

Buhurt.

It's a funny word. "Boo hoo, I'm hurt!"

Which is semantically apt for what it represents: fully armored combat.

From the Old French *béhourd*, alternatively meaning joust, tournament, or "to wallop," Buhurt is a contact sport where Middle Ages enthusiasts suit up as knights and duke it out. Its origins date back to Medieval Europe, where the nobility fought mock battles to showcase skill and train for warfare.

Sporting historically accurate armor and weapons, participants engage in competitive combat refereed by certified "knight marshals." Buhurt has amassed an international community of warriors since its modern revival in the 1990s. The first European Championship took place in Ukraine in 2005, but the movement really took off following Ukraine's Battle of the Nations in 2009. Today, there are international tournaments held multiple times a month, with the world championships taking place each July.

Last year, my friend Zoey and her ex-partner — who tragically died during a Buhurt fight, just kidding they only broke up, Buhurt is very safe, or as safe as whacking each other in the head with dull axes and swords can be — discovered the obscure sport on YouTube. They found a nearby team in upstate New York and joined.

For months now, she's been trying to get me to come out to a meet. My initial reaction was no thank you. It seemed too ridiculous or niche or nerdy or something. But through her persistence and some badass video clips I warmed to the idea. So when she told me about the Mid Evil Times event her team was hosting at the Flying Fox Tavern, I relented.

Arriving during a still-light, end-of-summer Saturday evening, I exited my Uber to the typical Ridgewood scene: narrow streets, double-parked cars, ambient noise, intermittent sidewalk vegetation, and plenty of people. The smell and feel of the air was dewy, thickening toward the downpour forecast for later that night. I smiled to myself wondering what I was about to witness and opened the door to the tavern.

Walking from the entrance of the narrow, amber-tinted bar to the backyard was like spanning a normie-weirdo continuum in real time. A nondescript crowd at the front, each step coincided with a slightly more quirky demographic mix, so that by the time I reached the back every patron was either a wizard or a clown or a bearded lady.

The back door was the threshold; beyond it, on the outdoor patio, lay Mid Evil Times, with its knights in shining armor. The modest, squarish space was filled with chatter as spectators formed a thick perimeter and participants gathered in the center. There was a collective feeling equal parts anticipation and incredulity: Are they really going to do this?

Zoey spotted me and ran up for a hug, donned in everything befitting a knight but her helmet. The feel of the steel plates protecting her body was smooth, hard, and heavy. I was impressed; they weren't kidding about the historical accuracy. "I'm on again soon," she informed me. The veteran dueler had already fought a couple times before my arrival. I told her I was excited to see her in action.

While she suited up, I surveyed the colorful crowd. There was a winged fairy floating around in a baby blue dress, a bagpipe player clicking his curly clogs, a busty wench with glittering cleavage, and a court jester sporting full face paint. At a nearby table sat a pile of two-pound turkey legs, \$23 each. I asked a stranger if I could try hers, and she happily obliged: "I forgot what turkey leg tastes like. After five or six bites I remembered I don't like it that much! You want to buy it for half price?" I told her I didn't think I could handle a whole turkey leg myself, but was obliged for the bite. It smelled smokey and tasted gamey and was smothered in barbecue sauce.

The court jester, who I learned was that evening's knight marshal, then called for everyone's attention. A duel was about to begin. Zoey and another girl put their helmets on, grabbed their weapons, and stood opposite each other in the center of the patio. A collective countdown began: "Three, two, one, go!"

The two knightettes lunged forward and began bashing each other's heads in with their swords and shields. The spectacle was hype and hilarious and a little bit disturbing. A healthy mob mentality arose, with people hollering and stomping and otherwise losing their minds as the battle intensified. After a few minutes of high-exertion combat Zoey tapped out. The crowd roared and applauded for both combatants, and I along with it.