

Some Thoughts on the Qualifications for the Peerage (Mostly Knighthood, but also the Laurel and the Pelican)

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Introduction (and Disclaimer)

Why is this guy a knight, and why isn't that one? That's a question we've all asked ourselves from time to time, whether or not we're new members or crusty and cynical peers who have been in the SCA since dirt was invented. It's a good question, and one very important to what we do and how the SCA works. This makes it a question worth answering. So in one of those lulls between projects at work I sat down and hammered out this somewhat long essay (now known as the "Peer Doc"), in the hope that it will at least start answering the question. I can't promise you'll be happy with it, but it seemed the effort was worth it. But before anything else, I'd better start with a fairly bloodthirsty disclaimer.

First of all, I assume you know what a "peerage" is. If you don't, you should look elsewhere for basic information on the structure of the SCA. Secondly, and more importantly, the following essay consists of my opinions, and my opinions only. This is not an official document of the SCA Inc., and the SCA cannot be held responsible for this document's contents. Nor can any Crown, King, or Queen be forced to share these opinions, or forced to adhere to any ideas which might in fact be contained within. There are in fact "official" requirements for entry into the peerage, these are listed in the SCA's Corpora. I'm barely going to mention them here; I'm going to describe what I look for, not what other people look for or even what I'm supposed to look for.

There is no such thing as a closed text or final word on this topic: many people will certainly disagree with a much that is said herein. I do not claim to be a majority opinion, nor do I speak for any group of other peers. My goal is simply to help people to understand what I look for when I consider someone for the peerage, to make people think and consider, and I hope that many people will be inspired to respond or react to some of the ideas I present. I also freely admit that not all of the ideas presented are original ones of mine. I can't give real credit out, either, dozens if not hundreds of people have influenced my thoughts on the matter in different ways.

Any discussion of this sort must brush up against other topics of great interest: what is fealty, what is honor, what role do they play in our lives? These questions are very important, and a peer must understand them and be able to work with them both within and without the SCA. But I really don't have time to discuss them here; they will occasionally pop up, but if you're really interested in them you'll have to look for me at events. I should also mention that I am not going to discuss the historical aspects of knighthood directly. Some elements will of course crop up here and there (since the SCA's ideals of knighthood are loosely based on historical models), but I can't discuss knighthood's origins and evolution without writing a book. Nor am I going to mention the historical development of the peerages within the SCA itself. For that matter, there may be a lot of things that interest you that get left out, as I'm doing my best to neither rant nor rave. If you want to hear what I think of armor standards, the BOD, membership requirements, calibration, fencing, light fighters, art crowns, personas, the dream, pseudo-period geekspeak ("the troll told me on the farspeaker to move my dragon!" -- would a medieval person really say this?) or any of the myriad oddities that affect our lives, come look for me at an event. No doubt you'll agree with me on some issues and disagree on others.

This essay is going to approach the issue requirements largely from the perspective of knighthood. This is partly due to my experience and training in the SCA (knighthood was my first peerage), partly due to the conditions that prompted me to put all this down on paper, and partly due to the forms my current projects have taken (I find myself heavily involved in various aspects of fighting right now). But I'm going to try to talk about all the peerages here, in my own clumsy way. I'm not going to say anything about the various suggested "fourth peerages". My assumption throughout is that there are three peerages and three peerages only (I'm also not going to discuss royal peerages). Masters-at-Arms are members of the Order of Chivalry, and are assumed to be mentioned wherever "knight" is mentioned (with a few exceptions). This is not supposed to be exclusive, but is simply a time-saving measure since it would be tedious to say "knights and Masters" everywhere. In a similar spirit, I'm not going to go out of my way to be politically-correct and double-gender every pronoun ("he or she" in every possible situation). I'm going to use both male and female pronouns wherever, and whoever is not mentioned shouldn't be slighted. Just because I might say "a Laurel, if she wishes" doesn't mean that men can't be Laurels, or that women can't be either knights or Pelicans. In other words, it is very possible that at least one person will be offended by this document in

some way which I cannot at this time imagine; if you're that person, come grab me at an event and we'll try to understand our differences.

Practical Mysteries Explained

How are peers chosen? What is a peerage council? Simple questions, and I am constantly surprised that so few people know the answers -- after all, the answers are not secrets. As a matter of fact, if you are a peer and think that any of the following information is in any way sensitive, I'll laugh. It can be found on some web sites, for example that of the West Kingdom. (On the West Kingdom site you'll also find some essays on fealty and the peerage, which might interest you. I confess I haven't bothered to read them.) So if you for some reason you read this and then tell me I've violated the "Privacy of the Council", I'll think you're an idiot -- and I'll be right.

The Crown and the Crown alone has to power to make peers. That is, the King and Queen make peers, but I'm not going to get into a long discussion of what the Crown is, or the difference between the powers of the King and the Queen (some other time, maybe). All you have to know in this regard is that the Crown is all-mighty; it (or they) can in general make anyone a peer at any time for any reason. There are only two real restrictions: the new peer must be elevated at an official event (you can't elevate somebody at fighter practice, or during your weekly poker game) and the new peer must be a resident of the Crown's own Kingdom (you can't elevate people who aren't your subjects). That is 99 per cent of what you have to know about making peers: the Crown does it, and does it pretty much when, where, and to whom it wills.

So what's the council for? Well, it's nothing more than an advisory body for the Crown. Whenever the Crown is uncertain whether or not to make some individual a peer, it consults the council and the council advises the Crown on what action it should take. (The giving of advice is, in fact, one of the obligations of fealty.) In practice, the council generally suggests candidates to the Crown, and then the Crown decides what to do with them. This is a practical device, as the Crown can't possibly know every possible candidate in the kingdom; the council has many members, and they have contact with lots of people the Crown might not even have heard of. Here in Drachenwald there are in fact laws demanding that the Crown consult the council before making a peer -- this is a conscious attempt to limit royal power. But if you read the law carefully you'll see that the Crown is required to consult the council, but there is nothing that says the Crown has to follow the Council's advice. The final say on who becomes a peer is the Crown's.

It is now standard in most kingdoms to have a "list" or "watch list" of possible candidates, which is kept by the council or an individual in the council (this is a secretarial function only). The people on this list are NOT people who about to be made peers, so even if you manage to steal one somehow you don't know as much as you might like to think. The list is of people who the peers are observing and/or monitoring. People who are proposed for the peerage are normally on these lists, but the list is an administrative aid only. The Crown can elevate someone from the list, from a different list, or some total unknown if it wishes. Many kingdoms with a large number of candidates have in fact two lists, the "Short List" and the "Long List" (in my experience, Drachenwald has usually had only a single list, but I'll explain this just to be on the safe side). People on the short list are, in council, discussed in detail. They then may (or may not) be either proposed for the peerage, left on the list, or moved, either back to the long list or to the dustbin of history (i.e., dropped). The "long" list is normally read so that the names are familiar, and some people may be moved to the short list for future (or, if there is need, immediate) discussion. There may also be a "Problem List", which lists the names of horrible cheaters or other trouble-makers (or trouble-making themes: heavy hitting, insufficient enforcement of armor standards, whatever). If there is only one list (as I said, usually the case in Drachenwald) everyone on the list gets discussed in every meeting, i.e. there is only the "Short List".

Note that this "system" of lists is very flexible, and varies from kingdom to kingdom -- and even from monarch to monarch. Some kingdoms maintain a single list, either due to tradition, lack of candidates, or other (informal) systems of discussing potential peers; some have more than two; some kings hate documents, throw away the written copies, and maintain a rough version in their heads. Furthermore, as I have already said, the lists are aids only. I myself have known people to have been knighted from a kingdom's long list, since they made so much progress in-between councils that they were ready. I have also seen people sit on a short list for months, constantly under discussion, only to be judged unfit and moved back down to a long list. I have seen people put on the lists, removed from them, and then put back on; I have seen people remain on them for years. I can't stress this enough: they aren't lists of people "about to be made" or even of people "being considered"; they are lists of people under observation. They are an aid for the council and an aid only. Some of the people on the list will become peers quickly, others won't,

and there can be many reasons why someone is being observed, just as many people are being observed who are not on any list.

A "normal" peerage meeting runs roughly as follows. The Crown announces the meeting, and everyone meets at the appointed time in (preferably) some secluded place. After greeting one another and slurping their coffee, everyone gets down to business. This may take more or less ceremony, depending on the Kingdom and/or the monarch. Some kings give little speeches as the council opens, some kingdoms have particular rituals that are gone through to open the meeting. Here in Drachenwald it's pretty straightforward, the meeting just starts.

The Crown (or the secretary of the order) then reads a name from the list (the short list, in kingdoms with more than one) and there is a general discussion about the candidate. What progress has this person made toward the peerage? Some, none, all? How active has the individual been since the last council? What gaps in the person's education exist, and if so how can the council arrange for the person to get the necessary instruction? If (God forbid) the person has some sort of problem, has it been solved, or how can the council help the person solve it? This sort of discussion can take a while, and often gets sidetracked into theoretical or philosophical issues (which a strong Crown quickly squelches). It can sometimes lead to a real debate, i.e. an argument between people of strongly differing opinions. But, in general, the progress of each candidate is verbally described to the Crown, so that the Crown can make an informed decision whether or not it should elevate this person. When the Crown has heard enough to make a judgment they issue the appropriate commands ("we will poll the other members of the order", "we will offer her the Laurel at March Crown", "no action will be taken at this time") and the next name is read. If there are a lot of names, this can take a long time.

When the people on the list (or "short list") have been discussed, members of the council suggest any new names that they might wish to come to the Crown's notice. This can spark new debate over whether or not this person should be on the list at all -- the longer the list, the longer the meeting, so there is incentive to limit the list (let's face it, you can't have every person in the kingdom on it, although that is theoretically possible). I should also mention that it is very inappropriate for a peer to suggest the name of his or her own significant other (husband, wife, lover, girlfriend, etc.) in council. I've seen it done before, but it is akin to tattooing "I am an idiot" on your forehead in letters of fire, so most people don't. For that matter, it is usual in most kingdoms for a peer to leave the council when their significant other is being discussed, on the theory they cannot be impartial and might be offended if some other peer offers a criticism of the significant other. If necessary, the Crown will summarize the discussion for the peer upon his or her return. In many kingdoms, it is also tradition that a peer does not discuss his or her own vassals (squires, apprentices, or whatever) without specifically being asked, i.e. a knight doesn't jump up in council and say "hey, knight my squire!" but responds only to questions about that squire. Different kingdoms have different approaches to this "vassal" issue, in Drachenwald there doesn't seem to be a real strong feeling either way.

Finally, at the end of the meeting, a few minutes are taken to discuss the people on the problem list or other general problems: "the archers keep mixing themselves into the line of battle, so watch for this when you're marshaling", "how do we get more people to enter Crown?" There may then be closing ceremony or pontification, depending on the Kingdom and/or monarch.

Hopefully, this doesn't sound very exciting, because peerage meetings aren't. They are part of a peer's job, and have nothing to do with secret passwords, strange pseudo-Masonic rituals, or whatever other legends float around the underbelly of the SCA. They soak up a lot of time that most of the peers would rather be spending elsewhere, like on the fighting field or in the scribe's workshop. They are also very dependent on the Crown: a strong Crown knows exactly what information it needs from the peers, and runs the meeting efficiently. A weak Crown, on the other hand, dithers about trying to figure out what to do while the knights talk about what kind of jockstraps they prefer and the new basket hilts Tom is making for cheap. Hours pass, and the short list isn't even finished yet...

In far-flung kingdoms like Drachenwald there are often "pollings", a form of long-distance council held by letter (either surface or email). A list of candidates is sent to the members of the council and written comments on each candidate are solicited. While this is called "polling", a "poll" has (technically) been held whenever the opinion of the council is solicited by the Crown (a council is thus a form of "poll"). The word is rarely used for face-to-face meetings, though. Postal "polls" are a great time-saver, and allow those peers who are geographically distant or unable to travel to the next major event to participate and contribute. But this method is nowhere near as responsive as a real council, as the peers aren't usually able to read each other's contributions and there is little interaction or debate. This method also undermines the collegial feeling of the peerage. It is a necessary evil, but not one I myself use gladly.

But to go back to basics, the Crown chooses and then makes peers. The council is only a group of advisors, and while they have tremendous influence on some Crowns, other Crowns ignore them at will. It is very possible that a Crown will elevate some person who the council thinks is a total spooze, and this in fact happens from time to time. The council can't do anything to stop this, but the King and Queen can of course be harassed once they step off the thrones -- they are then, after all, only members of the populace and are subject to all the whims and social torments the rest of the populace can come up with. This is sort of a bizarre "slow-match democracy" resulting from the transitory nature of our monarchs. In other words, there is a social pressure to follow the council's advice, even if there is a legal right to ignore it.

The efficiency of this whole system is of course somewhat dependent on the personalities of the involved individuals, and I will say right now that this system for choosing peers is not perfect. Nor do I think that anyone will claim that it is. We could name a lot of problems: favoritism, factionalism, regionalism, insanely slow response times, you name it and it can happen. Worthy people are not noticed and unready are advanced. But it's the only system we've got, and by and large it works. Not infallibly, and maybe not even efficiently, but it works. No matter who you are and what kingdom you're from, you have to come to terms with this, because no one has been able to come up with anything better.

The Privacy of the COUNCIL

The "principle of privacy" is, simply put, the idea that the names of the candidates under observation by the peers are secret, and not the business of the populace. Nor is the content of the council's debates and discussions a public matter. I'm a big believer in the privacy of the list. If I knew of a specific peer who blabbed to the wrong people I would (ahem) speak to them about it. But sadly, most leaks aren't traceable, since there are so many layers of gossiping cretins between the rumor and the source. On the plus side, most so-called leaks are not actually leaks -- I've lost track of the number of times I've heard that X or Y is about to be knighted, and it isn't true. As a matter of fact, in my time in Drachenwald I've heard so many lies (oops, I mean rumors) that when I hear this sort of thing I assume it ISN'T true, unless I hear it from the Crown. Take what you hear with a grain of salt.

The names of people under observation or discussion by the council should remain the business of that council and that council only, for a very simple reason: protection. Privacy protects both the members of the populace and (what most people don't realize) the peers. Members of the populace are protected from false hopes, pressure to perform, and the slimy brown-nosers that appear out of nowhere to flock around new peers. The peers are protected in that they, when privacy is enforced, have freedom of speech. I have to have the ability, in council, to stand up and say "this person is not worthy." I don't always have that ability in a public arena, when the person in question is standing next to me. To properly advise the crown, I need to be able to speak my mind freely, both pro and con.

A corollary of the "privacy" issue is that if you see a bunch of peers (and only peers) talking together, or the Crown sitting somewhere with just peers, you should hesitate to interrupt (if you do have to interrupt, be graceful). They may well be discussing some candidate or issue outside of the normal council structure (this is often faster), and if you show up and start listening it will bring their debate to a rude halt. Along the same lines, it is very inappropriate to try to listen to a council's discussion -- the attempt will call down the wrath of the assembled peerage and the Crown upon your head. Make sure you have your will and testament properly filled out first.

Recommendations for the Peerage

Can a member of the populace recommend someone for the peerage? To tell you the truth, it never occurred to me that this would be a problem until meeting several (more than two) members of the Drachenwald populace that didn't know how to deal with this. So I'll take a shot at answering it.

In general, the answer is yes, but like so many other things it has to be done properly. This is probably best-illustrated by an example. When I was a young, unshaven and unwashed unbelt, a fighter I with whom I was well-acquainted happened to win a tourney (not a crown), and I knew the knights would be talking about him. I went up to a couple of knights I knew and told them that I had great respect for this fighter both on and off the field, and hoped that they were observing him. This was totally proper, as it was done correctly. What I didn't do is tell them that I knew more than they did -- this is the most common pitfall with this sort of thing. Don't go around telling people they're stupid. Courtesy is supposedly one of our fundamental principles, and there's no reason not to use it in such a situation

as well. I didn't go up to these two knights and say "you spooges, why haven't you knighted this guy? He kicked your butts!" (A bad idea, since for all I know the guy had been offered the chain and spurs already.) Nor did I present the knights with some variant of "he should be a knight", where I presumed to be able to judge candidates for the peerage - in effect claiming the peerage for myself. I offered my opinion, and only on those things which I felt fit to judge: that is, I didn't say he was a peer, or that he should be a peer. I told them that I held the man in high esteem, and that was about it.

If you do this properly, you shouldn't offend anyone (shouldn't -- you might run into some mega-arrogant cretin who will be offended no matter what you do, ignore this sort of person as much as possible). The only real way you can get in trouble with this is when you claim the right to judge peerages; this is a sensitive subject, and different peers will react differently to it. It is also true that most peers have a very good grasp of the qualifications for the peerage, and many members of the populace don't; this makes them very skeptical when regarding direct recommendations. So choose your phrasing carefully.

A counter-example might illustrate these points better. Once (when I lived in a different kingdom) there was a fighter in an isolated area, and his local group wrote the council asking that he be knighted. "He can kill anybody", they wrote. Well, some knights made the effort to go down there and check the guy out, and he was a horrible fighter. Nowhere near the knightly standard. But all the other guys in the local group were such spooges that he could kill them whenever he wanted, and everyone thought he was invincible. We'll come back to this topic (now I'm starting to digress into qualifications) but you see that the people who thought he should be knighted weren't qualified to judge the martial aspect of knighthood, let alone the non-martial and courtly sides. In the end this worked out well for all involved, since it brought a couple of knights down into the isolated area and gave them a chance to teach. All the people learned something from it -- the fighter got an idea of where he needed to go and what he needed to do, the local group got a better grasp of the ideals of the peerage and the Society, and the knights got a chance to scope the local talent, fight a bit, and report the results to the Crown. But this happy end is not guaranteed; think about it before you make recommendations, and tell people what you know, not what you think.

Now that I've scared you off (sorry), I have to say that as a knight, I actually like getting recommendations and comments (as I say, if done properly). You see, there are those fighters who have what is known as "selective calibration". They fight nobly and chivalrously against the knights, and cheat horribly against non-knights. (There are also some who are the other way around.) I don't always have a way to see this, since these sorts of guys might go out of their way to commit few crimes in my presence. I might also miss positive things in a fighter: say somebody has been working hard training new guys in a place that I don't visit much. Unless I happen to visit the Shire of East Elbow, or the entire pack of fighters makes it to an event that I'm at, how would I know this? So feel free to come up to me and tell me these sorts of things; I like hearing them. I reserve the right to think you're nuts, and if you tell me "You HAVE to knight him" I'm a lot less likely to take your word for it. Tell me things that will help me judge, that you have respect for someone, that you have learned a lot from him, that he did some noble deed on the field, that he aims for cups, that he never calls shots that hit him in the armpit. I'll keep it in mind. Of course, I may already have an opinion that totally differs with yours and so lose all respect for you, but this is the risk you run. There's always a chance that the guy you really like is the kingdom's biggest cheater, and once tried to roast and devour a small child -- so watch out.

A corollary of this is that a peer asking a member of the populace what she thinks about a particular individual doesn't mean that person is about to become a peer, or that the person being asked is about to become a peer. That is, just because a knight asks you what you think about somebody's fighting doesn't mean he thinks you're a knight. (It never occurred to me somebody would think that, but more than two members of the populace mentioned this misperception to me...) This is a totally normal sort of question. Maybe there's a fighter I've never fought against; I might ask some guy I know what he thinks, to start creating a "book" on the fighter, so I know what he can do. Even basic information ("he usually fights two-sword, but today he's using a shield", "he just moved here from Ansteorra") is better than nothing, especially in a tourney situation. These questions can also be teaching or learning tools, both for me and for the person I'm asking. They can open different discussions on the "theory" of fighting, or field behavior. So if this happens, don't worry about it; it's a completely normal part of SCA life.

Becoming a Peer: Vigils and Ceremonies

This is something that's hard to talk about, because the topic is so huge. If you're interested in actual rituals involved, various versions of the ceremonies are available on the web. Check out the various kingdom web sites.

Here, I'm more interested in what happens once the decision to elevate somebody has been made. What do you do then?

As we've already seen, the Crown decides to elevate someone. They should immediately inform the council, and in fact it is extremely rude not to do so. This happens from time to time, when there is a particularly obtuse or arrogant Crown, but it never goes over well. (This is less of an issue in Drachenwald, where the Crown is legally required to consult the council first, but I suppose it could happen.) If the candidate is in fealty or in a teacher-student relationship (squire/apprentice/protégé) it is also extremely rude not to tell the candidate's knight/Laurel/Pelican, since they will have to release the candidate from any oaths before the ceremony of elevation (if he or she is in the council, the Crown can kill two birds with one stone, otherwise they'll have to get on the telephone). Other than that, nobody HAS to know, not even the candidate. The entire thing can be kept dead secret, if the Crown so wishes.

Wishes of the candidate, are however, usually respected. That is, the Crown usually has a pretty good idea of what the candidate wants; either it's general knowledge, or the Crown went and discreetly asked someone (usually the person's main teachers, who are in almost all cases peers themselves). Does she want to be surprised, or have time to prepare a vigil and an ornate ceremony? Will the candidate be better-off if her husband, friends, or family are informed first? Or should it surprise the community as well? In most cases the candidate does not want to be surprised, or has no particular opinion either way. This means that the candidate has to be informed somehow. There are two main ways this happens: the Crown does it, or the Crown sends an emissary (in almost all cases a peer who has some close connection to the candidate). The candidate is grabbed, dragged out to some secluded place, and told that they're going to be elevated. He or she now faces a series of decisions.

First, the candidate has to decide to accept the offered peerage -- it is in fact possible to refuse, but this rarely happens (I personally know of only one case where a peerage was refused, but there have certainly been others). In the case of the Order of Chivalry, the candidate declares what title he will assume, that of Knight or that of Master (this is something that the Crown should know first, but the candidate has the right to change his mind at the last minute). There is then the question of when the elevation will take place. It does not need to happen immediately; the candidate may well wish to gather friends and family members together for this great occasion, and so ask that it take place at a particular event. It also sometimes happens that the candidate has some particular relationship to the next monarchs (the current Crown Prince and Princess), and so asks that the elevation take place following their coronation (this is not rude, if done correctly). The Crown usually honors these wishes. If the ceremony is not going to take place immediately, it is then the candidate's decision how many people to tell. Some wish to keep the ceremony secret; others wish it to be made public. It is perfectly acceptable for a candidate to tell everyone in the Kingdom that he's about to be elevated, but in this case it is a courtesy to tell the Crown and the council that this is being done. It will then be clear to the council that privacy is in no way being violated, and that they are free to spread the good news as well.

After selection of a time and place, the candidate, in consultation with the Crown, decides on the form of the ceremony. There is, in most cases, no obligation to use a particular form. Different kingdoms have different traditions, but even within these structures there is great flexibility. The ceremony can be simple, ornate, elegant, long, short, whatever the candidate wants. The decision to hold a vigil is also up to the candidate, as well as it's form and degree. That is, despite what some people might think, vigils are not open events. The "standard" form throughout the world is that only the members of the Order about to be entered are invited; only knights attend a knighthood vigil, only Pelicans attend a Pelican vigil, and so on. In many cases guards are posted to keep unwanted drunks and buffoons away (there was that one vigil that was invaded by a psychotic with a shotgun...ask me sometime). The most typical form of vigil has the candidate sitting alone in some secluded place, meditating on the obligations and burdens of the order he is about to enter. Each peer from his new order then goes individually to the candidate, and gives him some piece of advice or a few words of wisdom. Some vigils are religious experiences, deeply moving for all involved; some degenerate into parties. In Drachenwald, there seem in fact to be a lot more "open" vigils, where the drunk de jour can show up and tell you what he thinks, as if he knows anything. But -- and this is a big "but" -- this is the choice of the candidate, in consultation with the Crown and his or her teachers. The populace (or members of the other orders of peerage!) cannot assume a vigil is open, nor is the populace justified in being offended if it is excluded.

Requirements Part One: Practical Things

Well, now we know how peers are chosen. Now we've got to talk about why they're chosen, a much more difficult thing. Now we're in the realm of intangibles. But please note that the following discussion takes place in no

particular order. That is, please don't think that just because one aspect of the peerage comes before another means that it is more or less important. They appear here as they occurred to me when I sat down in front of the computer, without any real plan or logic behind them. They are not grouped according to "priority" or "importance".

You should also know that any written document can create the impression that there is a "checklist" of requirements for the peerage, and that it's a cut-and-dried procedure to become a peer. This is in fact NOT the case, but as any attempt at communication (written or verbal) will result in a linear development of ideas (they have to come one in front of the other, after all) this misperception often arises. Similarly, any grouping of ideas into categories (on-the-field, off-the-field, courtesy, whatever) could result in a "list", if some twisted reader really wanted to create one. In other words, if we have a text, we can't avoid the creation of textuality. But while you read this please keep in mind the fact that there are no real "categories". Being a peer is sort of a Vulcan-Mind-Meld-Zen-Spiritual thing, either you are or you aren't. I've made groupings of ideas within the text in an attempt to describe aspects of the peerage, but you can't get obsessed with my arbitrary divisions. In other words, I'm doing my best to describe the indescribable and unquantifiable, don't get hung up on the fine print.

Most SCA people are aware of the broad divisions of the peerage: knights fight, Laurels do art, Pelicans serve. This is as good a place to start as any: if you want a peerage, you HAVE to do one of these things, and to get any particular peerage you have to do the activity it demands. It is impossible, for example, to get knighted if you don't fight. I don't care if Sean Connery has been knighted for acting and Ronald Reagan for...acting, you can't do it in the SCA. If you want to be an actor-knight you'll have to write to the Queen of England and ask her, you can't do it in the SCA. So don't even start to whine about it, it's a non-issue. You cannot ignore this fundamental triad: you have to fight to be a knight, do art to be a Laurel, and serve to be a Pelican.

In fact, each order -- which, remember, are co-equal -- partakes of the others in some way. In plain English, if you are a knight, you have to do art and serve. If you are a Pelican, you must know something about fighting and art; a Laurel must know something about fighting and serve as well. Oddly enough, I find many Laurels and Pelicans are horrified by the thought of fighting, while many knights do art and serve, so I'll try to explain this in a bit more detail. If you are a knight or a Laurel you need to have served enough to appreciate the tremendous sacrifice of time and energy that it takes to be a Pelican. If you are a knight or a Pelican you have to have done enough art to appreciate the talent and dedication it takes to be a Laurel, and if you are a Pelican or a Laurel you have to know enough about fighting to appreciate the training and sweat that goes into becoming a knight. This doesn't mean that in fact you have to have ever put on armor, nor does it mean that if you crassly applaud in some ape-like fashion the yielding of an arm on the field that you understand what's going on. You have to know what makes a good blow, and know when to think someone's calling blows and when not. You need to see the three dents that got made in the cheater's helm, and know he didn't die to any of them; you need to know that any single word spoken during a fight could be the greatest courtesy imaginable or the most blatant of discourtesies. You need to know that honor is exchanged, won and lost upon the fighting field, and that this makes that field a sacred space. Your sovereigns are chosen upon that field, and men and women are both made and ruined upon it. But knights must have the same command of the Laurel and Pelican spheres; another way of putting what I'm trying to say here is that you need to believe that the three orders are co-equal, and know why. You need to appreciate the other people in the SCA, and understand why they are your peers. The best way to do this is through experience, a theme that will appear again later.

Let us return, however, to the main requirements. We have said that a knight has to fight. Well, lots of guys fight -- just fighting isn't enough. Any prospective knight has to be good enough: he needs a minimum knightly competence upon the field. Or, as one knight once said in council, "we gotta have some standards, or we'll have to knight everybody who's a nice guy." The standards aren't constant. They change over time (the quality of the SCA's martial art has improved constantly) and through space (different Kingdoms have different styles and forms of combat). Even more importantly, I cannot define this standard in words. There is no "knight-o-meter", or absolute scale against which new fighters can measure themselves. One oft-cited rule-of-thumb defining this standard is that you're good enough if you "beat the average knight half the time", but since nobody can define the average knight we're back to square one. Furthermore, some guys are better than others when they get knighted, some guys fight well with seventeen different weapons, some guys amazingly well with just one. Some guys are lousy in wars, some guys are lousy in tourneys but amazing slayers on the battlefield. I can only say that you have to be good enough, and if you're not, you won't get knighted.

One thing I can say that the standard is in fact an international standard, because it is an international order. If you are knighted in Drachenwald, you are a knight in every kingdom on the known world; you are KSCA, a knight of

the SCA. This means that you might kill all sorts of people in an isolated area, where everybody marries their cousin and plays the banjo, but if you haven't met the martial minimum you still won't get knighted. The standard, despite its variations and oscillations, is an international one. It, not a local one, must be met.

As a minor digression, I will say that one of the burdens of knighthood is that this standard is very difficult to maintain. To get knighted, you have to meet the standard and stay on it long enough for the knights to realize it. But once you're there, you have to prepare yourself to fall off of that standard, and you will. You are knighted for life, and when you are ninety there is no way you can fight as well as you did when you were twenty. Aging is one of the basic facts of existence, and one of the greatest tests of knighthood is how to face this decline. In most sports, you quit, but you can't quit being a peer. You're a peer for life. This is one of knighthood's greatest tests, and many knights fail it. An interesting side to this is that just because you're beating some knight into pulp doesn't mean that you're good enough to be a knight. It just means that you beat some guy who used to be good enough into pulp. You might even beat every knight in your kingdom into pulp, and still not be good enough! Weird, huh?

Lest the international level of the knightly standard depress you, I'll say that I believe that anybody can be good enough to get knighted, with very few exceptions. Guys who have no arms cannot swing a stick and so can't fight, therefore they can't get knighted (but there are fighters in wheelchairs, a knight with one leg, etc.) Deaf guys can't hear the call "hold" and so cannot fight. A guy who is blind would have a rough time of it, but I suppose he could try. Other than that, I think just about anyone could be knighted. I have only twice met individuals of such profound uncoordination, combined with either innate stupidity or arrogance or both, that I gave up hope; they are the exceptions that prove the rule. Some people need a lot of training, some people need little, but I think everybody can get there, if they want to and are prepared to make the necessary sacrifices.

There are a few more things I can say about fighting at this mysterious international level. For one thing, you can't cheat. If you don't call blows, you won't get knighted. Period. I don't care if you think this worked for X or Y, if I am in council and think you don't call well I'll advise the crown that you're a cheater and should be set on fire. If you buy the Crown a new car and get knighted anyway I'll do my best to ignore you in council and at events; just because you're wearing the regalia doesn't mean I have to treat you like a knight. No one else will like you either -- all you'll do is devalue knighthood for everybody else. So this isn't the way to get good enough. The only way to get good enough is to find guys who can teach you and then go out there for hundreds of hours and train. Just going to practice once in a while isn't always enough, even if you do it for a dozen years. Years don't matter at all. Hours in the helm matter, and the quality of those hours. You might have been fighting for fourteen years, but how many days in the year do you actually fight? Are you getting the instruction you need? Do you have teachers at all, or is the practice just a bunch of guys whacking each other with sticks? If you do go to practice regularly, how many hours did you actually fight? Being present at the practice is not enough; you have to be working, not talking about X-men or the new video game you borrowed from your cousin. And if you get tired quickly and have to take a lot of breaks, you might need to do some sort of conditioning (running, cycling) on non-practice days to improve. Many people I suggest this to are offended; they seem to think the SCA is recreation and thus shouldn't have anything to do with sweat. Well, they have a right to think so, but I have a right to think they're idiots. If they aren't prepared to make the sacrifices necessary to excel, they shouldn't be whining about the fact that they aren't fighting at a knightly level.

Some kingdom traditions emphasize the fact that knights have to master the use of many weapons. I confess I don't really consider this an issue. I require a minimum competence with one "dueling form" (any form used in tournament combat), and in my experience if you can fight at this standard you're probably competent with whatever you pick up -- your control of your body and awareness of your opponent (to say nothing of your knowledge of what's legal with the different weapons) mean that you can at least go out and whack at things, no matter what you're fighting with. So I don't bother with "multi-forms" when I ask myself if someone's a knight (some other knights do, though). I do ask what the candidate's dueling form is, and make sure that it meets the minimum. This means that you can't get knighted for using a purely formation weapon like a spear, since it's next to useless in single combat. Knives and other toys are also out, as you have no chance against a "normal" fighter. For that matter, you should try to use some sort of "knightly" weapon. We are here to re-create the middle ages, and if you show up with Xena's throwing Frisbee you should be laughed at, not knighted.

Other aspects of fighting are sometimes mentioned in attempts to describe the "knightly level". There are, for instance, different "styles" of combat; it is often said that a fighter is ready to be knighted when he has his own style. This is supposed to mean that he no longer needs to imitate his teachers, but has combined all that he has been taught into a unique form all his own. There is a lot to be said for this idea, but I have found it to be a bit misleading. For one

thing, some people think it means that knights don't need any more instruction, something which is not the case (I believe you should always seek to improve your skill-at-arms, whether or not you've been knighted). Another problem is confusion in the use of the word "style". Some people (such as myself) use it to describe broad schools or groups of fighters, a sort of strategic view, while others use it to describe different tactical or positional elements in the fight itself (i.e. they would describe a switch from a guard with the sword held forward to a guard with the sword behind the head as "switching styles" -- I would say that a fighter's style provides him with a variety of different guards, which are used in different situations). So this "style" description of the niveau can be useful, and crops up from time to time, but isn't the ultimate answer.

A knight-level fighter does, in my view, have a certain presence on the field. They can command fights, controlling their opponent -- when two in-form knights meet, 99 per cent of the fight happens in their heads, not between their bodies. This sort of thing happens at the higher levels of every individual sport I've ever participated in, team sports being somewhat different (it is a factor, but not as decisive). The "mental game" is not confined to the martial arts. But you have to have reached a certain level before the mental game makes a difference; before that it's just confusing, because you have enough problems trying to deal with technical problems, i.e. control your body. I wish I could explain this better, and of course I can't describe this in any kind of concrete terms. But the mental component -- perhaps as a reflection that the physical has been internalized -- is definitely there. It's something I look for in a fighter, it's one of the ways I know he's getting close if not there already. "Getting psyched up" before a fight has nothing to do with this, anyone can do that. What I'm looking for is a psychological or spiritual presence, something that makes the combat a contest of wills. This presence does not have to be there all the time (most fighters can't "turn it on and off" at will, though the best can), and just as interesting as seeing the fighter develop presence is to see at what level he fights when he can't turn his presence on (his "munitions-grade" fighting).

THE LAUREL

I've already mentioned that to become a Laurel, you have to do art. In plain English, "doing art" means you gotta make stuff, and the stuff has to be good. As with the Order of Chivalry, the level is somewhat flexible; some people do one single art but are incredible at it, while others do many things well. But, like the knights in the martial realm, to become a Laurel you have to do at least one art at an international minimum. The level is international for the same reasons that the knights have an international standard; if you're a Laurel, you're a Laurel in every kingdom in the SCA. You have to be a leader in your field no matter where you live, and if you get laureled for doing a single scroll in crayon the Laurels in other kingdoms will laugh at you and kick you.

An interesting twist to the Laurel standard, however, is that it generally doesn't go away with age. In most cases, Laurels improve the older they get, like good wine. But the Order faces a different problem: the diversity of arts. That is, some people are laureled for costuming, some for brewing, some for painting, some for armoring. This makes an absolute standard very difficult to describe, even more so than with the Order of Chivalry. (Incidentally, this is one of the reasons why the knights are more fraternal than the other orders; they train and go to war together, and thus know and work with each other often, if not weekly or even daily. This is not as true for the other peerages.) The Laurel standard is further complicated by the fact that the Order is more or less a catch-all for everything that's not medieval combat (knights) or service (Pelicans); there is often debate over the "placement" of candidates, as no one is sure if what they do is art at all. Since in English pretty much any human activity can be described as "art" (think on the term "martial arts") this is never easy, and there won't be any solid conclusions any time soon. The term "sciences", as in "arts and sciences" is also nebulous, and there's no clear division between the two areas. I was once told that a science is anything you can hit with a hammer, while everything else is art, but as you can imagine even this definition is wanting. I myself don't make a distinction between "arts" and "sciences" in the SCA, as far as I'm concerned this is an artificial distinction and I ignore it.

What is art? I've thought about this off-and-on for a long time, and don't have a very good answer. If I had one, I'd publish a book on it and become famous -- it's something that has concerned many people throughout history, not just the Order of the Laurel. The best definition I can come up with is that "art" is a) original and b) creative. What does that mean? A very good question. I suppose it just means that I find myself using these words constantly in artistic contexts, and not just in the SCA.

By "originality" I mean something like "something new", in the sense that a piece of art is something that has never been seen before. It is an original experience. Some people seem to believe that since we are a medieval re-creation organization we must slavishly copy medieval examples, but I don't think this is the case. If that were true I

would put the "Book of Kells" in a Xerox machine and instantly be a Laurel. That's not art, that is imitation. Or, to use another of my favorite examples, just because a size eight medieval shoe was found in a swamp somewhere doesn't mean that I have to wear size eight shoes on my feet. I can make them 10.5D (that's about a 44 in European sizes, if you're curious) and have them fit me. We are not puppets, but living people, and we can be original. There are degrees of originality, of course. You might make a scroll that uses many medieval elements (knots, beasties, whatever), but if you assemble them in an original way it can be "art", not "copying". A new combination of elements would be something that had never been seen before, it would be "original".

"Creative" is the word I use to say that when you look at a new piece of art, something is there that was not before. This something is not always concrete. It could be a mood, a feeling, or a memory that is summoned. This is why music and theater are arts; they create responses within us. Art objects are, in fact, objects which are less important for their "object-ness" (existence) than for the fact that when we look at (or touch) them we respond in different ways. These responses are not a constant, as different people will respond differently to any given art object (some will not respond at all, and thus it is not "art" to them!), but the potential for response is there.

Well, all of this philosophy is well and good, but what's it got to do with the order of the Laurel? I admit that I don't run my "art test" all the time, holding up (say) every dish at a feast and asking myself if it's original and creative. But these concepts, as well as the idea of "art" itself, lie behind all of my thought on the Laurel. "Art" is really not as rarefied as it might sound; you don't have to be Monet to get a Laurel. The responses of your audience can be very simple ones, like "that's cool!" or "wow, neat-o!". The most common response that a Laurel seeks to evoke is a sense of medievalness, when the object is viewed or experienced the audience is a little bit closer to thinking we're in the middle ages. That's not as hard as the philosophical underpinnings make it sound.

I should also mention that a Laurel doesn't do "art" all the time, just like a knight isn't on his best form every day. Sometimes she's doodling, or sketching, or making patterns, or just trying something out to see if it works. I just made a horribly ugly leather gauntlet, for example. I wouldn't call it "art" or even "Laurel quality", even though I made it and I'm a Laurel. I was messing around while watching TV, and made it out of bits of scrap leather; it has sort of a Frankenstein's monster look, with big stitches all over. So what? I threw it in the loaner gear, and it's now a second gauntlet new guys can use on their shield hand. So art is not a permanent state, and if you want to be a Laurel you don't have to art all the time. You just have to have the ability to do art, and you have to do it once in a while.

Now, "once in a while" is of course yet another nebulous phrase -- no doubt you're getting tired of them, but that's the nature of our subject. The truth is that to become a Laurel, you have to have created some body of work, some group of "art objects" (or, in the case of the more ephemeral arts, "art performances"). There isn't a defined size to this body of work, I can only say that it needs to be more than one piece. So making one single banner won't get you laureled, even if it's a really damn fine banner. There is often debate in councils over whether a candidate has done "enough", in the sense that her body of work is large enough to deserve a Laurel, so this topic can't be closed here. But it is important for three reasons: first, a large body of work means that any single object wasn't a fluke, second, a large body of work implies a long-term commitment to artistic endeavor, and third, it means that there has been a large contribution to the kingdom (in the sense that many responses have been evoked over time). So the body of work is important, and must be larger than one, but I can't give you any hard numbers.

The pieces comprising this body of work have to have particular qualities, since we're in the SCA. The first is the quality of the technique itself, the craftsmanship of the piece. The piece must be finished well, in the sense that it is well-made. You can't have duct tape holding it together, stitches should be even, dye shouldn't have bled all over, etc. Second, the piece must have what is often called a "period aesthetic". This means that it has to look and feel medieval to the SCA observer. You can't have cute little unicorns and rainbows on the scroll, they are a purely modern repulsiveness; your art must be something that a medieval person could conceive of. This is fairly hard to describe, but look at the difference between a picture of Superman in a comic book and a medieval drawing of a guy in a cape and you will see that they are quite different. One meets our modern expectations, one the medieval; SCA art should meet the medieval. I wish I could explain this better, but it's hard to do without lots of examples (you'll have to catch me at an event and get me to show you things). The "period aesthetic" varies, like so much else, over time and space (the sixth century and the fourteenth are very different, as are France and Japan), but it's there and it's a crucial element of SCA art.

Another element I look for in an object is what I call "medievalness", or "periodicity". This differs from the "aesthetic", since the aesthetic is appearance or perception. Medievalness is how closely the piece is based on

medieval models. To know this, you generally have to do a bit of "research". "Research" can mean many different things. Some people go to original manuscripts, and reconstruct dances from them that haven't been done for five hundred years. This is what we usually think of when we think of "research". On the other hand, some "research" consists of looking at some art books and then drawing a bunch of Celtic knots on scratch paper. This is just saying that different projects will demand different amounts of "research", and that "research" can take different forms. This is another huge topic that stands somewhat to the side of our main discussion, so I'll let it go for now, if you're curious about it you should grab me (or some other Laurel) at an event and start asking questions.

The last element I consider when looking at "art" is what I call "design". This means that if you make a useful object, it has to work. The shoes have to fit their owner, the sword has to fit in its scabbard, the folding chair has to be stable enough for someone to sit in it. Many attempted art objects fail this "design" test, just as there are many well-designed and practical objects that fail the "period aesthetic" test.

Despite what many people (and many members of the order) think, becoming a Laurel does not mean that you have to become a tech-weenie or a pedant. What you do have to know is what elements of your work are medieval. That is, you have to know what elements in your work have medieval models, which elements are mediievally-possible, i.e. constructed as a variant on a medieval model or combining elements from several medieval models, and which ones were made up out of your own head for your own reasons. You have to, in effect, judge the degree of originality of the work (there's that word again). Every project will be a compromise, between ease of construction, effective design, period aesthetic, and medievalness. Each artist, when creating art, makes this compromise in a different way for her own reasons. But "Laurel-quality" work requires particular kinds of compromises: in almost all cases it is much more medieval than not, either in the sense that it has a tremendous period aesthetic or a tremendous degree of medievalness. Ease of construction is generally downplayed.

There's one other thing I should mention. If you're a Laurel, you can't cheat. "Ha!" you say, "cheaters are something that only knights have to worry about." Not true, say I. There is something called plagiarism, and it can affect your life as an artist, as it happens more often than you might think. Plagiarism is where you take someone else's work and call it your own. Taking a medieval song, changing the line where it says "mighty King Richard" to "mighty King Elffin" and claiming you wrote it is plagiarism. You can do this, I mean sing the song with clear conscience, but then you have to tell people "this song was written by X [insert medieval author's name here], and I've changed it a bit". If you do a scroll, and paint a straight copy of an illumination onto it, write the original artist's name (or the work if you don't know his name) on the back: "I took the little group of guys on horses from the Utrecht Psalter." This isn't hard to do at all, and it's incredibly disrespectful to the medieval artists to steal their work and claim it's yours. Plagiarism also takes place within modern contexts of the SCA. In most cases, this involves taking patterns from some extant piece and using it, say taking the pattern of a pot helm and then making your own. If you don't give credit for the source of the pattern, you are in effect claiming credit for the design phase of the project, which you didn't do. You should a) ask the original designer for permission if at all possible and b) give credit to him. "I made this pothelm, based on a pattern developed by X." It isn't hard to do this, so make the effort and be kind to those who have gone before you.

THE PELICAN

Becoming a Pelican requires service. That is easily said, but I confess I have a hard time defining the requirements of the Pelican. I suppose this means that I'm in no way ready to become a part of the order, but since that would mean I'd have to go to three peerage meetings (ugh!) that doesn't worry me particularly. But having seen the sacrifices of time and effort made in the realm of service, I have to say there is a real need for the order's existence. The SCA without the Pelican would be an unjust place. I have a bunch of friends who are Pelicans ("some of my best friends are Pelicans"), and I can say that the work some of them have done is just insane. Think about being a chronicler, for example -- over 20 hours a week, every week. That's a job, not an office, and other offices often aren't much better (though admittedly they are usually more feast-or-famine, a lot of work then nothing).

Pelicanhood is in fact often associated with offices and office-holding. One rule of thumb for Pelican service is that you have done things that allow the SCA to exist, i.e. created the structures that then allow other activities to take place. There is something to be said for this, but like the "average knight half the time" definition for the Chivalry it has its problems. Service, like the arts among the Laurels, is incredibly diverse. It isn't just offices. Following your King in war is, for example, a form of service: your King calls, and you sacrifice your free time and your money to go to him. Solving problems is a service, at every level from interpersonal (the two new guys in your group who hate each other) to the international (dealing with the BOD). Teaching is a service, holding events and taking up offices are

services. The possibilities are endless; like art among the Laurels, almost every form of human behavior can be a service, and can be learned from and can help others. So the "structure-building" definition is a bit exclusive, it allows only one type of Pelican, and there are many.

Since version 1.0 of this "peer document" came out, many Pelicans have written me to try to define "Pelican-level service". (Maybe that's one definition of a Pelican, they are the sort of people who are willing to take the time to write and help me out.) These definitions fall into three general groups. First, some variant of the "structure-builder" rule of thumb, mentioned above. Second, some variant of "extraordinary service": Pelican service should be extraordinary. It should be something that others might say, "How were they able to do so much"...this has to be done on a consistent level and not only at highly visible jobs. I kind of like this definition, as I don't think it's any less nebulous (though much shorter) than my attempts to talk about knight-level fighting. I have from time to time heard a variation of this, that Pelican service is when you "make a difference", i.e. the work you have done has made a real difference in your Kingdom; it would be a lesser place without you. The problem with this definition is that you could use it for every peerage, in that the kingdom is a lesser place if a given peer is not there. "Extraordinary" (or "extraordinary") service is perhaps the closest we will be able to get to defining this one side of Pelicanhood. I should point out, however, that "extraordinary service" is in fact a "body of service" -- something very similar to a Laurel's "body of work". This "body" demonstrates that any single effort, task or successful term in office wasn't a fluke, as well as a long-term commitment to the ideal of service and a large contribution to the kingdom (over time). There aren't any hard numbers or "work-o-meters" that let you measure service, either. Like so many other aspects of the peerage, it's a qualitative and not a quantitative thing.

The third issue raised in the Pelican letters I've received doesn't deal with the work a candidate does directly, but rather with intangibles; knowing that ...you can't make volunteers do something they don't want, knowing how to motivate people, and when to give up and try something else. Knowing when and how to ask people to do something. This is leadership, and I think it's a critical part of a Pelican's service. A Pelican doesn't closet him or herself in some sort of hermetically-sealed chamber and labor in secret, but rather creates an environment where many people have the opportunity to participate and enjoy in creating an SCA experience. Having thought about this a lot since the batch of letters arrived, I think this is really the "international" aspect of the order. That is, a Pelican's service is to one particular kingdom, not to the Society as a whole, and often takes kingdom-dependent forms (particular offices or tasks, etc.). But I think that each Pelican, no matter where they're from, will have a way to create this space around them, and this is their "international aspect". I find this interesting, because it's so team-oriented, and we often don't think of Pelicans as the "team players" they actually are. Leadership is a theme that we'll see again later, but this creative element is as I say an important side of the order's service.

Before leaving the Pelican, I should mention that (like the Knights and Laurels) a Pelican can't cheat. Cheating in the realm of service seems to take the form of "credit-stealing", this is where a group of people does something and one person gets all the credit, or one person gets credit for someone else's work. I'm not sure how common this is, or how easy it is to do, but since Pelicans complain about it from time to time it can happen.

TEACHING: A VITAL COMPONENT

Well, now we've got the practical side of things out of the way: we know that Knights fight, Laurels do art, and Pelicans work; all of these have an international standard that must be met. But it is not enough that you do this alone; you must also get other people to do these things as well, i.e. you have to teach in your field.

Teaching in your field is fairly self-explanatory. If you want to be a knight, you'd better be fighting new guys and showing them how to get better. (If you're a knight from some weird kingdom on the East Coast where there are secret practices and you only teach your squires and household men, grow up! You're in fealty to the Kingdom, so you damn well better help the Kingdom as a whole.) If you want to be a Laurel, you need to be showing people how to do art, and if you want to be a Pelican you should be showing people that it isn't difficult but is rather a joy to serve, and encouraging them to take up tasks and projects. Teaching, especially in Drachenwald where there are so few people who know or can move within the international niveau, is crucial to a peerage.

Some people are, of course, better at teaching than others. But since a peer must teach constantly, you need to learn how. The first step is to know your limits. Teach only what you know, and make sure what you know is absolutely correct. I myself have heard fighters in this very kingdom teaching people incorrectly or spreading misinformation ("hold your sword tight when you hit!", a phrase I've heard from at least two people, springs

immediately to mind). You also need to teach in the proper way; new people need to be encouraged and helped, not punished or ruled. If you take a new guy and club him for three hours till he hurts in his first practice, I'll stand up in council and tell everyone that you don't deserve a belt. The same things go for the non-martial peerages. Sitting there telling new people how crappy their scroll is and that they've wasted their time won't do anything, even if it makes you feel mighty. Talk about what is good and point out areas for improvement. Most art doesn't need much supervision; show them how to do it and then leave them alone. The only thing people need help with is overcoming "art fear", the idea that they can't do it, that art is hard. The same thing goes for service -- get people to conquer the stage fright associated with it. And no matter what you do, whether or not you're a peer, if you can't do this well, LEARN HOW. Every peer must teach, constantly, especially in a kingdom like Drachenwald where the populations are isolated, often inexperienced, and desperate for leadership.

Now, no matter who you are you won't teach all day every day. When you do teach, you are making a sacrifice of your time and effort to help others; this is a form of service, and no small service at that. The peers know you can't do it 100 or even 99 per cent of the time; you need to go to the bathroom once a day, after all. It is also true that not every student will learn from you. Some need other teaching styles, other methods of explanation and demonstration, or simply another personality to bounce up against. But you have to be reaching out to the others around you to be considered a peer.

KNOWLEDGE

When you are a peer, you are a repository of knowledge about how to live in the SCA: it's ways, it's history, it's traditions. At one level, this knowledge is also practical: you need to have martial knowledge (command the rules of the list as well as an awareness of safety standards), artistic knowledge (what is medieval? what isn't? when do we compromise between the two?), and organizational knowledge (how does the SCA work? who do I talk to when I have a problem with X or Z? What is allowed by kingdom law and what isn't?) There is no way I can tell you everything you need to know here, but after all that was never my intent -- as I've said, there isn't a checklist of things you must "do" or "know", and areas of knowledge vary widely from peer to peer. "Knowing" is in fact a very nebulous word, it isn't just information. Courtesy, for example, involves "knowing" a multitude of attitudes, movements, gestures, and phrases. "Knowledge" is just my way of telling you that you need some sort of intellectual or philosophical background for your behavior.

A peer must have a grasp of the practical sides of the SCA, but he or she must also have a strong understanding of it's philosophical side -- as well as how that philosophical side interacts and influences what we do and how we do it. Among other things this means that a peer must understand both honor and fealty, and come to the realization that they are utterly real. Yes, real: honor can be lost upon the field (I have seen this happen), and since it can be lost it must be real. Similarly, fealty is an emotional commitment, and even if it is not legally binding the emotions it evokes -- anger, joy, sorrow, pain -- are very real, and affect the individuals who feel them. One of the hallmarks of the SCA is the fact that although we are actually fairly lousy at the history side of things (no enforcement of medieval appearance, mixing of periods, etc.) we create a successful emotional reality that underlies much of what we do. Actors do not weep while playing Shakespeare, but SCA members weep from time to time as they encounter facets of the Society. A peer must understand this, and be able to easily move in and out of the gray areas between competing realities. The odd thing about all this is that it is quickly said: a peer must understand fealty and honor. It took a lot longer to try to explain what the international standards of the orders were. But don't let this fool you: these are huge topics, and it would take hundreds of pages to even begin to cover their many ramifications. One of these days I'll try to do this (I've already got bits and pieces written, but who knows when it'll be done), but for now I'll move on.

One aspect of a peer's knowledge that is usually not raised in council (i.e., many peers don't think it's important) is a candidate's knowledge of history. I like candidates to have some historical knowledge, though "knowledge" is probably the wrong word here. I don't care if you know who was Pope in 492, or can name all the sons of Charles the Great. "Appreciation" might well be a better word: an appreciation for history. This is an awareness of the fact that the Middle Ages were not an object or some abstract construction, but years in which people breathed, laughed, and lived. They were very different from us (just how different is not usually obvious to the casual observer) but they were people. I like a peer to know this, to have a deep understanding of how utterly disrespectful the phrase "the middle ages as they should have been" truly is. This knowledge of history is helpful in many ways. If you're trying to understand fealty and honor, you really need to go back to historical models and behaviors to try to

understand them and their change through time; a knowledge of SCA behavior is almost never sufficient. It is also a great help to know in what ways we mirror medieval societies and in what ways we fail utterly.

GRACE AND COURTLY ABILITY

Another thing I look for in potential peers is something I call Grace. This is "carriage", in the sense that you look and act noble. A peer is a nobleman, and thus has to be "noble" in his behavior, and be perceived to be noble. Which is the nobleman -- the well-dressed one who moves calmly through the sea of admirers, or the unwashed shirtless one scratching his crotch? Grace contains many elements, but appearance and speech are probably the most important. "Speech" doesn't mean that you have to speak in front of a crowd, but rather than you say the appropriate things, and that you can express yourself when you need to. Appearance is important on the field as well, and extends to the choice of weapons and the manner of their use. A graceful fighter is controlled and smooth on the field, and doesn't move in some sort of oafish wood-chopping manner. He doesn't fight inelegantly (for example, coming too close to his legged opponents -- few things are more graceless than to have some brute's cup shoved into your face when you're on the ground) and in fact he draws elegant motions out of his opponent. And he has a noble appearance, his armor looks good and non-medieval elements are concealed to enhance the spectacle of the field.

My search for grace in candidates is, perhaps, the most debated requirement of peerage; many people have told me that it is too exclusive. I don't think so, as I recognize the fact that there are different kind of peers. There are, for example, many "workin' man" knights, guys who go out and fight and afterwards sit around in their boots drinking a Bud. They find debates on chivalric action pointless, and have gut-level emotional commitments to fealty. They have strongly-felt personal honors in which they feel confident, and only rarely draw upon historical models. This is fine. But each of these men can still stand up and move correctly when pushed, when they have to. So they in fact have "grace", even if they display it in different ways and at different times than some other sort of knight. Grace is vital, as when you're a peer you're constantly in the public eye. You are a leader of the community, and it is your responsibility to lead the community in positive directions, not into the gutter.

What I call "courtly ability" is in fact an extension of grace, and of historical knowledge. There is in fact a list in Corpora of what you have to do to be a peer: heraldry, dance, play chess, stuff like that. I don't bother with details, and lump all of these activities together into one category. I also don't care if you can do any particular one of them, i.e. if you can't play chess it doesn't mean you can't get knighted. I do care about what "courtly ability" means: it means you have the ability to move through and live in a court. Not a court as in a court of law, but a court as in a group of noble people who socialize together. This is, interestingly, perhaps the most medieval of the peerage requirements, and is based upon the skills noblemen and -women actually needed to have. This is what I mean when I say you need historical knowledge for it; courtly skills varied throughout the middle ages, as Viking longhalls differed from French palaces. In the SCA, courtly ability also means that you are familiar with the usages of the court, i.e. titles, rituals, and traditions, and can use or ignore these as appropriate to the situation.

No doubt some of you who are reading this are wondering where "courtesy" is. I usually lump courtesy under courtly ability, since COURTESY takes place in a court (in the SCA the "court" is pretty much everywhere that's not the fighting field). I subsume courtesy in grace and courtliness, as being "well-spoken" is part of a nobleman's job. What is in fact more important to me (oddly enough) is the ability to communicate. You'll have no doubt noticed that a peer must communicate constantly, for example when teaching. This is absolutely vital. One of the jobs of a peer is to identify problems within the SCA and either solve them or get them solved through the appropriate channels (i.e., kick them upstairs). This can be simple: "Hey Wiglaf, I hit you hard and you didn't die. You're a big cheater." Or it can be complex: "My lord, with respect to the seventh blow thrown in our fourth exchange, I feel that the impact was sufficient to have been judged "killing" under the SCA's conventions of combat. We read in Mallory...Raymond Lull, who himself thought of blows in Augustinian terms...Nietzsche shows that sufficient force is in fact a psychological construct..." If you've got a problem, you have to be able to identify it, speak about it to the people involved with the proper courtesy/graciousness, and propose solutions. This is one of the jobs of a peer, and demands a certain minimum articulation; this is not only a vital part of grace and courtliness, but in a bizarre circular fashion is also one of the reasons why a peer needs grace and courtliness at all.

How long does it take?

Time in Grade: I hate this phase. I hate it hate it hate it. It's totally a misleading phrase common in Drachenwald, adopted from the ever-helpful US military. But it does take time to be a peer. How long? Well, there's

no fixed answer to that; meeting just the "international standard" in our chivalric martial art or in our art world can take a long time. When I started, in the West Kingdom, I was in one of the best places to fight in the world. There were huge practices everywhere, and huge numbers of skilled teachers who had guided many people to peerages. In the summer there were often sixty or more people at the twice-weekly practices, and in winter I'd go and there would be a low of (say) fifteen regulars; I was the only one who wasn't a knight (most were royal peers as well). In this training- and tourney-rich environment (where it was not unusual to fight 100 days a year) it normally took four to five years to get knighted. That's years. I know one guy who took nine, and that was with constant training. He just wasn't very physically gifted, but got there eventually -- and everyone rejoiced that he had achieved what he had. In a kingdom like Drachenwald, with limited teaching and training opportunities, it may well take much longer to reach the international standards of any of the peerages.

Why does it take so long? Well, on the one hand, you have to have the given skill necessary for the peerage. No skill, no peerage. But even if you have a great deal of skill, and could (say) do Laurel-level art on the first day you were in the SCA, it will still take time. The non-practical abilities of a peer (what we usually term "off-the-field" abilities, and which appear above under all sorts of names) must be developed. And even if you had all of these -- let's say you can dance, play chess, recite improvised staves in Old Norse off the top of your head and are a nice guy besides -- it will take time. You need time to build up a body of trust between yourself and the current active peerage of your kingdom. This trust is vital; you will be, once a peer, one of the leaders and exemplars of the populace, and the current peers need to know that you will act properly in pressure situations. That is, even if you know everything, it will not only take a while for the peers to become aware of this fact, but many of the things that you have to know -- how to react when it gets dirty and ugly -- can only be exhibited in such a situation, and these situations don't occur that often.

This is no doubt a bit obscure, and a couple of examples are probably in order. Let's say you're a great fighter and a nice guy, etc. But how do you react when your opponent is a horrible cheater? Do you turn your sword around and start beating him with the basket hilt? Do you take off your gauntlets and challenge him to fisticuffs (both things which I know to have happened on the field)? Or do you speak to your opponent, working together to solve the problem? And if your opponent is a safety hazard do you go through the proper channels of the marshallate to make the Kingdom aware of this, or do you turn to evil and low-brow means, slander and abuse? This is actually a fairly simple example, but you see the point: suddenly you must confront a clear dichotomy between the ideals of the Society and an individual's behavior. Do you react properly? A peer must react properly, and see that the proper procedures and statures are followed, and that with the necessary courtesy and fairness.

Lest we think Laurels and Pelicans are immune from such tests, it should be mentioned that the hardest tests are not the ones on the field, but the ones that take place purely in the social sphere. What do you do with the new guy who sat down in the throne? What if he's drunk and passed out in it? What do you do with the Prince who is drinking a can of Budweiser at a dry site? What do you do with local seneschal making the members of his local group swear fealty to him before they can be members, what do you do with the local herald who uses his office to sexually harass new members? What do you do if you are insulted, really and truly? How you go about solving these problems that is perhaps more important than the solutions themselves, and a peer must find both a proper means and a proper end. Like so much else, there's no "litmus test" to see if you can do this, and the peers need to see you doing it before they begin to believe you can.

This doesn't mean that you should run around sticking your nose in other people's business. It is, however, one reason why you should take on jobs from time to time, why you should help and be involved in different ways. Take on a small job: become the local marshal or local seneschal, autocrat an event. If you are the head cook at a feast, do you strangle the fourteenth person to come up after the deadline and announce some cretinous and unbelievable food allergy? Do you glare at them and tell them they should have called ahead, or do you smile and say "I'm sorry, it's too late to do that, but I can offer you these other options from which you can choose?" Service takes many forms and fulfills many roles; one of it's advantages is that it places you in situations from which you yourself can learn, and thus be prepared for yet greater challenges and problems. And as an added plus, there are almost always people around who you can ask for advice.

In vast, spread-out kingdoms like Drachenwald all of this is harder and takes much longer. It takes a while for all the peers to see you, get to know you, and learn to trust you. It also takes longer for the populace to accept you, in the sense that they embrace you as one of their leaders. It will, therefore, hurt you to move around from kingdom to kingdom. If your career path wants to take you elsewhere you will have to give up that body of trust that you have

built up in your home kingdom. (This doesn't mean you go back to square one, just that you will be set back a bit.) This is a choice you will have to make, and if a peerage is important to you this fact will have to be weighed with the other elements of your life. People move for many reasons, and stay in one place for many reasons: maybe the kids like the schools, maybe it's a beautiful town, maybe the opera is good, maybe you want to keep working on that peerage. You are not a slave to career opportunities, but constantly balance the elements of your life in an attempt to find happiness. This is totally normal.

Now, if you're in (say) the Air Force and get transferred, all I can say is "welcome to the military." You are a volunteer and knew that might happen when you joined, so stop whining.

Attitude and approach: Greed vs. Goal

All kinds of bizarre attitudes flock around the peerage. There are the people who hate all peers (why?). There are people who worship all peers (why?). There are people who are afraid of peers (why?). There are slimy brown-nosers who fawn all over peers (why?). Then there are the people who walk around thinking "I should be a peer because I am so mighty." These last create all kinds of problems.

I'm going to state right off that it is not a sin to want to be a peer. Nope. In no way. Wanting to be a peer is perfectly acceptable. Thinking you should be one is not; "wanting" is desire, while "should" is an expectation or demand. An expectation is actually counter-productive, and usually sets your peerage back. It prevents the peers from trusting you, as they don't believe that you'll act correctly under pressure. I mean, there you are, getting only pressure from within, and you've already twisted yourself and started down a path of bitterness. How are they supposed to think that you'll do the right thing when facing someone else? (I should also mention that most of the people thinking they should be peers are those who only consider the "practical" abilities, i.e. fighting or art, and have a very poor grasp of off-the-field elements.) It is also the case that people who really want that peerage tend to quit once they get it, rather than sticking around and lending their experience to the kingdom. Once their goal is gone, they have nothing left to do. What all this means is that you need balance, and perspective when setting goals. I admit that this is hard: too little goal, and you never go anywhere; too much goal, and it's counter-productive. I can only say that this is one test among many. You'll have to find this balance within yourself.

One thing to carefully consider is why you want the peerage. You should know right now that it's not an automatic ticket to worship and prestige. In fact, a peer gets only the respect that he or she earns, just like every member of the populace. If you're a cheater or a cretin, no one will worship you just because you have some award. (Well, there will always be some brown-nosers, but if you like having them around you're even sadder than I thought.) In fact, all you do is make all the other peers look bad, since now they have to constantly prove they're not like you. So, no matter what you wear around your neck, you are what you do; ask yourself why you want a peerage, and try to look upon it as a waypost in a long journey, rather than some sort of final or end state.

One practical thing along these lines is to make sure you don't get obsessed with "winning". This happens a lot to fighters (who feel they have to defeat their opponent to prove their prowess) but can also happen to others, in particular artists (who sometimes feel that if they win lots of art competitions the Crown will have to give them a Laurel). I'd like to point out that I am a knight and have never won a tourney, any tourney. Ever. I may never win a tourney, and that doesn't really bother me. I might also point out that I've fought guys, beat them 14 fights of 15 and left saying "God, that guy is good, we better knight him!". I've also been beaten 12 of 15 fights and left saying "that guy's OK, but not a knight-quality fighter". So you see that these things are subjective, a simple Win-Loss ratio isn't always a good guideline.

I will admit that I won two art competitions, once when I was brand new (it was a dance contest, I jumped in a group of people dancing and then they told me I won) and once after I was knighted (the king made me enter a bardic contest, and I won). But these had nothing to do with the fact that I later got a Laurel -- they were in fact the only competitions I ever entered. Art competitions are just a tool, they are a structure to let you show your work to people from a different area and (hopefully) get feedback on what's good and bad about the work. They can also be an excuse to do art (some people need this added incentive). But winning a contest doesn't really mean anything in terms of a peerage. Like the examples of fighting, you can win hundreds of them and it doesn't really matter; you can lose hundreds of them and that doesn't matter either. Don't get focused on winning and losing as a measure of your "progress" toward the peerage. It's a dead-end street that often leads to you putting pressure on yourself (a sure route to unhappiness) and even to various forms of cheating.

When I was a young unbelted fighter, I wanted to be a knight. This is totally normal, and as I say it's OK to have desire. But then I took that desire, that goal, and made it one for the far future: I put it way off in the distance. My only real, practical goal (though I wanted someday to be a knight) was for the knights to take me seriously. When I stood across from them on the tourney field I wanted them to think "I'll have to fight hard, cause if I flop around he can kill me", and when I was talking with them I wanted them to think "Hmmm, that wasn't a bad idea...of course he's wrong because of this and this and this." I didn't worry about any awards whatsoever, it was only this "seriousness" (not "respect") that I wanted. This worked very well. When they did come up to me and tell me they were going to knight me (the whole council was drunk like skunks, get me to tell you the story sometime) I had known that they were beginning to take me seriously, but it hadn't occurred to me that I would be knighted. So I was surprised and pleased at the same time. In other words, I was able to find a balance between my desires and goals, by defining them correctly. I don't know if this method will work for you. I describe it here just to give you an idea of what I did inside my own head; if you can't do it try talking to some of the other peers and see what kind of balance they found. I can only say that you need this balance, and that for many finding it is very difficult. Many people have in fact written to me and described their own search for balanced goals during their SCA careers. It seems that I was actually fairly lucky, and created a good working balance very early on. Many other people struggled to come to terms with their desire, and some had bitter battles with themselves to find that needed balance. I find this humbling, as their internal struggle made them in many ways stronger when they finally became peers, and often enriched their understanding of others in ways I lack.

Conclusion

Before I go, I'd like to give you one piece of good advice. If there are things you want or need to know about the peerage, go up to whatever peer you happen to know (or even better, one you don't) and ask. If you're having problems with finding a balance in your goals, are starting to get that "what do I have to do?" feeling, ask somebody. There's no law that says you have to thrash around in the dark for twenty years to become a peer, "what do I have to do, where do I need to go?" are perfectly good questions. You won't always get the answers you want to hear (maybe you're an obnoxious and arrogant cretin, and need to be told this), but it might help. And if you don't know any peers, you can always talk to me, since I like talking about these things.

And as a very last comment, if you like/dislike elements of this little essay, please tell me. As I said in the beginning, it is a working document and I wrote it partly to provoke responses from other peers. Feel free to email me at sjrossa@aon.at, or grab me and talk to me at some event. And thanks for reading this.

Wiglaf.

APPENDIX I: VOCABULARY

For those of you who aren't native English speakers, I've provided the following glossary.

Brown-noser: 1. Sycophant. 2. Yes-man. 3. Lackey. 4. Toady. 5. Servile individual. The term derives from the fact that a brown-noser is often kissing someone's posterior, and his nose passes into a...comfortable aperture and becomes brown-colored.

Spooge: 1. Geek. 2. Idiot. 3. Unwashed or greasy individual. 4. Irritating individual. 5. Unskilled individual. 6. Pale, pasty individual, often with cold clammy hands resembling flippers. 7. A socially inept individual. 8. All of the above.

APPENDIX II: CREDIT WHERE CREDIT IS DUE

The "standards" quote in the text was made by Paul of Belletrix. The "hammer" definition of science is from Juana Isabella de Montoya y Rameriez, but I don't know whether she came up with it herself. The Pelican quotes come from (first quote) Honor of Restormel OP and (second quote) Hanna of Hanecnolle OP.

Gelasius I was Pope in 492. It is good to know who he is since he came up with the doctrine of the "two swords", one of the theoretical building blocks for papal power (this fed into the Investiture Controversy, etc.). The only son of Charles the Great (a.k.a. Charlemagne) you really have to know about is Louis the Pious, who reigned after him. The other sons you can forget about, unless you are a Frank-freak. Charlemagne had flocks of scandal-causing daughters as well.

This little essay has benefited from the comments of many people. I would particularly like to thank John Theophilis KSCA OP, Katherine Goodpasture OP, Geoffrey of Griffinhold KSCA OP, Kira Ivanovna OL, Cyneswith aet Caldhaven OP OL, Honor of Restormel OP, and Hanna of Hanecnolle, OP.

As I said at the beginning, lots of people have contributed to my thoughts, and it's impossible to list them all here. Of course, the phrasing in this document is original (as far as I know I came up with the term "international standard", for example) but there's no real way to sort out the unwritten intellectual tradition from which I am descended. I'll only mention my former knight, Sten Halvorsen KSCA, who has probably been the single greatest influence upon how I approach the Society.

APPENDIX III: DOCUMENT HISTORY

1.0 [12/99] First draft completed, handed out to various peers for comments and reactions.

1.1 [2/99] Slight modifications in response to John Theophilis. Katherine Goodpasture suggested softening phrases like "if you're a cheater I'll spit on you in council", this one was re-worded and expanded to explain that respect is earned. In the introduction, mentioned the fact that Corpora is not a real issue here.

2.0 [2/00] Lots of changes. The intro chopped to protect the innocent. Cheesy examples in Laurel section removed. Pelican totally reworked, now twice as long. Minor tinkering with other bits, now more polite, most "die, evil cheater!" comments deleted. Bloodthirsty "no checklist" disclaimer in middle.

2.1 [2/00] Very minor changes, Hannah and Kira get full names in the credits, one sentence in the Pelican section changed to not be self-contradicting. Minor typos that escaped the spell-check found and corrected.

2.2 [2/00] Got a lot of feedback from Katherine Goodpasture. Added bit about not mentioning your significant other in council, just in case some idiot peer didn't know that. She pointed out that I didn't say if you could be a "science" Laurel, so I rephrased things to (hopefully) make it a bit more clear that there is no such thing as "science". Everything is art. Added a bit about body of work to the Pelican. Added the copyright notice. Deleted the old Appendix I, with the old Introduction taken out it was an orphan. In 3/00 I added "OL" after Kira's name in the credits (yay! finally!) but didn't think that was worth calling the document a new version.

COPYRIGHT NOTICE

I confess I don't really like copyright notices, as they've always seemed somewhat arrogant. "Read my stuff and steal it because it's so good." But since this will probably get put on one or more web sites, it's a necessary evil. So:

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