

**How Curious transcript – What goes down at the Medieval Fair of Norman?  
28<sup>th</sup> April 2026**

**MUSIC:** How Curious theme

**Rachel Hopkin Script**

Hello, I'm Rachel Hopkin and this is KGOU's How Curious

FAIR ATMOS

**Riley as Solus**

My character is Solus. It's a *Star Wars* character that I've kind of transformed for medieval.

**Rachel Hopkin Script**

I ran into Solus at the Medieval Fair of Norman earlier this month. Although he was very personable, he looked quite menacing. He was dressed in all black and wore a forbidding dark grey and red full coverage facial mask.

**Riley as Solus**

I've hand sewn this robe, well, I had some help but now I know how to do it myself. And then I've 3D printed this mask. It's based off of *Star Wars: The Old Republic*. It's a Sith Acolyte.

**Rachel Hopkin Script**

This was my first visit to the Fair and I was slightly perplexed.

**Rachel-in-situ**

In what way is it medieval?

**Riley as Solus**

Essentially just in that I've traded the light saber for a wand I made [laughs]. But the way I kind of justify it is that *Star Wars* starts out in "a long time ago in a galaxy far, far away," so ... "a long time ago."

**Rachel Hopkin Script**

Solus told me he's been coming to the Medieval Fair every year that he's lived in Norman since 2018.

**Rachel-in-situ**

What brings you here?

**Riley as Solus**

I love it, the atmosphere, I love seeing people getting dressed up, and all the little knick-knacks you can buy. It gives me a chance to be someone else entirely, not because I don't like myself, but it's fun to dress up and see the reactions and that sort of thing.

**Rachel Hopkin Script**

My encounter with Solus highlighted a number of recurrent themes of Norman's Medieval Fair, which celebrated its 50th birthday in 2026. Embracing escapism, a delight in dressing up and

role playing, and an often somewhat loose approach to historical accuracy. I saw mermaids and fairies and those in steam punk garb, amid others who looked somewhat more “medieval-ish” for want of a better word. All this among a cornucopia of goings on – all day live music and other performances; scores of food and arts and crafts vendors; plus various opportunities to participate in activities that you might not see in your usual everyday life.

FX  
SWORD FIGHTING

**Ducky Walker**

So we are a “Fight the Knight” booth, sword fighting booth.

**Rachel Hopkin Script**

This is Ducky Walker.

**Ducky Walker**

Step into the arena, beat the love into your friends, family, your foes.

**Rachel-in-situ**

So how do you do the combat, what are the instructions?

**Ducky Walker**

It’s Monty Python.

**Rachel Hopkin Script**

I think this means it’s based on the travails of the Black Knight in *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*.

**Ducky Walker**

So you get hit in the arm, you lose the arm, get hit in the leg, you lose the leg. Centre mass is instant death.

**Rachel-in-situ**

And what kind of people tend to do this? I see you’ve got two young men there.

**Ducky Walker**

All ages. I’ve seen people ... if they’re old enough to crawl, they’re old enough to brawl.

**Rachel Hopkin Script**

Ducky told me that he’s worked the sword fighting booth on the fair circuit for a number of years.

**Rachel Hopkin Script**

In full transparency, I should mention that the Medieval Fair of Norman is put on by University of OK Outreach, which is also the entity that oversees KGOU operations. And it belongs to the genre of festival that also encompasses Renaissance Fairs. Although their names refer to two distinct historic periods, in this context the two share much in common according to public historian Cate Kurtz.

### **Cate Kurtz**

So medieval and renaissance is really an interchangeable term. They all are encompassed by this idea of The Fair. But all of the festivals are the same macro and minor details of performance, education, craftsmanship. So really, it's the backdrop of the festival. Norman, for example, set their fair during the reign of King Edward III and they're in the town of Avalon. So really it's a kind of set dressing and it informs the characters you might see walking around the festival. But it's really interchangeable. All fairs are anachronistic.

### **Rachel Hopkin Script**

Avalon, of course, is a mystical place from Arthurian legend whilst King Edward III was a real English monarch who ruled for over 50 years during the 14<sup>th</sup> Century. And in fact, the Norman Medieval Fair is set during one specific year of his reign, according to Ann Marie Eckart, the coordinator of the event.

### **Ann Marie Eckart**

We decided to stick with 1360 to make it easier to have focus for our cast.

### **Rachel Hopkin Script**

Of which there are over 50 official members, including the fair's very own King Edward III.

### **Ann Marie Eckart**

Prior to that, we've been all over the place. The Royal Court has been everything from fantasy to 900, 1100, going back and forth. People had to keep changing costumes, so we picked 1360 because it's the happiest year. We think the war is over. We don't yet know that it's going to be the Hundred Years War and our men are coming home from war, and everyone is happy. It's peaceful and prosperous 1360. And we think the plague is gone, because it's been gone for almost two years, even though it's going to come back next year. But since we don't know the future, we're very happy [laughing].

### **Rachel Hopkin Script**

The very first Medieval Fair of Norman took place way back in 1977. Here's Cate Kurtz again.

### **Cate Kurtz**

The Fair was originally organized by the University of Oklahoma English Department as a forum for students to engage in medieval scholarship and field interest in the humanities. Another goal was to dispel the common frame that the medieval period was dark and sombre, whereas in fact it was a period of intellectual and social activity. So there were a number of people involved in creating this original fair, but Chaucer scholars Sally Mussetter and Don Rose are credited with spearheading the project. So Mussetter attended a fair back in Houston, Texas, earlier that year, and she was inspired to bring it back to Norman. And then April was chosen as the month for the festival because it's William Shakespeare's birth month, and coincidentally, the first festival was held on April 23<sup>rd</sup> which is kind of the contested birth date of Shakespeare.

SEGUE

### **Ann Marie Eckart**

I've talked to two people who were involved in the planning at the beginning of it.

**Rachel Hopkin Script**

This is Ann Marie Eckart again.

**Ann Marie Eckart**

And it's like "oh, we thought it would be just small, we'd do it between some of the buildings on the South Oval.

**Rachel Hopkin Script**

That's an open area that's part of the OU Norman campus.

**Ann Marie Eckart**

They were really glad they changed their minds and did it at the top of the South Oval because they had a big attendance the very first year. Everybody loved it. They had people come up from SCA from Texas and do fighting in what was referred to as the Passion Pit.

**Rachel Hopkin Script**

The SCA is the Society for Creative Anachronism, a non-profit which is dedicated to researching and recreating aspects of pre-17<sup>th</sup> century European life; and the Passion Pit is a sunken area on the South Oval.

**Ann Marie Eckart**

Fine Arts performed some dances and some pageant plays. There were some high schools that came and performed some different plays. There were student organizations, like some folk dancers that were performing throughout the day. And it was just an amazing first event and everybody loved it.

**Rachel Hopkin Script**

That first Med Fair, as it's sometimes called, was part of a general vogue which had been fomenting for some time. Here's Cate Kurtz again.

**Cate Kurtz**

So the first renaissance festival, as we know it today, appeared in the 1960s as a segment of counter culture in reaction to the Cold War. So in Laurel Canyon, you had all of these Bohemians who were also including actors who were being persecuted during the Red Scare, and some of them were Phyllis and Ron Patterson who were working in Laurel Canyon. While they were in there, they were kind of inspired by this early employment that Phyllis had there to teach drama to children. And so they were trying to figure out a way to instruct these, like, 80 children from 6-12 on historical events while keeping them engaged, so they had this idea of bringing play into it. So they worked with the local station and they had the first renaissance festival. People attended, it was very popular, and I think it just really hit this period in American history in the 60s where medieval culture starts simmering again. Movies are coming out, plays are popular, and I think part of it is you have the stress of the unrest of the '60s, especially as you get into the later 60s. And I think people start looking at ways of escapism. In history, we talk about the "return to the land" movement where hippies are going "let's live off the land." And I see that also as "let's return so far back to the land" that we're going to this fantastical era of chivalric

knights, and there's heraldry blowing in the wind. And then after that, they slowly start dotting around the U.S.

### **Rachel Hopkin Script**

Including, of course here in Norman. Since that first fair, it's grown quite a bit and has had to relocate a couple of times as a result. Now it takes place at Reaves Park south of downtown and regularly attracts huge crowds. I asked Cate how typical it was of this type of festival.

### **Cate Kurtz**

To some degrees, it's typical, in the sense that it's blending education with entertainment, but something that is singular to the Norman fair is that it's one of the free festivals you can attend. Most renaissance festivals have some kind of cover charge to enter but the Norman fair is a pop up event for three days and it's free which is also great because they have some years reported like 355 thousand people who attend. So it's exceptionally big and it's spatially very large. And then with that as well, they have the added difficulty of not having permanent structures, whereas a lot of renaissance festivals are on land they rent, so you have these permanent villages you can walk through, but Norman is really a ... they build it up over the year, and then you get to experience the wonder that they're able to create.

SEGUE

### **Linda Linn**

I compare it to building a city ...

### **Rachel Hopkin Script**

Linda Linn is a past coordinator of the fair.

### **Linda Linn**

...in that you have to create all the infrastructure that a city would need, like water, sewage, trash, mapping. I mean, we have to map out the fair so participants know where they're going to be setting up their booth, where visitors know to go: "where is this stage where I want to see this performance?" We have to have streets for that reason on our maps. Police. Fire. Medical. Everything that a small city would need, we have to make sure we have at Medieval Fair.

### **Rachel Hopkin Script**

It is quite the undertaking, and all this makes way for – as Cate put it – the wonder they're able to create. There's so much going on – musicians, jugglers, acrobats, dancers, a human chess board, live jousting is one of the most popular events, plus all the vendors. And then there's the Royal Court, headed by King Edward III and his wife Queen Philippa. They're played by Mark Jackson and Ashley Oliver respectively. I asked them what their roles entailed.

### **Mark Jackson**

We're kind of the face of English royalty for people to look at and go "oh, there's the king, there's the queen." We hear that a lot when we're wandering around the fair. So it's basically just being there as a visual for people to see. But we also do something where we have open court and anybody who wants to can come up, visit us, and we will bestow a title upon them. We can

knight them, we can make them a princess, we can make them a wizard, we can make them a dark overlord of the universe, you know, whatever it is they want. And so we have a little interaction with them. Sometimes they'll take pictures with us. We're basically there just to smile and wave and make people hopefully enjoy their time there.

**Ashley Oliver**

Take them back in time.

**Mark Jackson**

Yeah

**Rachel Hopkin Script**

I watched quite a few people getting titles bestowed upon them in rather whimsical exchanges, like this one. Sorry that it's a bit hard to hear. It was a very noisy environment.

**Member of Royal Court 1**

Good morrow, your highnesses. May I introduce Diaz, who wishes to receive the title of the Gamemaker today.

**Member of Royal Court 2**

Very well, Gamemaker in what capacity?

**Diaz**

I make board games.

**Member of Royal Court 2**

Ah, excellent. Do you promise to make the greatest board games the land has ever seen?

**Diaz**

Of course I will.

**Member of Royal Court 2**

Do you promise to sell them at an affordable price?

**Diaz**

Always, always.

**Member of Royal Court 2**

Third, do you promise to give one to me?

**Diaz**

If I can find you, yes.

**Member of Royal Court 2**

Excellent. Very well then, Diaz, please kneel. In the name of God, St. Michael, and chess, I dub you Gamemaker of the Realm. Do now stand and be recognized as such.

**Collective voices**

Hip hip huzzah, hip hip huzzah, hip hip huzzah

**Rachel Hopkin Script**

I asked Mark and Ashley if they enjoyed playing their roles. They both enthusiastically affirmed that they did. Ashley expanded on why.

**Ashley Oliver**

I like seeing the kids smile, their face light up after they get a title bestowed on them. Then we make little ribbon roses that we hand out as trinkets for the patrons. And it's just an amazing experience seeing everybody enjoying their time and going back in time type thing.

**Rachel-in-situ**

Is there anything particularly that you don't enjoy?

**Ashley Oliver**

The English weather, sometimes. Last year was a mudfest, I would say.

**Rachel Hopkin Script**

Ha! No getting away from challenging weather in either England or Oklahoma, though this year's Medieval Fair was pretty lucky in that regard. Let's hope for the same next year, which will take place from the 9-11 April 2027. I've put a link to the Fair's website on this episode's webpage. Just search for KGOU and How Curious.

Many thanks to all the contributors today, plus Dara Fogel, Cody Clark, and my colleague Hannah France.

How Curious is a KGOU Public Radio production. The Managing Editor is Logan Layden. David Graey composed our theme music and I'm Rachel Hopkin.

As ever, if you have an idea for a future episode, we'd love to hear about it so please drop us a line at [curious@kgou.org](mailto:curious@kgou.org).