

Appendix D: Visiting a Foreign Court

Visiting foreign court (any court not of your character's liege) is a common event for a knight. They might be acting as a guard for their traveling liege lord or lady or be with other knights on an adventure. Certain protocols exist, and the knights should follow them, barring truly exceptional circumstances.

Meeting Foreign Knights on Patrol

The Player-knights may occasionally journey to other counties or kingdoms. Most knights (including the Player-knights) must patrol their county borders as part of their duties; all know the conventions that apply when meeting a patrol.

Meeting a patrol will almost certainly occur shortly after crossing into a different county or kingdom. The Skills of Courtesy and Recognize come into play here. A successful Courtesy roll assures that your character makes a good impression on the patrol and smooths relations. A successful Recognize roll allows Player-knights to learn something about the foreign knights, especially their famous Skills and Combat Skills and which lord they serve, which gives important information and may allow for social intrigue or flattery.

If the foreign lord or lady expects the Player-knights' arrival, one of the local knights welcomes and invites them to the lord's castle and escorts them there. The knight also sends a messenger to hastily inform the lord or lady, who prepares the castle or hall for guests.

If the lord or lady does not expect the Player-knights, then the patrolling knights demand to know their business and expect them to announce their intentions. The Player-knights know they should make a peaceful gesture and state their business or simply state they are "passing through." The patrol may allow the Player-knights to pass (particularly if their respective lords are on friendly terms) but may opt to bring them to their lord's castle for questioning instead.

The Player-knights know that resistance creates hostilities. If the Player-knights refuse to give information, then the guards probably become suspicious and touchy. The Gamemaster may add a modifier to a Suspicious roll, on the patrol's behalf, the success of which results in the patrol interpreting the Players' refusal as a hostile act. If the patrol outnumbered the Player-knights, they may attack, with an enemy squire or messenger galloping to the castle with this dire news as combat is joined. The lord will probably muster up his household knights, arm himself, and hasten to the spot where combat is occurring (if the castle is close

or has occurred (if it is farther.) Fighting with the local patrol makes enemies, and the lord needs to show no mercy toward strangers.

At the Gate of a Foreign Castle

If no patrol intercepts the Player-knights, they may find a castle gate open to local traffic during the day. A handful of guards are always at the gate to check the identity and business of everyone who enters, especially armed and mounted knights.

If the gate is closed, the normal procedure for a party is to ride to the gate and knock, blow a horn, ring a bell, or simply shout until someone comes to listen to them. This person is usually called the porter because their job is to tend the port, or door. Being a porter is a prestigious job at any castle since they determine who enters immediately or later. A successful **Courtesy** roll may help the Players if they are unexpected. The porter may decide to allow entry right away but is more likely to send a message to his liege lord. The Player-knights must wait patiently outside the gate, even if the weather is miserable.

At some point, a castellan, steward, or other official shows up and welcomes the knights to the court. Hospitality must be extended by the lord's man and accepted by the visitors, as discussed under the "**Hospitality**" Passion on p. 22 of *Book II*.



THE COURTYARD

Upon entering the gates, grooms and stewards meet the visitors, offering to take their steeds. Knights ought to order their squires to take care of their horses anyway, with the grooms assisting them. It is likely that the squires will remain in or near the stables until summoned the next day, as it is their duty to watch over their knights' horses and belongings. However, a Player-knight is free to use their squire as a body servant and messenger, as needs be. The squires receive food and can find a bed in the hay in the stables.

BEING INTRODUCED TO THE COURT

Servants escort the visitors into the presence of the reigning lord or lady, who may be in their high seat, bed chamber (it is not unheard-of for lords to receive guests from their beds), or otherwise engaged in some other duty. They will welcome the knights and ask their names if unknown. The Player-knight with the highest Glory ought to reply for everyone and make a Courtesy roll, the outcome of which may determine the tone of the encounter. The lord may ask about their business or inquire as to their destination but is not obligated to do so, as it is the old Cymric custom to offer hospitality first. Once welcomed, the knights are at the mercy of their host, who usually invites them to stay as long as they wish. The knights are then escorted away from the lord's presence. The lord is under no obligation to see them again. A successful Courtesy roll may grant an invite to dine with the lord's family.

A guide, perhaps a chamberlain or dapifer ("meat server"), or perhaps some of the pages or squires of the court, will take the knights to their quarters. Depending on the period and the wealth of the lord, this could be a furnished tower room, which the Player-knights share, but could just as easily be a pile of clean straw in the hall. The normal resident of the room (or floor space) will move out to make room for the Player-knights. A separate guest house (if it exists) is usually reserved for very important visitors, such as diplomats or agents of the king. A successful Courtesy roll could open its door to even the lowliest knight.

The Player-knights receive facilities to wash away the grime of the road. Ewers and buckets of water are available, along with soap and towels. If the leader is of significant rank, they are also provided a bath, and other knights may use it after them—the water is not usually changed.

If the knights receive an invitation to dine with the lord's family, they are expected to don their very best clothing. If their manners greatly impress their hosts, or their hosts are particularly generous, they may also offer costly robes for the visitors to wear during their stay.

During their stay, the lord or lady grants the knights limited leave of the castle. One of the court servants always escorts them and deftly tries to steer them away from the things the lord does not want them to see or talk about. If the servant is a commoner, a successful Folklore may put them at ease, and a successful Intrigue roll may allow a Player-knight to learn something about the goings-on of the castle, and perhaps if anything out of the ordinary is occurring.

Once they have received Hospitality, Player-knights should not depart the castle without the lord's permission. This is called "begging one's leave" and is a vital component of Hospitality. Departing without begging one's leave will cost the visitors one point of Hospitality. When the time is right, the lord or lady may give them a gift of food for the road, instructions on how to get to the next destination, and perhaps a guide for the next leg of the journey. They may also offer a parting stirrup cup of wine and even ask the knights to bear messages or tidings to individuals in other courts if the lord or lady holds them in esteem.



Dining at the Lord's or Lady's Table

As dinner draws closer, a servant brings the Player-knights to the great hall and gives them seats that are appropriate to their station, bumping the residents down to make room. Notable or renowned knights may receive an offer of a seat at the high table, possibly next to the lord or lady.

Dinner talk is for boasting, good humor, and trivialities. If the lord holds to the old Cymric tradition of Hospitality, they ask the Player-knights their business only after the final course is served. A request for news of the outside world may precede or follow this request and could be an opportunity for Player-knights to make Orate rolls.

ENTERTAINMENT

The lord offers amusements to the Player-knights during their stay. The lord may simply wish to show off their wealth and generosity, or they could like the Player-knights and enjoy their company, or they may wish to offer distractions to delay a purposeful meeting with the Player-knights for political or diplomatic reasons.

In the evenings, usually after dinner, the lord summons entertainers to the main hall. These include musicians of all stripes, including singers, harpists, lutists, flutists, and drummers. Jugglers, pantomimists, and fools will dazzle with mirthful and exciting acts of physical dexterity or humor. Entertainment may include poetry recitations and music from a renowned bard if the court is particularly wealthy or famous. Player-knights may offer, or be commanded, to perform for the court's amusement. They may attempt rolls on their Compose, Orate, Play (Instrument), and Singing Skills to impress their noble hosts (or not). Gamemasters should encourage their Players to role-play these events.

A dance is also a common amusement, and Player-characters have a chance to show off their moves by making successful Dancing rolls, which endears them to the court and anyone with whom they are currently Flirting.

Sometimes, Player-knights may partake in games of chance or skill. Gambling is a common enough pastime for nobles, and Player-knights may have the opportunity to win or lose some denarii at the table, depending on their Gaming rolls.

In the days to come, their host may ask the Player-knights to join a hunt and exercise their Hunting Skill or demonstrate their Falconry Skill. A servant will always accompany them and either get what the Player-knights want or else tell them why they cannot have it. Outside of their quarters, it is hard to find time to be alone with anyone but the escort.

Clarion the Diplomat

Sir Clarion has been chosen to negotiate peace with a neighboring baron on behalf of his lord. His goals include the following: (1) Gain free access along the barony's trade roads; (2) Obtain relinquishment of claims on hunting rights in the Bedegraine Forest; (3) Obtain tollage rights at Highwater Bridge.

His lord, King Leodegrance, gives Sir Clarion £10 in Roman silver to help grease the wheels. Over the course of the scenario, Sir Clarion hands out £4 in "gifts" and engages in three opposed Courtesy rolls (for diplomacy purposes) against courtiers and the rival baron himself.

He wins two, gaining the baron's concession on the trade roads and hunting rights in the Bedegraine Forest. The baron will not, however, budge on tollage rights.

Sir Clarion mounts up and rides home to deliver the mixed news to King Leodegrance.

Diplomacy at Court

Player-knights may be on a diplomatic mission for their lieges or wish to engage in the fine art of diplomacy for personal gain. The simple version of diplomacy is for the Player-knight to meet in private with the lord or lady (and perhaps their councilors, clerks, and priests) and state what they wish to obtain. Then they present £1D6+3 in the form of gifts; those not meeting this minimum requirement of gift value suffers a -5 to all Courtly Skills for the purposes of diplomacy, at the very least. Proud or Selfish lords may send the Player-knights away or confiscate goods from them instead!

The opposing diplomat could be the lord or lady or one of their representatives. The Gamemaster determines the opposing diplomat's Courtesy Skill with a roll of 3D6+4. It is quite possible that the opponent is famous for their diplomatic skills.

An opposed Courtesy contest between diplomats determines the winner, that is, who gets their desires fulfilled. The entire scenario may be handled with one Courtesy roll, or several over several days of negotiations. For particularly difficult cases, the Gamemaster may impose a reflexive modifier of -5/+5 or even -10/+10.

Spying at Court

Player-knights may have to spy on someone for their liege while at a foreign court. To spy is to seek information from someone who wants to keep it private. This is a treacherous

undertaking. As mentioned, it is difficult for Player-knights to find time to be alone with anyone but the assigned escort; they may probe the escort for information, who may also be trained to resist Intrigue with their own Intrigue Skill.

The Player-knight must first select an informant. Anyone at court, within reason, is eligible to be an informant, including officers of the court, ladies, handmaidens, lords, courtiers, and squires. Any servants, even noble ones, may be corruptible and act from personal interest.

Once an informant is selected, the Player-knight must first find common ground and persuade them to speak. This can be accomplished by Flirting, seduction (see above), using a Skill to demonstrate knowledge of a shared interest (like Falconry, Hunting, Heraldry, Gaming, etc.), giving a gift (valued in £), doing a Favor, hunting or hawking together, going on a short adventure, and myriad other ways to establish rapport.

Lastly, an opposed resolution between the Player-knight's and informant's Intrigue Skill determines the outcome. Since the informant knows not to share certain types of information with people from outside of court, they may modify or augment their Skill with a Passion, such as Fealty or Loyalty.

Accommodations

When traveling through strange lands, knights normally stay at any castle, manor, monastery, or other settlement they encounter along their way. Hospitality is an honored tradition, and the custom is to help any traveler, appropriate to their status.

Most people travel very little and are likely to be starved for information and gossip about the outside world. Thus, strangers who are known not to be enemies are welcome, and if they are entertaining, then they are all the more welcome.

If it is an enemy who has inadvertently come to the door, the porter simply stalls for a while, perhaps exchanging bitter or insulting words with the travelers, while knights take up arms and prepare to rush out and capture the foe.

More information on the rules of hospitality and visiting a court are given in the previous parts of this section.

Monasteries welcome all guests. Grooms attend horses, and guests have a place to clean up and rest. Separate quarters are generally available for different social ranks, thus keeping the nobility away from the commoners. The abbot might actually offer his quarters to Barons and Round Table knights. Commoners receive typical austere monkish fare, but knights and nobles feed upon richer victuals with the abbot.

Where no decent accommodations exist, knights seek to stay at peasant dwellings. Commoners are usually reluctant to allow powerful strangers into their houses and may recommend someone in town who is less suspicious. A potentially agreeable host tentatively agrees but usually complains that he is poor with nothing to spare and hints at being compensated somehow. They dicker over the price until an agreement is reached. Nothing is guaranteed except what both parties agree upon in advance.

Public inns do not develop until late in King Arthur's reign, and at first only in cities and market towns. Initially, inns are of poor quality. They are unlikely to have private accommodations, a menu to choose from, or food other than common peasant fare. The building is likely to house everyone in a large common room with a single fireplace.

Finally, if no accommodations are available, knights camp out on the cold, hard ground, those traveling with pavilion tents will find the experience somewhat more tolerable.