



Atlantia Fencers at Gulf War, 2024

Starting in SCA Rapier Fencing

Introduction

Welcome to "Starting in SCA Rapier Fencing," written by Lady Virginie de Champagne for SCA Fall University 2024. This class is designed to help newcomers navigate SCA Rapier Fencing, providing all the necessary information and resources to get started. It was created with the participation of Masters of Defense and the Order of the White Scarf.

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Class Goals

- Learn about SCA Rapier Fencing.
- Get to Know the Local Rapier Community.
- Recognize Ranks and Roles.
- Get ready for your first practice(s).
- How to participate in Rapier activity at events.

What is SCA Rapier Fencing (Kingdom Level)



Society for Creative Anachronism

SCA Rapier Fencing is the way in the Society for Creative Anachronism to bring the thrilling swordplay from before 1600 A.D. to life. It's not just about swinging swords; it's about diving into history, getting a great workout, and having a blast with friends. Whether dueling one-on-one or battling it out in massive melees, we like the freedom and variety of this vibrant sport.

We embrace this form of combat in the SCA for its historical roots, fun, and physical fitness blend.

Overview of the Local Rapier Community

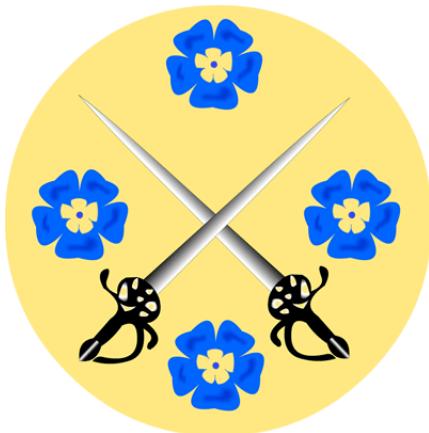
Atlantia



In Atlantia, our rapier community thrives on a foundation of well-defined rules and a commitment to historical authenticity. Governed by the Kingdom Earl Marshal's Policy and the SCA's Fencing Marshal's Handbook, these guidelines ensure safety and historical integrity across all activities. Essential rules include specific conventions for rapier combat, general marshal activities, and combat archery, with special provisions for youth participants and gear appearance to maintain a pre-17th Century look.

Understanding these rules is the first step towards safely and effectively engaging in SCA Rapier Fencing. Our community is supportive and dynamic, and we welcome all who wish to explore the art of historical fencing.

Academie d'Espee



"We, in representation of the Academie d'Espee of Atlantia, come before You, King and Queen, to request that, by Law and by the Right of the Dread Sovereigns of Majestic and Mighty Atlantia, we be recognized by Royal Charter as a Guild of Atlantia."

This guild, chartered by the Kingdom of Atlantia, **promotes historical rapier combat**. Membership begins at the Scholar level, marked by blue scarves, with higher ranks indicated by gold and white scarves for Free Scholars and Provosts, respectively.

The Academie d'Espee aims to enhance skills and camaraderie within the rapier community. Participation is optional but highly beneficial for those involved in SCA rapier activities. The Academie does:

- Offer training, feedback, and practice in historically informed techniques for scholars at all levels.
- Enhance communication and foster inclusion within the Arts of Defense across Atlantia.
- Develop ceremonial recognition of advancements within the Academie d'Espee.
- Coordinate activities that contribute to Atlantia in varied and impactful ways.

For more details, check out the Academie's Facebook group.

Quick Differences Between Practices And Events

- **Practices:** Organized by each barony and shire, practices are opportunities to improve skills in a non-competitive environment.

Local practices can be found through your group's Chatelaine or by checking the online list at Atlantian Practices. However, verifying details via local Facebook groups or Atlantia's Discord server for the most current information is advisable. Unofficial practices may also occur, not governed by SCA rules, and participation is at your discretion. **Practices are free**

and open to all. A waiver is required if you are not an SCA member. You can sign up online when you subscribe if you are already a member.



Ponte Alto SCA Practice, Feb 2024

- **Events:** Scheduled at specific times throughout the year, events require payment and prior **authorization** to participate in rapier fencing. They offer a structured opportunity to engage with the broader community and are an excellent place to have fun, gain knowledge, and network.

Events can be found on the Atlantia Calendar. Respecting events' structured and often busier nature is essential, and etiquette suggests that questions for fencers be asked outside active combat times.



Ymir 2024 by Thomas Bebee

We will discuss the nature of practices and events further below.

Part 1: SCA Rapier Practices

Required Age to Get Started

Atlantia offers fencing programs for children and adults governed by specific age-related rules.

- Adults (18 and older): Participate in the adult rapier program.
- Older Teens (16 to 17 years old): They can choose between the youth or adult programs, but they are restricted to participating in only one.
- Youth (6 to 15 years old): Must enroll in the youth rapier program outlined in section 3.8.5 of the Kingdom policy.

Note that the Kingdom Youth Rapier Marshal, not the Kingdom Rapier Marshal, manages the youth rapier program separately.

Requirements for Safety

Participants wear protective gear such as masks, gorgets, and other safety equipment to minimize risk during rapier combat. Weapons are tipped with dull blades for added safety, and a team of volunteer marshals oversees all activities to ensure compliance with safety standards. The command "Hold" immediately stops the action if any issue arises, providing assurance and maintaining a safe environment for all fencers.

While accidents can occur, the community takes extensive measures to minimize them, prioritizing the safety and well-being of all participants.



Dun Carraig BB 2023 by Thomas Bebee

Injury Prevention and SCA Combat Longevity

Injury prevention is crucial in rapier fencing to ensure participants' safety and the sport's longevity. To avoid common injuries such as strains and impacts, it is necessary to understand body mechanics, wear proper protective gear, and practice correct techniques.

For more information, Master Baru le Bataillier (Bumi) offers a class and videos that are excellent resources for learning effective injury prevention strategies. The class focuses on increasing body awareness, educating about anatomy, providing practical applications for daily activities, and adapting to physical stress. This approach helps fencers enjoy the sport safely and sustainably while improving their skills.

What to Bring to Your First Practice

For your initial practice, come dressed in comfortable athletic wear, including pants and shoes suitable for movement. It's essential to wear appropriate protective gear for your safety. **Most groups provide loaner gear for general use, ensuring there are typically more weapons available than participants.**

However, ensure you have the necessary groin protection and rigid protective gear for vulnerable areas, as combatants are responsible for their safety equipment. These protective gear are not available for borrowing and are necessary for safety when practicing with a sword. However, the first session often emphasizes footwork and blade techniques, so it's okay if you don't have it for the initial practice.



Ponte Alto SCA Practice, Oct 2022

"Don't try to "win" practices." — Noble Sigfrid

Part 2: Additional Requirements To Start

To begin training in fencing, a discipline that combines the elements of sport and martial arts, one must make a combination of mental and practical preparations.

Mindset Requirements

1. **Dual Perspective of Fencing:** Approach fencing as a competitive sport and a traditional martial art, balancing efficiency and precision in competitions with discipline, respect, and self-improvement.
2. **Commitment to Learning:** Adopt a learner's mindset, valuing continuous improvement and skill acquisition over immediate results. This involves patience, resilience, and openness to feedback, which is essential for growth in Rapier Fencing.
3. **Respect for the Practice:** Embrace the etiquette and honor core to martial arts, extending respect to fellow fencers, instructors, and the sport's traditions.
4. **Goal-Oriented Approach:** Set clear, achievable goals for practice and competition to maintain motivation and track progress.

Practical Requirements

1. **Physical Fitness:** A basic level of physical fitness enhances the agility, strength, and endurance necessary for the sport. **If you have any injuries and fitness requirements, talk to your care provider to ensure you can practice this sport.**
2. **Regular Practice:** Commit to regular practice sessions in a formal setting under a coach and through independent practice to reinforce techniques and build muscle memory. Higher-level fencers are not obligated to coach or teach classes at practices. However, most of us do it often to serve the Rapier community.
3. **Engagement Outside the Fencing Piste:** Deepen your connection to the sport by engaging with the fencing community and studying historical techniques and theories.
4. **Feedback and Mentorship:** Actively seek input from more experienced fencers and consider mentorship to enhance learning experiences.

First Gear to Acquire

Local fencing practices generally provide loaner gear, but it's beneficial for participants to acquire their equipment for a better and more hygienic experience.

The first personal items to purchase after mandatory **protective gear for vulnerable areas** should be **a mask** and **a gorget**, as these are crucial for safety and are not always available to borrow. While swords and other defensive equipment are often available to borrow at practices, having your protective gear, especially items that require frequent cleaning, significantly improves your quality of life.



Protective Gear for Vulnerable Areas (Balaur Fencing Chest Protector)



Fencing Mask and Hood (Racaire's Workshop)



Fencing Gorget (That Gal's Gorgets)

Newcomers should be familiar with the **Gold Key** for events. An organization or position typically falls under the purview of the local group's Chatelaine. The Gold Key provides garb for events to ensure participants adhere to the appropriate dress code, even if they arrive in casual attire. Availability and variety of garb can vary between groups, so it's advisable to connect with the Chatelaine for guidance on what is available and appropriate. Information can be found on your local Facebook group and website.

“You're not training against me, but yesterday's you.”
— Duke Ragnarr Blackhammer

On Defining Personal Goals

In the SCA

Setting goals in SCA and fencing depends on what you want to achieve. Considering the amount of time and effort you're willing to put in, remember that if you attend one practice a week and don't do much at home, **you can authorize in about six months**, provided you're in decent shape.

However, if you're in the northern region and have the luxury of attending three or four weekly practices, you might pick up the basics faster. But be warned that attending more practices can

lead to receiving advice from different people, which can be confusing.

If you're passionate about rapier and want to take it to the next level, you can get matched up with top fencers who can help you create a structured training plan, even taking you as a "cadet" or personal student. This plan may include "homework" to help you improve your skills faster. Thinking about your fencing goals, setting them accordingly, and proceeding at your own pace is essential.

*"Practice like you are going on an adventure.
Diligently & consistently." — Master Celric d'Ravelle*

Outside of the SCA

Historical European Martial Arts (HEMA) is a popular alternative for getting more practice time. However, HEMA practices tend to be less uniformly regulated than SCA. For instance, a local HEMA club might require a six-month introductory course in Longsword to be able to fence Rapier, which can be a barrier if that's not your interest.

Personal experience suggests that HEMA provides opportunities to face various opponents. However, HEMA and SCA offer distinct learning experiences with sometimes little overlap, which may only suit some preferences.

Master Aeron Harper organizes **Lord Baltimore's Challenge**, one of the few overlapping events.

Part 3: First SCA Events for Rapier Activities

Becoming an Authorized Atlantia Fencer

To participate in competitive rapier fencing within the Society for Creative Anachronism (SCA), individuals must first pass a safety test known as an **authorization**. This process ensures that fencers are familiar with the rules and demonstrate sufficient control to ensure safety during combat. This guide primarily addresses authorization for adult rapier combatants in the Kingdom of Atlantia, though the principles apply broadly across various combat forms and kingdoms.



Swamp Wars 2022 by Thomas Bebee

Authorizations are typically conducted at every SCA event before the fights commence, and some local practices may also organize special authorization days. It's important to note that authorization cannot be completed at Pennsic anymore, so fencers planning to attend must be authorized beforehand.

There are several categories of fencing authorization in the SCA, including Light Rapier (Youth), Heavy Rapier —most common, Cut & Thrust Combat (C&T), Rapier Spear, and more. Fencers must authorize each category they wish to participate in.

To prepare for authorization, you should:

- Read the SCA's Fencing Marshal's Handbook, which is Society-wide.
- Read the Atlantia policies to understand the kingdom's specific rules. Section 3 of the Kingdom Policy covers the Marshal policy, and section 3.12 specifically addresses the Rapier.
- Participate in at least one mock authorization with local marshals to familiarize yourself with the process and reduce test-day stress.
- If new to Atlantia, create an account in the Authorization Database of Atlantia to streamline the paperwork process.

Authorization tests are conducted by marshals and an usher who CANNOT be your regular practice partners. They offer an unbiased assessment of readiness for competitive play. Engaging in mock authorizations at your local practice is highly recommended, as it provides practical experience and insights into the expectations of the actual authorization test.

Participate in your First Event –What to Expect

Local events

To stay informed about local rapier activities in Atlantia, consider joining the Academie d'Espee's Facebook group. This public group is a hub for updates and discussions about rapier events within the kingdom. Generally, Rapier fencing activities start after morning court, but it is better to check beforehand. Authorizations often happen in the early morning before the first tourney.

- **1. Getting Ready at Home:**

When preparing for your first fencing event, the Gold Key is the best place to find clothing that fits you properly. Usually, fencers will advise you on the required equipment before and during the authorization process. You can also borrow gear from your local practice for your first events. You can keep the gear with you for the event weekend and return it afterward.

- **2. Check-In Process:**

When you arrive at an SCA event, your first step is to check in at the event registration, commonly referred to as "Troll." Here, you'll pay the event fee; if you're not a member of the SCA, you must sign a waiver to participate.

- **3. Authorization and Inspection:**

Next, head to the Minister of the List (MoL) table near the fighting field or the check-in area. You must be previously authorized to fight, a process that ensures you understand the rules and safety requirements. Additionally, before you can participate in any combat, a marshal from the field staff will need to inspect your armor and weapons to confirm they meet all safety regulations.

- **4. Participation:**

There are different ways to approach events. You can use them as opportunities to grow personally, without competing against others, or as a chance to challenge yourself and improve your previous performances.

The rapier field has two main types of activities: tourneys and melees. Tourneys usually involve one-on-one fights, while melees engage multiple fencers against each other. To participate, it is essential to know the rules of the activity, which may vary from one event to another. The authorization process usually includes familiarizing oneself with the rules and listening to the Marshal in charge on the field. If you have any questions, don't hesitate to ask.

For a comprehensive list of Rapier activities, consult the MOL Handbook.



Ruby Joust 2024 by Thomas Bebee



Kings Assessment 2023 by Thomas Bebee

“There’s always someone better than you. Define your own ‘win’.”

— Lord William Mac Dhomhnaill

Out-of-Kingdom Events

When Atlantia fencers attend events outside their kingdom, they need to remind marshals that they only need to inspect armor to the minimum standards set by the Society. This is because different kingdoms have different rules for various weapon styles. For example, an Atlantia fencer with rapier authorization may be assumed to be certified in a single rapier only, which may not be the case.

Familiarizing yourself with the local rules regarding valid blows is crucial. Some kingdoms allow tip cuts, which can be unexpected if you are unprepared for them. Understanding these local nuances is essential to ensure safety and compliance during the event.

Two major out-of-Kingdom events where Atlantia fencers often participate are **Pennsic (Slippery Rock, PA)** and **Gulf War (Lumberton, MS)**. These gatherings provide excellent opportunities to experience the broader SCA combat community and test your skills against various opponents.



Recognize your peers on the Field

Identifying and understanding the ranks of your peers is essential for fostering camaraderie and effectively navigating learning and practice environments. Specific symbols and attire help recognize fencers' experience and responsibility during practices and events.

Monarchs grant orders and peerages at court, while the Academie confers ranks. Orders are specific to Atlantia, while the peerage is a royal rank recognized throughout the Society.

Orders and Rapier peerage

- **AOA of Rapier / Order of the Sea Dragon:** The Award of Arms (AOA) of Rapier, also known as the Order of the Sea Dragon, is a distinguished honor given to individuals who have demonstrated exceptional skills and made significant contributions to the art of rapier fencing. Recipients are granted the title of Lord or Lady and can design their coat of arms. The award is represented by a necklace featuring a Sea Dragon.
- **Order of the White Scarf:** The Order of the White Scarf is a prestigious award within the Kingdom that recognizes high expertise and leadership in the rapier community. It is closely linked with the Provost rank within the Academie, but it is an independent honor granted by the Kingdom. Those who receive this honor wear a white scarf to symbolize their advanced skill level and dedication to rapier fencing principles and practices.
- **Peerage of the Master of Defense (MoD):** The Master of Defense (MoD) is the highest in rapier fencing. It is a society-wide royal peerage, representing the pinnacle of mastery and

peerage status. Masters of Defense are recognized for their exceptional expertise, leadership, and contributions to the fencing community. They wear a medallion featuring three crossed swords, symbolizing their elevated status and comprehensive mastery of rapier art. It is also often displayed on clothes and accessories. This award acknowledges their role as mentors and exemplars within the fencing community.

Ranks with Oaths

- **Scholar:** The rank of Scholar is the entry-level position within the Academie for those who have received authorization in rapier fencing. Scholars are identified by a blue scarf worn on the arm, signifying their commitment to learning and improving their skills in this martial art. This rank is open to all individuals interested in joining the Academie, regardless of their initial fencing level. The Scholar's Oath, available in both ancient and modern versions, affirms their dedication to the ideals of the Academie.
- **Free Scholar:** The Free Scholar rank represents an intermediate level of achievement within the Academie. Individuals at this rank wear a gold scarf, indicating their more profound knowledge and improved skills in rapier fencing. Free Scholars have progressed beyond the basics and have demonstrated a commitment to furthering their understanding and proficiency in the art. They affirm their dedication to the Academie's principles through the Free Scholar's Oath and Prize.
- **Provost:** Provosts are advanced practitioners within the Academie who have demonstrated a high level of expertise and leadership. Identified by the white scarf, Provosts have shown significant dedication and skill in rapier fencing. This rank involves guiding and mentoring less experienced fencers, contributing to the overall growth and development of the fencing community. The Provost's Oath formally declares its commitment to these responsibilities and ideals.
- **Distinguished Provost:** The rank of Distinguished Provost is reserved for members of the Order of Defense who are also part of the Academie. This rank signifies mastery in rapier fencing and a deep commitment to the Academie's values and community. Distinguished Provosts play a crucial role in shaping the direction and standards of the Academie. The Master's Oath serves as the formal affirmation of their dedication to these high ideals.

The leaders within the Fencing Community are often Provosts, White Scarves, and Masters of Defense (MoDs). They oversee and direct events and practices. **Marshals** in charge of rapier activities are identifiable by their black and yellow colors, often displayed on a stick.

Conclusion & Next Steps

Thank you for reading this class! Be sure to explore the additional resources and local practice listings provided. Your journey in rapier fencing starts here, and we're excited to see where it takes you. If you have any questions or need further guidance, please get in touch with me.

YIS,
~Lady Virginie de Champagne
SCA Fall University 2024

Thank You Note

With the participation of:

- Magister Percival Aldridge (Percy)
- Master Armand Schermitore (Armand)
- Master Jacques Gonse (JG)
- Master Geoffrey Gamble
- Master Elphin ap Dafyd
- Master Cailin Blackwood
- Master Brian De Moray
- Master Darren Di Battista
- Master Ffernfael of Carleon
- Magistra Letia Thistelhueyt
- Master Raphael de la Rosa
- Lord Ulfarr Refskegg

Links and additional resources

“Remember, swords are awesome.” — Master Brian De Moray

Official Practices List

General SCA Resources

- [SCA Homepage](#)
- [SCA Kingdom Lookup](#)
- [Welcome to the SCA](#)

Rapier Combat and Atlantia Specific Links

- [SCA Rapier Combat Resources](#)
- [Kingdom of Atlantia Official Site](#)
- [Atlantia Kingdom Marshal's Office - Rapier Combat](#)
- [Atlantia Kingdom Marshal's Office - Practices](#)

- [Atlantia Governing Documents](#)

Academie d'Espee Links

- [Academie d'Espee Official Site](#)
- Academie d'Espee on [Facebook Group](#) - A community group for members of the Academie d'Espee guild.

Additional Resources

- [MOL Handbook](#) - Ministers of the List Handbook
- Guidelines on [Becoming an Authorized Rapier Fighter](#)
- Information on [Youth Combat](#)
- [Pennsic War](#)
- [Gulf Wars](#)
- [Lord Baltimore's Challenge](#)
- [The Awards of the Kingdom of Atlantia](#)
- [Ask a question to Bumi about sports injuries](#)

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