

Overcoming the barriers of entry into armored combat.

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Schola Saint George has always encouraged the use of historic replica armor on the field during training, tournaments, and other events. But we consistently see beginner, intermediate, and sometimes even advanced students who do not or will not use armor. We often hear the same excuses put forth as to why people do not have this, in my view, required equipment. This document is designed to help new Insruttore, group leaders, or other members overcome the common barriers of entry into armored combat.

One of the biggest barriers I see is knowledge. Learning about armor can be intimidating for new people. Saying things like “what do you want?” and “do some research, we’ll help you.” are not necessarily the best answers for new people looking at armor. It is great to have armor at weekly practices for people to see, hold, and try on. This will help demystify it and help people find a direction with their harness. If there is not enough armor available, having books or other media with good pictures is also helpful for newer people. I like the Osprey series of books; while they may not be the most academic of sources, they do provide lots of colorful pictures of different styles to help direct people into their own suit of armor. Unlike other groups like the SCA, Schola Saint George has a fairly narrow time period of study. Armor of the 14th, 15th, and even 16th century Europe is a relatively easy starting place. By educating members about armor from the beginning they are more emboldened to take the steps forward into a harness of their own. It is important though to showcase different qualities of armor. Usually, we want to show off our nicer pieces and relegate our older, rusty, and dented pieces to the back of the closet.

Having really nice kit on the field is a double edged sword though. Presenting a high quality, accurate harness greatly increases the overall ambiance as well as changes the fighting styles more towards period techniques. But, it can also intimidate people who are budget wary. Some of the nicest replica armor will cost thousands of dollars and many of our members are poor college students. We need to help them understand how to get into harness in a way that will not bankrupt them. We are engaging in a sport. Although there is far more to SSG, taking to the field in a tournament is akin to taking the field playing football or baseball. Those other games also have required equipment; nobody bats an eye at buying a football helmet, so why is a bascinet such a big deal? We need to emphasize that although one can start and participate without the required gear, one will not be able to progress very far without it. Reinforce that it is required equipment and setting goals and deadlines for acquisition. Presenting alternatives is also very helpful for new, less wealthy, people. Some of the HEMA gear is a little less expensive and an attractive choice, but it may not provide adequate protection and range of movement; it also seems to be less durable over time than steel armor. The student will ultimately spend more money in the long run they replace this gear with higher quality replica armor. Building armor is also a viable alternative. Most of the older reenactors and anachronists started by building their own kit, at the time there was nowhere to purchase it. These people can be a wealth of information for armor construction. Patterns, tips, and techniques abound on the internet, I am on armourarchive.org regularly. Certain pieces particularly lend themselves to novice armorers and those on a very tight budget should be encouraged to build their kit with a hammer rather than their wallet. All hobbies cost

money; we can help prevent our members from wasting money but it is important to recognize that a certain amount of equipment is required to participate.

Remember, this is a hobby and a game, not a profession, and people should not be excluded simply because they do not have armor. However, I do feel that we should institute mandatory minimum gear requirements for testing and separate requirements for sparring. This will give people deadlines to procure armor as well as incentive to be fully armored up. However, we must make sure to continue to be helpful, inviting, and friendly so as not to drive off casual participants. Especially as people move into more senior roles in the organization, they need to demonstrate that using improvisational and inadequate protection is unacceptable. It is up to us to not only tell people that they should be in armor, but also help them get there and set an example of how one should present himself on the field. By being helpful, encouraging, and facilitating the SSG will continue to present one of the most beautiful examples of medieval recreation.