

You do not Have to be a Fighter to be a Marshal

by Lord Absolon of Hereford

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There are many things in the SCA that draw people's interest and bring them into the fold. For many, it is combat. Whether it is the direct participation in combat of weapons clashing or the long distance shots from siege and archery (at events or local practices), combat cannot occur without marshals to ensure the safety of all (participants and spectators).

If you watch professional sports, martial arts tournaments, or even boxing matches you see that there are referees and officials to oversee the action. Have you ever looked at a referee for boxing? It is fairly safe to say that they have either never boxed, or have not in a long, long time. In the same genre, you do not need to be a fighter, nor have been one, to be a marshal. All you need is the knowledge and understanding of the rules for combat and to follow the path for authorization. Your knowledge of the current rules is paramount for enabling all parties to enjoy our martial arts.

When the SCA started in California many years ago, there were no conventions for armor or weapon standards. The requirements for these standards evolved as the society did: through becoming an actual corporation and needing insurance to utilize various properties for tournaments and events as well as ensuring a standard of safety.

Most everyone has heard the tales of the freon canister helms and carpet armor. Combatants would lay on to each other with full force and grapple. Now we have our armor and weapons standards which must be upheld.

There are two main document bodies that dictate the standards to which we must adhere as marshals. One is the Society Marshalate Handbook, and the other is the Ansteorran Complete Participant's Handbook. As with anything, they are not always congruous. The Society book is the base of the rules for every kingdom in the known world. The Ansteorran book is our additions to those rules. You must keep up with both and ensure that you reference the most current version. If you happen across something that does not match from one book to the

other, the most restrictive requirement will prevail. By law, we cannot be, or allow to be, less restrictive than the corporate requirements.

The Society Marshal's Handbook can be found on the SCA's main site, sca.org. At the top of the page you will see a link for "officers." Once you have selected that you will see a link for the society marshal at the bottom of the left column of the officers. The next page will have a list of links on the left of the page, select "Armored Combat" and that link will take you to a page with the Marshal's Handbook http://sca.org/officers/marshal/docs/marshal_handbook.pdf. This is the first step to becoming an authorized (not "authorizing") marshal. This book will provide you the information you need to know for not only armor, weapons, and conduct on the field, but it also includes the requirements for marshaling. It explains that the acknowledgement of blows is up to the fighters... to a degree. A good scenario is that you are watching two heavy fighters battling full bore at a crown tourney. A shot goes down for a leg and the recipient does not acknowledge the blow, but you see that fighter limp on and keep fighting. For most, the first thought is "Thou canst defeat me! I am impervious to thy blows! Bwahahahaha!" The reality is that the shot rolled and hit him in the shin so hard that it caused him to limp, yet was not a callable shot because no shot from two inches above the knee down is a valid shot. I am sure that there are some that believe "Well if he was hit hard enough to get hurt, then he should call it anyway." If we do not have a definitive line on whether or not a particular area is valid or not, then there will be some that will take advantage. Therefore, a shot in an area that is not a valid striking zone will not count regardless of force. The groin is also not a valid striking zone, yet the vast majority of fighters will call a blow there regardless because it hurts that bad. As a marshal, if you notice a fighter getting struck in the groin frequently, talk to them, or their knight if they are a squire, about possibly changing their defensive stance. If you notice a fighter purposely striking opponents in the groin or any other no-strike-zone frequently, pull them aside and gently inform them that they will be removed from the list if they continue to do so.

The second step is reading The Kingdom Complete Participant's Handbook. This can be found on the Ansteorran website ansteorra.org. On the left column of links, select "Law/Handbooks." In the middle of the links on this page select "The Kingdom Complete Participant's Handbook"

<http://marshal.ansteorra.org/handbook/>

[Complete%20Participant%27s%20Handbook%20Aug%202008.pdf](http://marshal.ansteorra.org/handbook/Complete%20Participant%27s%20Handbook%20Aug%202008.pdf). This will provide you with the additions and greater restrictions that we have in Ansteorra. One very important thing to remember is that through corpora, we have the ability to experiment with things that are not in corpora or our current rules (or experiment with variations of rules that are in them). To get all the pertinent information, on the Ansteorran website, go to "officers." Select the marshal's symbol (crossed swords in a sable (black) circle <http://marshal.ansteorra.org/handbook/>). On this page you will find links for all the manuals, errata, addendums, and experiments. Again, your knowledge of the rules must be current to be a good marshal.

There has been mention of a test for being a field marshal, but at this time there is not a link on the Marshalate website. Your local knight marshal will be a valuable resource for this and other information on changes.

The hierarchy for the Marshalate is:

1. Society Marshal
2. Ansteorran Earl Marshal
3. Regional Marshal of the applicable discipline (Rapier, Heavy, Archery, Siege, Youth, etc.)
4. Local Marshal/Field Marshal

When marshaling on the field, it is difficult to stay out of the way and even more difficult (for some) to say something when they think something is wrong such as getting too close to the ropes. It is always best to error on the side of caution. Anything is better than someone getting injured.

You must keep a watchful eye on the fighters as well as the spectators. Watch for armor failure, targeting, and proximity of spectators. Generally, someone will call "edge" once a fighter's body comes in contact with the ropes, but that does not prevent a spectator from getting struck by weapons. There is no ratio of combatants to marshals, but you must have at least one marshal per lyst field. I would recommend two if polearms or spears are being used.

If you choose to become a field marshal or Knight Marshal, meet with your local marshal and practice being a marshal at your local fighter practice or event.

Beyond this, we will discuss the rules of combat. If you are not in my class, please meet with your local marshal. As the rules change, I am not including them in this text.

In Service,

Lord Absolon of Hereford