be able to go to Gulf Wars or Estrella War. You should attempt to visit every region of the Kingdom to represent the Royalty on the field at least once (I missed Constellation, sorry, guys). Now, my event schedule was significantly higher: If you include the event I was made Champion at, I will have attended 13 events as Champion when Coronation happens (and two others, in September and October, as well). At least three of those events were added to the schedule AFTER I became Rapier Champion. Nine of these events happened in January, February and March. Basically, I went to every single event that TRM went to, except for two. PLEASE NOTE: Most royalty will NOT expect this level of commitment. I have gone to the events I have gone to because I WANTED TO, and wanted to set an example, not because it was expected. What I would like to see in prospective Champions is that desire -- to WANT to go to as many events as possible.

2) You are an official representative of Their Royal Majesties. You represent TRM in everything that you do in the SCA -- every email post, every thrust, every draw cut, every court you stand in, every person you talk to. You MUST CONSTANTLY keep this in mind. You are ALWAYS on duty. Any offhand comment that someone overhears and is insulted by -- or spreads -- can build into a firestorm that will come back squarely on YOU when the King calls you up and says "Hey, Rapier Champion, what is THIS about?" For example -- at Gulf Wars, I said I thought that a tournament was on Friday instead Saturday, but that I might be wrong. Three hours later, people were coming to me and asking me why the Tournament had been moved to Friday. This includes people from OTHER KINGDOMS. Now, I don't know if people have been able to tell or not, but my attitudes, especially on email lists, have changed SIGNIFICANTLY since I became Champion -- and it's been difficult. I almost NEVER send a long detailed post directly to a list anymore -- I write it, set it aside, edit it, maybe even ask people's opinions, and set it aside again, re-read it and THEN send it. This document has gone through several revisions. You need to be able to do this as well, if necessary.

3) You represent the Rapier Combatants of this Kingdom to TRM. Now, how effective a representative you are depends on more than one thing -- including what kind of relationship you have with TRM. If you're lucky, you'll be able to sit down

and come up with an agenda. I was that lucky. Some of the things I've brought up with HRM have worked, some haven't. (I'll leave it as an exercise to the reader to determine what that they were.) But I have enjoyed a rather higher level of access than the average fencer -- as Champion. This means that when the King asks you for an opinion about something Rapier related, you not only need to be able to clearly articulate what YOU think, you should also be able to present other opinions as well. YOU MUST BE FAIR. I happen to think that this Kingdom should allow blade-grabbing. However, if I was asked about it, I would say "In my opinion, these are the reasons why we should allow it. On the other hand, there are several MidRealm fencers who DO NOT think that we should have blade grabbing, and this is why." Access of the level that you get while holding this position can be dangerous. Use it wisely. I like to think that I have.

4) You're not only a Champion, you're a Retainer. That means (depending on which other retainers are present) that you may be asked to run messages, hold goblets, follow one or the other of TRM around, take care of discarded armor/weapons, etc. It can be like being a valet, it can be like being a servant, it can be like being a mom. If you're not prepared to do this at least once or twice, the job is not for you.

5) You're not only a Retainer, you're a packhorse. You'll be expected to help unload and load the Royal Vehicle. If you want to be Rapier Champion, take a look at how the Thrones are constructed -- chances are that you'll have to help put them together at least once.

6) You're not only a packhorse, you're a LEADER. Find what it is inside you that enables you to lead people. Everyone has the capacity, but not everyone can FIND that capacity within themselves. To be Champion, you need to be able to find it.

7) Accidents will happen. You WILL screw up. Hopefully it isn't something huge; apologize, and move on. TRM don't want people on their staff who are afraid of them. They want people who will talk to them, laugh with them, play with them, and work with them. Every reign is different, of course. I have not acted identically with the Royalty in the various reigns I've been involved in -- but I've definitely screwed up with each set at least once. Obviously, since my head is still attached to my shoulders, those accidents weren't major.

8) Know the Rules. Several times in the past six months, I've made errors in referring to the rules about various things. I'm simply not up to date, even though I'm sure you will all remember how hugely involved I was in the rules discussion. That's my fault - - and it's a stupid mistake, because I could have easily looked it up before I posted replies -- I maintained the MidRealm Rapier Website for years, for pete's sake! But, because I have a certain rule set in my head, I posted without really thinking about it -

- which also violated Section 3 above. So, when you're given that Tabard, download the rules, email the KRM to get updates, and READ THE RULES.

While what's written above is my opinion, they are fairly standard issues. Next I'm going to address a few things that are very definitely MY OPINION, and are SURE to be NOT SHARED by all. These are VERY PERSONAL CHOICES

1) Don't fight in tournaments. You're the Rapier Champion. You're there for others to measure themselves against you. You don't need to be in the business of knocking other people out of tournies, or winning them yourself. People KNOW you're a good fencer. Granted, I'm not the best fencer in the MidRealm -- but that's not why I was chosen. But I have won a few tournies. I didn't feel a need to do so during this reign. The only tournaments I have fought in as Rapier Champion were at Gulf Wars, where I represented my Kingdom upon the field. So, go to events and hold the field for thirty minutes, but marshal the tournament so that others can play. What's that, you say? You're the Rapier Champion and you're not a full marshal yet? What a perfect time to start.

2) Go to as many events as you possibly can. TRM went to two more events than I did. I feel very guilty for not going to those events.

3) Always be willing to set aside your time on the field for TRM. If the King wants to hold the field, and there's only 30- minutes of time, and He uses all of it, well, good. You were there, you served your King, He's happy, and it's important to keep the King and Queen happy about Rapier. Don't complain about not being able to fence. This is a once in a lifetime opportunity. You have nothing to complain about. In addition, if TRM need you for something else while the fencing is going on, be happy to have an opportunity to serve. At Clancy Day, the plan was that I'd authorize polearm in heavy, and then fence. But there were delays, Ragnvaldr needed me for a few things, and the auths didn't take place till after 3 pm. Since court was starting at 5-ish, it was more important that I get cleaned up for court than it was that I fence. I would have liked to do both -- but I have decades of fencing to look forward to. I'll likely be Champion only once. That's more important.

4) ALWAYS wear your Tabard. You're Champion for the duration of the event. Wear it everywhere. In addition to the Rapier Champion's Tabard, there is a newly renovated Rapier Champion's Baldric to wear when you're wearing clothes that don't go with the Tabard or are too hot (it's HOT).

5) Do other stuff. Don't just fence. Everyone knows this is a pretty hot topic for me. When you're the Kingdom Rapier Champion, you're the most visible fencer in the Kingdom. So make sure that you do SOMETHING else. I've fought Heavy, sung a

very few songs, taught a few classes, washed some dishes, displayed some banners, etc. You don't have to do what I did, but try to do SOMETHING. We all realize that there are exceptions. Don't get frantic about it if you have to leave early from an event. Just try to make up for it the next event. (And wear those favors that I made for you! I slaved... I mean, my wife slaved for HOURS to make those things!)

6) Step down and BE QUIET. When the reign is over, allow the new Rapier Champion to have the limelight. This is going to be pretty hard for me to do, myself, but I am definitely going to focus on other things for a while, including my family, which has been of great support to me, and whom I have been greatly absent from, to my great sorrow. When I start attending events again, you will rarely see me without my son at my side (and I already know that I'm going to Crown without them, that doesn't count).

7) Stay true to your commitments. That's an Oath of Fealty you take when you're kneeling up there, with your hands on Oathbinder. It doesn't mean you do EVERYTHING you're asked. But you should do everything possible, that is good and right and true.

So, who am I to write all this? Nobody, really. Someone who has gotten to fulfill a dream, and would like to see that dream continue. I don't think I'm off base here -- but if you do, please -- let me know.

I have enjoyed being Rapier Champion hugely. I owe much of that enjoyment to Their Majesties, Their staff, my wife and son, and the Fencers of the MidRealm. I can never repay you for the gifts that I have been given. I am truly thankful.

I am, as always, in service and in song,

[Andrew the Purple](#)

Warder, Company of the Bronze Ring

Die fechtenden Naehenfroesche

Minstrel, Fencer, Bearward and Player (and INSTIGATOR) (from the ACTE of 1598)

"Passion is my sword, Goodness is my armour, Humour is my shield." - Unknown epitaph

"At any given moment life is completely senseless. But viewed over a period, it seems to reveal itself as an organism existing in time, having a purpose, tending in a certain direction." -Aldous Huxley