

Modern Medieval Culture

By Ben Mandeberg





The Vicount Sir Layatol of the Silver Hills probably doesn't look that dangerous to someone who might happen to pass him on the street. However, when adorned in full medieval armor with his intimidating shield and sword, he is capable of inspiring fear and humility in his most worthy adversaries. Sir Layatol, "mundanely" named John Whelan, works in a high tech field, and so is well aware of the comforts that technology brings to modern life. His interest in medieval society, though, has taught him to view this comfort in a more objective way, without disillusion or con-

tented acceptance. When asked about his intrigue with medieval times, he responds "It's the contrast. It's how they did things differently. In our culture we don't deal with doing without. Everything we do is handed to us, where in the Middle Ages they didn't have that, yet they seemed to get along." This simplistic sense of community, motivated by the pure morals of chivalry and honor, is what attracts over 30,000 people worldwide to the SCA (Society for Creative Anachronism) modern medieval organization.

Most people today fall into what some call the “trappings of leisure,” meaning they take modern technology and comforts for granted. And so, it is ironic that in order to free themselves from the disillusion and desensitization that are so characteristic of contemporary culture, SCA members turn to the ideals of a society that is widely viewed as simple and even barbaric. It’s rather interesting that a heightened sense of identity and belonging can be achieved by stepping away from the modern complexities that mask our human nature, and embracing the simple community that comes from “doing without.”



At a local level, the SCA is really a society of friends. As Countess Lynda of the Lakelands puts it, the organization is made up of “people who are educated, who are interested in history, who have a wonderful sense of humor, and it’s a community, it’s a town, it’s everybody helping each other, everybody gossiping about each other, but everybody there when someone needs help.” At the core of the culture is a deep-set contrast between these peoples’ identities as twenty-first century citizens and as SCA members, each completely immersed in their assumed personas and medieval communities.

“Ohoh! To fight!”

- Sir Jeffrey Mathias



The SCA defines its purpose as “the study and recreation of the European Middle Ages, including crafts, sciences, arts, traditions, literature, etc.” However, what most members value the most is the sheer thrill of combat. It allows them glory, triumph, and grandeur not available to them in the “mundane world,” as it is known. It turns fantasy into reality, and allows them to create a whole new magnificent sense of self. “I grew up as a gamer,” says Sir Cullen, “dungeons and dragons, stuff like that, and the idea of being able to really be on your feet doing it is pretty cool.” Another similar reason for appeal comes from the fact that “a high percentage of SCA members are involved in high tech fields,” and therefore they enjoy the contrast between modern

and medieval technology. Whether exploring the roots of contemporary warfare, or simply appreciating the martial art form’s purity and grace, battlers get a simple sense of release from combat. Sir Jeffrey Mathias, a Society member for twenty-seven years, embodies this feeling by saying that “It’s a very relaxing thing for me because when I’m fighting, I’m not worrying about you know, oh, ‘I need to stop at the grocery store,’ ‘what are we doing at work tomorrow,’ none of that is going through my head. I’m just focusing on one thing, and I like that.” However, with this release comes the intensity of competition, allowing everyday people to push themselves in ways never imaginable in the “mundane world.” Sir Layatol’s eyes brighten when he is asked about what motivates him to battle. “There is no rush quite like fighting in the SCA,” he responds. “It gives you the opportunity to pit yourself against someone else of a similar mindset, and also to pit yourself against yourself. Every fight I’m striving not just to match the best my opponent has to offer, but also to find the ability inside myself to bring out more. And because it’s on the honor system there’s always that thought process of ‘Am I doing this honorably? Am I doing this the way it should be done?’” In accurately recreating medieval combat, “The first and most important rule is that each and every fighter on the field has honor.” This atmosphere of trust and chivalry creates a unique sense of understanding and community rarely found in modern society.



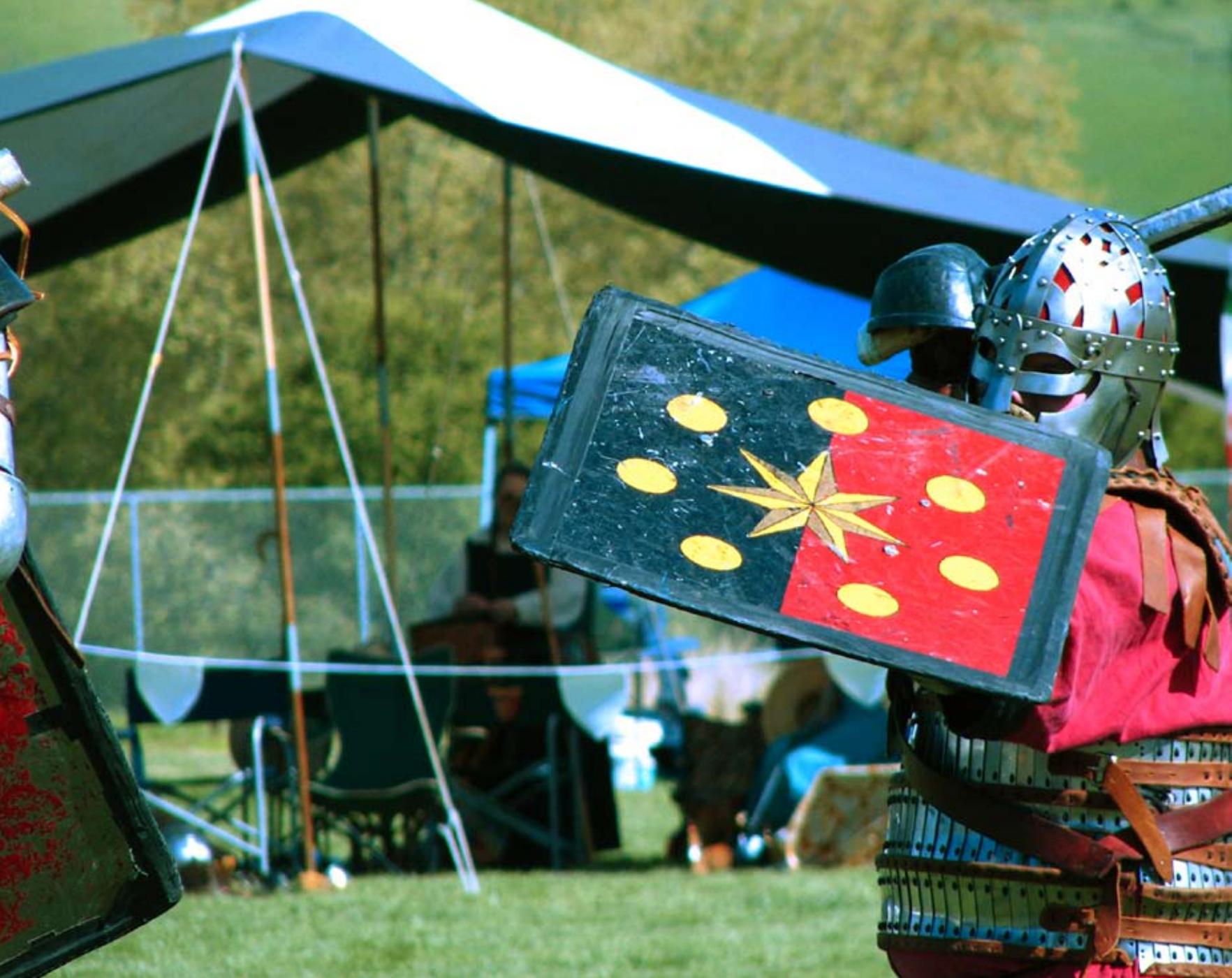
However, the nature of SCA warfare further illustrates the dichotomy of Society members' lives. Although they are intrigued and inspired by Middle Ages combat, they are still grounded by twenty-first century rationale. When asked how they felt they'd do in a real medieval battle, most of the fighters answered in the same way. Sir Layatol simply said "I have no way of knowing, and really I am not that excited to find out." Sir Cullen pointed out that "What we do is a lot of fun, but no matter how good a fighter you are, you know, a straight shot in a war kills you just as easily as the next person." He concluded with "All things considered, I'd do my best to avoid one."



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“I was going to college in a small town in Ohio, and I came back from a golf outing, saw these people beating on each other with sticks, and said ‘Oh, I have to do that.’”

- Sir Layatol





“You know, a straight shot in a war kills you just as easily as the next person.”

- Sir Cullen McClear

“Everything that we do is handed to us, we have cellphones, we have computers, where in the middle ages they didn’t have that, yet they seemed to get along.”

- Sir Layatol of the Silver Hills

West Kingdom
Farmers' Guild
BAYES JUNE
S XL I CROWN
Himmel und Erde





Bass Crumhorn
① ② ③ ④

I. Magi viderunt stellam

Tomás Luis de Vi
(1548-1

to Crumhorn
① ② ③ ④

A musical score for Bass Crumhorn and Alto Crumhorn. The Bass Crumhorn part is in bass clef with a common time signature. The Alto Crumhorn part is in treble clef with a common time signature. The score includes fingerings (4, 5, 2, 10) and a page number (15). The title is "I. Magi viderunt stellam" by Tomás Luis de Vi (1548-1). The score is held together by a wooden clothespin.







The Society for Creative Anachronism was officially started in 1966, as somewhat of a protest against the twentieth century, by a group of science fiction and fantasy fans in Berkeley, California. Sir Cullen McLearn, a knighted Society member for seventeen years now, describes this counterculture as based around “Honor and chivalry, those sorts of values that get lost so much today that are so much a part of what we do in the SCA.” Generally, the original founders wanted to create an active, involved com-

munity, where people could learn about medieval culture through building their personas. Today, many in the Society would describe the SCA as recreating medieval times “as they ought to have been.” This means indoor plumbing, upwards mobility, no grueling work, and certainly no plagues. SCA members would prefer to say that they “selectively recreate medieval culture, choosing elements of the culture that interest and attract them.”





“So it’s interesting to me to just think about how people lived back then. Not that I’d necessarily want to do it, but you know, what were their political systems, how did they live, what kind of food did they eat, all those kinds of questions.”

- Sir Jeffrey Mathias



*“We take care of our little
community, even though our
little community is worldwide.”*

- Countess Lynda of the Lakelands

The “Knowne World” of the modern medieval society spans across almost all continents of the globe. “We take care of our little community,” says Countess Lynda, “Even though our little community is worldwide.” The SCA is a feudal society based on service, duty, and fealty (reciprocal responsibility), stressing strong relationships and character over personal gain. There are people specialized into peerage orders, which hold the structure of the organization intact.



These peerages include service, arts, ruling, and fighting, forming a unity between different kingdoms and cultures around the world. “You know, a place for everyone and everyone in their place,” says Countess Lynda, “a very feudalistic society.” Ruling over each kingdom are kings, queens, princes, and princesses, all chosen purely by tournament combat. According to Lynda, things operate smoothly this way because “There’s no politics, there’s no favoritism, we just let everyone who’s interested in fighting go out three times a year and fight it out in a double elimination tournament to become king.” So, even though feudalistic organization maintains order throughout the Knowne World, the SCA hierarchy is constantly being shaped and shifted by warfare.









“One of the great things about the SCA is that you can do anything that they did medievally. You know, there’s food, there’s dancing, there’s music, and there’s fighting.”

- Sir Jeffrey Mathias





“You know, a place for everybody and everybody in their place. A very feudalistic society.”

- Countess Lynda of the Lakelands



SCA community support, coupled with a pure love of medieval times, really allows members to discover a whole new sense of self, unattainable in the modern, “mundane” world. Different morals and values such as honor, chivalry, and fealty are embraced through the simpler, truer culture.



Tens of thousands of medieval enthusiasts around the world are connected by this feeling of belonging, fellowship, and identity. From the beginning, the SCA has provided an escape from the disillusionment of modern society, and to this day it continues to unify people on a very profound level through a common passion: the recreation of a purer, more honorable society.



