

# Consultation 101a — Armory

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## Bronwyn ferch Gwyn ap Rhys and Elena de Vexin

Device consultation should be a symbiotic process. The client has a need and perhaps some rough ideas about what kind of design would represent her best; you as the consulting herald have the knowledge of heraldry and the talent to put those ideas and knowledge together to make something that both of you will be proud of. Both of you get pay-back; and for the rest of your life in the SCA, you will be able to look at banners at events and know that you had a hand in designing some of them.

First of all, you should strike while the fire is the hottest – that is, when the client is relatively new to the Society and hasn't had a lot of disinformation about heraldry and registering arms and names. Many people who have been in the SCA for a long time have been predisposed to the idea that arms registration is hard, complex, full of red tape, and a waste of time; and that name registration is even worse. In either case, gentle persuasion works the best.

However, heraldic design is not necessarily an easy thing to do. This is especially true if you haven't learned how various elements—field divisions, ordinaries, subordinaries, charges—can be put together to make a device. Before you start consulting, you must make sure that you have read and really know the contents of the Rules for Submissions. You must also know the material covered in a good basic text on heraldry (e.g., Brooke-Little's *An Heraldic Alphabet*, Boutell's *Heraldry* or Fox-Davies' *A Complete Guide to Heraldry*), especially the material on tinctures, lines and fields, ordinaries, subordinaries, and charges. You should also have done something between scanning and reading the *Pictorial Dictionary of Heraldry* ("PicDic"). While you don't need to have all of the vocabulary down, it does help impress the crowd if you do.

A good consultant will have these elements memorized, especially the tinctures, lines of division, ordinaries, and subordinaries. You also need to know (and have practiced!) how these elements can be combined into a good, simple, clean device that is authentic in composition and pleasing to the eye. It's also a good idea to have a rough idea of what charges can be used.

## **Tools of the Trade**

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There are certain tools you will have to have with you when you are consulting:

### Books:

**Pictorial Dictionary of Heraldry (“PicDic”)**

**Rules for Submissions**

**Brooke-Little’s An Heraldic Alphabet**

-or-

**Parker’s A Glossary of Terms Used in Heraldry (this is available online at Google Books).**

### Tools

**Sketch escutcheons and badge squares (see Appendix for copies of all forms)**

**Pencils and a good eraser**

**Ruler (a protractor with a 6-inch ruler will do nicely)**

**Colored markers: The 10-color Crayola waterproof marker pack has become the standard used in the SCA**

## **The Consultation & Design Process**

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You have probably heard over and over that simple heraldry is impossible to get through the College of Arms. You may be surprised, then, to know that just the opposite is true: simple, elegant heraldry is still the easiest sort to get passed! It is also certainly the easiest to check for conflict, and the easiest to alter in those cases where conflict is found to occur.

Unless you are very experienced and think very fast, you will need to have about an hour for your first meeting with your client. When you first sit down with her<sup>1</sup>, remind the client that arms are not like clothing—they can’t be changed at the blink of an eye; that they are something that she will, in all likelihood, have for many years; that they are something to be proud of. Begin by telling her not to worry about correct blazonry when talking about what she wants, that the picture is paramount at this point and the pretty words can come later. Have her tell you about any ideas that she might have already had for a device and ask her to sketch it (or you sketch it as she tells you about it). Ask her about things that have special meaning for her—his favorite colors, favorite/totem animals, plants, a craft or skill in which she is interested, possibly even a proverb or saying that has special meaning. Ask her what kind of first impression she would like to put forth; what she would like

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<sup>1</sup> To save time and space, I’ve used the feminine to encompass the masculine. After all, all embryos start off as females anyway.

the world to know first about herself. Does she want to show a sense of humor?  
(Think 'canting')

Does she want to project a quality—gallantry? bravery? spirituality? love (or love lost)? As she mentions each item, write it down at the top of your sketch sheet. After she has finished, hand her the list and ask her to prioritize it.

Now is the time when all the hard work you have put in learning heraldry will come to fruition. Circle the items with the highest priority and suggest that you can begin the process by playing with those. If one of the priorities is an animal (as it is very often), discuss the various attitudes and attributes. Does she want to show hers beast salient? dormant? If a bird, should it be rising or displayed? Should it be facing dexter or sinister? Perhaps the client has already decided that she wants only a leg or a head; or perhaps she wants a maintained tertiary charge. Talk about proper (remember the Rule of Contrast—a brown bear on a black field will get bumped, as will a yellow canary on white). Remember that inanimate objects look best when displayed upright along a line of division (although an anvil palewise still looks rather strange to my eye). Also remember that only overt, overly religious designs are forbidden—there's nothing wrong with someone including one cross or one crown of thorns or a bundle of mistletoe. And while it may be difficult to pass a device with a unicorn on it, it's not impossible (and using a griffin in Northshield really is permissible).

And now a special word about ordinaries. When a device is rejected, it is far too common for a young herald to find that extra CD by adding a bordure or an ordinary. Alas, all too often this addition brings neither balance nor beauty to the design. If you need to find an additional CD, think rather about altering the field in some way—add or change the line of division or vary the line in some way. Add a secondary charge. These changes are usually far less destructive to your design.

This is not to say that bordures or other ordinaries are completely forbidden; their use should be tempered with common sense. All ordinaries and subordinaries should be treated exactly as you would any other charge, which means that they should be considered as part of the whole design. They work best when they are part of the design from the beginning rather than just “slapped on” for the sake of a CD. Therefore, for the sake of your client (who must live with hers device far longer than you will), think twice (or even thrice) before offering up suggestions for change. Then, as in the initial design process, offer several changes for consideration.

Once you have hit on a design which your client likes, give her the sketch to take home. Tell her to hang it on the refrigerator for a week and if she still likes it, you'll be happy to help her send it in.

## Completing a Submission

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After a design has been agreed upon, but before you have had it redrawn for submission, check it for conflicts against the SCA A&O. If it is clear, it is time to send in a submission, and you are faced with your final problem: Someone has got to draw the damn thing! There are several different tracks you can take:

The client may know how to draw and take responsibility for rendering the emblazon herself. In most ways this is preferable since if the client then dislikes the device she has only herself to blame;

or

You take responsibility for the emblazon by:

**Finding someone to draw it:** Sometimes finding a competent artist can be difficult, especially if you're new to the CoH or in a new group. If this is the case, contact your regional herald or regional Signet. Both of them will know of people who can help you (many scribes love doing heraldic work, and the regional Signet will know who is nearest and best qualified to help you).

**Drawing it yourself.** Many heralds I know believed they couldn't draw when they first started. Some of them were right; but many of them learned that they could be "competent draftsmen" if not "artists." If you choose to try heraldic art, you will need to pick up a good "tech pen"—a waterproof black pen. (As both a scribe and a herald, I recommend the Sakura Micron Pigma brand, which is disposable, lasts for a long time and comes in several widths and colors. Get a 0.05 mm ("Pigma05") for outlining and a 0.01 or 0.005 mm for detail work. If you're really hard pressed, find the appropriate charge in the PicDic, enlarge it with a photocopier and do a cut-and-paste original.

In either case, do not suggest sending in the submission until your client has seen and approved the final drawing. This will save you huge headaches if, for some unknown reason, the drawing does not conform with what the client intends.

## The Blazon:

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You should, by all means, try to construct an appropriate blazon for the device; however if you are having problems, say something like "Please adjust or rewrite blazon to ensure that it properly describes the emblazon." This will let the senior heralds know that you really do mean the emblazon to be correct, and will also prevent the device from coming back for re-blazoning.

After the emblazon is drawn and has been properly reduced for the miniature, sit down with the client and help her to fill out the forms. While it is preferable for the client to then taken the forms for photocopying and coloring, some heralds have found it easier to do themselves.

Occasionally, you will find a client who just won't be reasoned, wheedled, bullied, cajoled, coerced or otherwise convinced to play by the CoA rules. Generally this type of person has been told by her friends that all heralds are poops (or perhaps even nastier things), already decided on a design, and has adopted a belligerent attitude towards the entire process of registering a name and device. Note well: many times these people have lots of talent, lots of energy and are only borderline SCA: the way they are treated by members of our College can determine not only whether they ultimately learn to play nice but also whether they play at all. At first, the client will refuse to even consider changing their heraldically inappropriate device. In those cases, don't argue.

Give her the reasons (complete with page and rule number) why you don't think it will pass, but ask her to say"). Then send it up the line and let the next higher levels return it.

At this point, you can play "good herald/bad herald," letting the Compass and Keythong Herald in Kingdom (or Laurel, although at this point most rejections occur at the Kingdom level) be the bad guys. You can take the letter of rejection back to your client and show her what went wrong, saying something like "This doesn't mean we have to abandon everything. Let's see if we can use the elements that are really important to you to make a passable device." You might want to lend her a copy of "The Philosophical Roots of Heraldic Design" to help you explain why SCA heraldry is the way it is. Then, go carefully through the consultation process, making sure that you stay completely professional and non-judgmental in your attitude. If you handle the situation with patience, good humor and appropriate use of your vast knowledge of heraldry, you can still turn it around.

Please remember that you cannot return or reject a submission. Only the Kingdom Herald or the Laurel Sovereign of Arms can do that. If you think there is something wrong with a submission—for example, conflict with the arms of Scotland, or violation of the Rule of Contrast—then you should explain it to the submitter and try to convince her to correct it. However if your client really wants her device exactly as drawn, then you should shrug your shoulders and tell her to send it off to Compass Herald. If the device is rejected, then, even though you may have to start from scratch, she may be willing to create a more passable device.

But no matter how friendly your client is to this process, if you have to redesign to eliminate a conflict, you will need to do some homework. Before the meeting in which you explain why the device failed, take the time to dig out your original sketch sheet or sketch out five or six new variations which use the client's charges (and perhaps some additional suggestions based on your previous discussions with her). After you have explained the deficiencies in her previous design, pull out your suggestions and go over the rationale for each design and how you feel that each fulfills the client's perceived desires and needs. While she may reject all your advance work, this will

**(hopefully) be a starting point, and she will now begin to come up with ideas of her own.**

**It isn't uncommon for a new herald to have a number of devices returned for simple problems. If this happens to you, don't give up! Consider each return as an error that you won't have to commit again. And remember: every single senior herald throughout the Known World once knew absolutely nothing about heraldry (in fact, I'll hazard a guess that most of them started out in heraldry because their local group needed a herald and they were "turkeyed" into it). Remember, too, that both Northshield College of Heraldry's senior members, as well as the heralds who participate on the SCA-wide Heraldry List, are only too happy to help others better learn this strange craft we've chosen, and probably pick up some new knowledge for themselves at the same time!**