

On Service

(or, "How in blazes did this Baldric get so heavy?")

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I'm squinting towards the field, looking at the fighters about to lay on. Nearer to me, I'm watching the Rapier fighters with their usual impressive show. The boffers are over to the right of me, having fun. Oh to be a kid again! I'm watching the people mill around talking, socializing, gossiping. My lady is sitting by in under our sunshade, and we're holding hands.

But my attention is not fully on my lovely lady, or on any one thing. Rather my attention is in full alert mode, watching, waiting. Hoping I don't have to respond.

The tourney is Gyldenholt Anniversary. My sunshade has a banner matching my baldric - the device of the Chirurgeonate upon them both. And along with the sun beating down on me, the reality of what I have taken upon myself is just as heavy and hot. For I am CiC for this event - Chirurgeon in Charge.

My mind falls back to when I started this path. I had started my apprenticeship at Fall Potrero war, running behind the warranted Chirurgeons with my first attempt at a first aid kit. Doubling as a waterbearer. Discovering what I have just let myself in for. Armor bites. Bruises. Thirst and heat exhaustion. Making sure fighters drink enough fluid. Bloody noses and dirt everywhere. A Red Cross first aid and CPR class did **not** prepare me for this. A heat stroke case, and I'm assisting Lady Fortuna, my mind in a state I call "first level panic", where you tell your mind and body "You can panic and have the shakes ****LATER****!! For now, this person needs what help you can provide, so focus on that!"

And later, much later, as I'm thinking to myself "I can't do this! What the hell was I thinking?", the friends of the people I helped, the leaders, the people I did help, come up. Expecting condemnation, I hear instead two words. "Thank You." "You helped my friend." "You got me back into the battle." "You made sure my fighters had water and Gatorade." "You bandaged my nose." "You cleaned off my face." "You made sure I was okay afterwards." And Lady Fortuna's comment, that she is not displeased with my work.

"Thank you mi'lord."

There are no words to describe what that meant to me. The realization that I, in a small way, made a difference in these people's weekend, (and even their lives.) And I think "yes, I can do this."

So I leave that war. I build a new first aid kit based on what I learned, (and it's not finished yet!). I work tourneys, kit by my side. Praying none gets hurt - and yet hoping there is a minor injury, so I can sign off that event. (I suspect that the symbol of an apprentice Chirurgeon should be a vulture!) And the thank yous. The small kid who gives me a hug for bandaging a knee. The fighter who appreciates the moleskin and padding I put on their fighting hand, allowing them to

continue to play. The fighter with a broken strap who I toss a roll of duct tape at. I take advanced first aid classes, work on learning more.

The year turns, and it's this year's spring Potrero. And I finish up my apprenticeship where I started. And I think, as I'm bandaging an armor bite, "I did this."

Jitters and flutters in my all too twitchy stomach. It's Queen's champion tourney, and I'm to take my oath and become warranted. 8 months have passed since I started this path. My concerns and worries haunt my mind. Did I do enough to warrant? Did I learn what I needed to? Am I ready for this? Do my fellow chirurgeon's feel I'm ready for this?

"I affirm by my love for all life and healing..." the oath begins. I see the pride and love in my loved's eyes as I read it off. Have I earned that pride? Have I earned that right? And the voice inside me says: "If you haven't yet, then you must try and insure you do. And if you have, you must make sure you always maintain what you have earned."

That night, the weight of what I have done hits me, staring into the darkened room...

A week later, and I'm at Mile Square Park in Gyldenholt. I'm getting my feet wet as CiC for the Gyldenholt Archery Tourney. No injuries, all Deities be thanked. And I learn a lot from the autocrat for the event and their excellencies of Gyldenholt about being an officer at a tourney. And the responsibilities there of. Could I do this? I think so. I get called up by the autocrat, given a goblet with the Gyldenholt Archer's guild device on it - a thank you for coming up and helping.

A week later, and back to the Gyldenholt Anniversary tourney. Much, much larger than the week before. Friends are there. Their Excellencies of Gyldenholt are there. Their Excellencies of my home Barony, Calafia are here. And - oh Gods! - Their majesties are here! I made my baldric myself - a half yard of red linen-weave cotton, with a Chirurgeon's badge sewn on it. The fabric and patch does not weigh a lot, a few ounces at most.

I feel this baldric growing heavier by the second. The responsibility has hit me. If something goes wrong, I'm the person on the spot. I'm the one who helps; I'm the one who does the paperwork.

I'm the one who has to make things right if they go wrong, or try to.

Set up my supplies, and Introduce myself to the autocrats, introduce myself to the marshals. Make sure they know where I'm at and what I have. All the time wondering what the day will hold. Opening court, and soon afterwards, a lady with a bee sting arrives. Make sure the stinger is removed, clean and bandage. A call to the rapier field - a blade went under a gorget, hitting the Adam's apple. No injury, thankfully. Make a note to report this later to the autocrats and marshal. Can I do this? Person comes up - they cut their hand carving out a coconut. Clean off the blood, clean and bandage. The cut's not too deep. It's the person's fighting hand, and they are in the rapier lists. Make sure the bandage doesn't hinder their movement. Damn this baldric weighs a ton. Walk around the field, seeing who might need help. Chat with people from the

Caid list, getting faces to go with names. Accept a cookie from the Baroness of Calafia, who asks how things are going, assure her things are well. A child needs a band-aid. Another bee sting. Can I do this? Make sure people get water and gatorade. Use my misty mate throughout the day to cool people down. Make sure I use it myself. Pass out sunscreen. How did this baldric get so heavy? See who might be getting burned, and offer shade, water, and sunscreen. The Queen comes by, asks how things are going? Assure **her** things are well. Another kidlet needing a bandage. Can I do this? Feel guilt, feeling like I'm ignoring my lady, bravely among strangers because her beloved is crazy enough to take this job on. Can I do this? For that matter, **Should** I do this? How can 1/2 a yard of cotton weigh so much?

Closing court. I stand before the people, ask their Majesties for permission to speak. My baldric weighs heavy on my shoulder. A breath to overcome my normal shyness, and then a thank you to the fighters and marshals for their honor and chivalry, and for making my job a lot easier. Me, who rarely has been called up to court and **never** spoken before court and the people, saying this. Meaning it. Breaking down our supplies, trying to fit it all in my car for the drive home. And it starts....

“Thank you for coming up and helping.” “Thank you for treating my hand.” “Thank you for taking care of my bee sting.” “Thanks for watching out for us.” “Thank you.”

I'm sure this is the case for all who take on an office at a tourney, a shire, canton, barony or kingdom. The first time marshal, listmaster/mistress, and autocrat. The first time cook, herald, constable. The arts officer, the sciences officer. And while I'm unlikely to wear a crown or circlet, the first time Baron and Baroness, the first time King and Queen. I'm sure all of them go through this, where the symbol of their office and responsibility, so light before hand, gains weight while wearing.

How **did** this baldric get so heavy? The mind's way of handling the weight of responsibility I suppose. “Can I do this?” I ask, and you find out you can. For at the end of the day, if all has gone well and you have done your best, your little questioning voice speaks up again.

“Yes, you can do this after all.”

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