



DEVOURING THE DRAGON AT MEDIEVAL TIMES

Ye Olde Shakedown

By Michael Nagrant

NORMALLY I MIGHT PASS ON THE OPPORTUNITY to chow on banquet-level catering while dudes in tights fight with swords. However, there comes a time (or twenty) in every father's life when he must suspend his disbelief and honor the whims of his child.

And so I spent my Saturday night eating baby dragon. Or at least that's what my serving wench called it. Or was that my bar wench? One can't be too sure, for the consumption of too many glasses of mead (read: piña coladas) makes one hazy. But, a wench it was. Welcome to Medieval Times!

'Twould be easy to storm this suburban castle, lay it ablaze, and retreat to my urban citadel. Easier yet to let the grandparents do the heavy lifting while I stayed behind and checked in on the latest taco stand. But I am not a food snob. My food-writing career started with a non-ironic tribute to the Olive Garden salad (oh, frigid iceberg lettuce, tasteless black olives, fat garlicky salty croutons, spiceless pepperoncinis and sweet Italian vinaigrette, how I love thee). And though that career may end with this treatise on Schaumburg-area dinner theater, maybe there was something to learn?

It is hard, however, to find truth in a place decked out with more fantastic frockery than a Lady Gaga fan-club gathering. Add in the Poison-worthy (get well soon Bret Michaels!) smoke-machine levels and laser light show, the weaponry kiosk (real maces, swords and daggers, oh my!) in the lobby, and well, it's enough to send one straight to the tavern.

Fortunately, Medieval Times, like Frontera Grill, knows that anytime you have a thousand or more people waiting in line to eat, you also have a lot of thirsty folks, and so you should build a really big bar to make some extra money. However, as good a businessman as Rick Bayless is, he does not offer dry-ice-filled smoking margarita collector's mugs priced at \$16 with the promise of \$8 refills.

Some might say that's because such a move is a cheap money grab or cheesy. Who can say? I can. Save your money and stick to the free plastic cup that looks like a chess rook. If you are an aficionado of Bourbon Street or Girls Gone Wild videos, you will love the rotating Slurpee-like machines filled with piña coladas, strawberry and mango daiquiris. The piña colada smells and tastes just a bit too much like sweet suntan lotion to earn a full-thumbs-up, but I've had worse.

But, this is a small price to pay for the pageantry of a Princess Leonore, who looks a lot like Natalie Portman as Queen Amidala in "Star Wars," pleading for the return of her prince. Actually what's most worthwhile is contemplating how much conditioner is used by the jousting "knights," most of whom forswear extensions in favor of real-life Farrah Fawcett-like tresses. It's remarkable how many of these actors look like, and display the righteous indignation of Dante Hicks from "Clerks." They would be interchangeable in a Kevin Smith-directed seventies period piece if they traded in their noble steeds for bitchin' Camaros.

So, what of the baby dragon? It's one of the better roast chickens I've had in a while, on par in many ways in terms of moistness and seasoning with the spicy charcoal-roasted number at D'Candela, minus the smoky char. Though, I wished the skin crispy and not saggy like a pile of used pantyhose as it was.

The dragon's tail soup, which tasted remarkably like tomato bisque, could have used more salt and a little more brightening acid. The accompanying garlic bread can be replicated by procuring a box bearing the moniker Texas Toast from your local freezer case. The herb-basted potato may have been basted only with heat for it was mostly dessicated. The ribs were not bad if you subscribe to the baked-meat jello, i.e. Windsor, Ontario, Canada school of preparation.

As it was hard for me to shake my cynicism, I spent a great deal of time looking at this experience, as much as possible through my 3-year-old son's eyes. Though he clapped during a few combat scenes and gummed the chicken with fervor, days later, he's not quite as enthusiastic—his LED-lighted plastic sword now cast aside—for Medieval Times as he was for Yo Gabba Gabba Live.

While I can't decide if Medieval Times is a step up or a step down from the ubiquitous traveling summer Renaissance Festival (steroidal turkey legs! The king's nuts!), I know it wasn't a total waste. I actually learned something: Medieval Times originated on the Spanish island of Majorca in 1973. There's something really comforting in knowing that America is not entirely responsible for the promulgation of such kitsch.

Medieval Times, 2001 North Roselle, Schaumburg, (866)543-9637

Select fashion shows, trunk shows, sales and events. See boutiqueville.com for more listings.

THU/6

Bring in Spring City Soles Event

20 percent off all new spring footwear. Enjoy cocktails, music, raffles and giveaways. City Soles, 2001 W. North, 10am-10pm.

K-Fleye Spring Trunk Show

Get a sneak peak at K-Fleye's Spring/Summer collection: kfleye.com. Macy's, 111 N. State, first floor jewel, 10-6pm.

FRI/7

Hollywood Glam at Park 52

Hollywood Glam Fashion Premiere and Party featuring K-Fleye, Double Stitch, Entourage Man, Kham'ryn B, Anna Fog. All guests must RSVP and receive confirmation at eve@eventsbyeve.com or call (773)933-4781. Complimentary admission, complimentary cocktails, invitation only. Park 52, 5201 S. Harper, doors open at 10pm.

Melting Luxe Fashion Show

The Ugly Step Sister Art Gallery is hosting the fashion show and festivities. Featuring clothing line, Rosina-Mae at 9:30pm. Wine and hors d'oeuvres served and musical entertainment by Argentinean DJ Alistair Gillespie. Admission is free and the event is open to the public. thearttrade.com. 1044 W. Fulton Market, doors open at 8pm.

SAIC Fashion 2010

SAIC's annual fashion show takes place in the Griffin Court of the Art Institute's Modern Wing. Fashion and art lovers will have the opportunity to see a multimedia runway show featuring cutting-edge garments by the next generation of SAIC designers. The 10pm "best of" presentation is part of NightWalk, a new late-night fashion party that kicks off at 9pm. For more information, (312)629-6710. The Art Institute of Chicago-Modern Wing, Griffin Court, 159 E. Monroe, 2pm and 10pm.

SAT/8

Gary Graham Event

Meet Gary Graham and shop his Spring collection and specialty pieces, for one night only. robinrichman.com, (773)278-6150. Robin Richman, 2108 N. Damen, 5-8pm.

"Not Your Grannies Panties" Vintage Clothing Sale

Eskell is teaming up with Kokorokoko and Chi-Town Vintage for their second annual vintage clothing bazaar. For information, go to eskill.com or call (773)486-0830. Eskell, 1509 N. Milwaukee, 11-8pm. Also, SUN/9, noon-5pm.

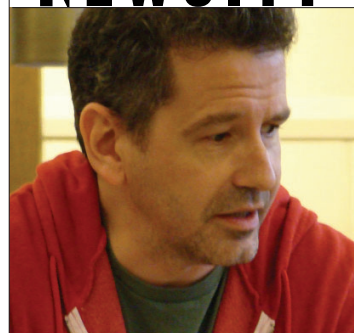
Styling the Modern Man

An annual event developed to provide men with an outlet for experiencing the latest fashions, gadgets and luxuries. Afternoon event, free and open to the public. Gala tickets, \$35; \$40 at the door. For information about the event or to buy gala tickets online, go to stylingthemodernman.com. The Lair, 12-5pm.

TUE/11

Fashion Columbia 2010 Show

Fashion Columbia is a showcase of Columbia College student work. Tickets are \$200 per person. Purchase tickets (312)369-7420 by April 26. Chicago Public Library/Winter Garden, 400 S. State, 9th floor, 11:30-1:30pm.



Cromer photos from rehearsal
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