

CAREER DAY

Margaret Ball

The damn beeper went off just as I was parrying the two big guys' swords at once. I've Vordo do this in the arena, and it's a neat trick; if you work it right you can catch them with their own blades crossed at your guard, give a little zotz to the pommel and they're both disarmed. Of course it doesn't work unless you can arrange to be fighting two big stupid swordsmen who get in each other's way. And it doesn't work at all if Call Trans-Forwarding distracts you for a crucial split-second. I bungled the parry badly; sliced one man's hand off and had to shove the point of my sword into the other one's throat to keep him from toppling onto me.

I guess I can't really blame it on the call. Vordo never lets himself be distracted by anything. I'd love to take lessons from him, but he doesn't teach. Actually I'd love to do just about anything you name with Vordo. Not only is he the greatest fighter on Dazau, he's also a hunk of golden hair and thews to die for.

Duke Zolkir would not be pleased. He'd specifically said to bring them back alive for questioning. Well, there were still three left, and the one with the missing hand might make it. I got it bound up in time; and at least I had time to push the bronze stud on my right wristband that activated the vocal transform and stopped the beeping.

"May I speak with Riva Konneva, please?" chirped the voice on the other end of the link.

"Speaking," I snarled. The thief whose hand I'd lopped off was bleeding to death in the center. His three buddies weren't helping him, but they weren't backing off enough for me to safely help him, either.

"Riva, this is Jill Garner? With the PTA Volunteer Committee? It's about the field trip to Shady Brook Stables? We need another driver, and I thought that since you don't work..."

"I do work," I told the wristband. "I'm working now, as a matter of fact." One of the three remaining thieves was trying to circle around to my left.

"Oh. I just thought, since the only number listed for you is your home phone... Do you work at home?"

"Sometimes." That was more or less true. Dazau was my home; Jill's planet was just a temporary address. The man behind me on the left was moving in now, confident that I hadn't noticed him.

"I suppose I'll have to call Vera Boatright, then."

Jill sounded depressed. "She's about the only mother left who's at home, because her chu

disapproves of women having careers."

The little sneak was close enough now. I hooked one foot behind his leg and brought him down with a thump. He tried to curl up from the ground with his dagger out, but that sort of move is hard to do if you don't keep your abdominals in shape. I stomped on his knee. It crunched and he collapsed back in the dust, moaning slightly. I really hate the sound of a breaking kneecap.

"Disapproves of women working? Will the church pay my rent if I quit?" I asked. At the moment I wasn't all that crazy about my job.

The other two thieves backed off and made comments about Unfair Use of Wizardly Devices.

Jill sighed. "It doesn't work that way. She probably won't do the field trip, either, because I think they also disapprove of girls riding horseback. Say, I've got an idea! Instead of driving on the field trip..."

The skinny one in the purple robe dived forward, scattering something like sand in front of me with both hands. I squeezed my eyes shut just in time and struck out, blind, in the direction where the sharpies felt thickest. Tiny needles stung all over my arm, but my sword whacked into something yielding that moaned.

"Spellsharpies," I said. "That's dirty fighting."

"What?" said Jill.

The air felt clear again. I squinted through my lashes and saw part of the purple robe lying on the sand at my right side. The other half was wriggling and flopping in front of me.

"You cheated first," said the last thief. "Calling up them there wizardly advice spells out the air."

"I didn't call her, she called me."

"How would you like to take the class to your workplace for Careers Week?"

"I'm gonna tell Duke Zolkir you cheat."

"That's perfectly fine with me. Come back right now and tell him in person."

"Perfectly fine? Oh, wonderful!" Jill chirped. "I knew I could count on you, Riva. Will my Wednesday be all right?"

"I didn't mean you, I was talking to him. Wait a minute. Wait a minute!" I yelled at the last thief as he started to sidle away.

My wristband clicked. Jill had hung up. I snarled and threw my dagger at the last thief. The idea was to slow him down, but I was mad and my aim was off. It slid right between two ribs and stuck out of his back, quivering, while he collapsed and coughed up blood.

Never in a million years could I have made a throw like that if I'd been trying. It had to happen when I didn't want to kill the bastard.

I looked around the back alley where we'd been fighting. Wasn't there one left? Let's see. I got one in the throat, sliced one in half, accidentally stabbed this one in the back, and the one with the missing hand had bled out while I was busy. Oh, yeah. The guy with the smashed kneecap. He shouldn't be dead, and he wasn't going anywhere.

He shouldn't have been dead, but he was. Two corpse-rats had slunk out of the gutter and slit his throat while Jill rattled on about field trips. I just saw their gray robes whisking around the corner when I turned.

The dead man's pouch had been neatly cut from his belt, probably with the same knife that the corpse-rats had used to slash his throat.

All five thieves dead. And I hadn't even retrieved the tokens they'd stolen from the duke.

Zolkir was not going to be pleased.

Especially when I told him I had to take next Odnstag on.

After cleaning my sword, I decided not to tell Zolkir directly. I'd leave a message with Fykrou instead. It was almost time to pick Sally up from school, anyway.

Furo Fykrou charged an extra ten zolkys for delivering the message, claiming he'd have to do it by voice-transform because he wasn't about to traipse up to Duke's Zolvorra on my business. I suspected that meant it had also cost me ten zolkys to take Jill's call. On top of the monthly fee for keeping the voice-transform link active across dimensions, and the monthly fee for the Al-Jibric transformations that took me back and forth from Dazau to the Planet of the Piss-Pot Paper-Pushers. And the fee for translating my pay into the flimsy green stuff the Paper-Pushers considered money. What with the costs of commuting plus the fact that I could only take on contracts during school hours, I was slowly going broke. The fact was that I couldn't afford to live among the Paper-Pushers and work on Dazau.

As I stepped into the transform zone and felt my molecules going all squoogy the way they do just before you solidify in the destination locale, I vowed that I'd find a way to make it work. At least for another few years. Maybe I could get a night job on Paper-Pushers, bound

in a bar or something... No, Sally was too young to be left alone at night. Well, I'd think of something. Sallagrauneva's education was too important to give up on that easily. The kid had brains; I wanted her to qualify for something better than a bronze-bra job when she grew up.

Maybe I could get together with some of the other single mothers with kids at Sally's school. A lot of them, like me, had moved into that nice yuppie suburb so their kids could go to a good school. A lot of them were also struggling to make ends meet on a part-time salary and a high rent. I should talk to them, maybe arrange to share a house or something to cut down expenses. After all, I wasn't all that different from them.

It was just that I'd moved from a little farther away.

Next Wednesday/Odnstag I stuffed my fighting gear into a tote bag, slipped an old shirt and some jeans over my armor, and walked up to school with Sally. There were seventeen fourth-graders, Vera Boatright, and some tall dweeb with black-rimmed glasses waiting at the front door.

"Wait a minute," I said while Sally shrieked with glee and ran off to join her best friend and a little knob of giggling girls. "I contracted to take the kids, not the adults." And Furo Fykrone's transfer fees for the lads, even at half price for children below sword-age, had just about wiped out my credit with him. I'd have to get a loan from him for the two adults, and at his interest rates I'd never get paid off again.

Sally emerged from the crowd of short people.

"Miss Chervill can't come," she informed me. "She called in sick, too late to get a substitute."

Smart Miss Chervill. If I had to face this roomful of brats every morning, without even a sword and shield, you can bet I'd call in sick as often as I thought I could get away with it.

"So Mr. Withrow offered to be our teacher chaperone for the trip."

The long drink of water in glasses blushed right up to his black eye-gear. "Dennis to you," he said. "I've seen you at the PTA meetings, Ms. Konneva, and I've been looking forward to meeting you in person."

"Mr. Withrow is the eighth-grade math teacher," Sally said, "and I hear he's an absolute fiend in class."

Dennis turned red again. "Sallagrauneva!" I said.

"A lot of children feel that way about algebra," Dennis said. "I try to persuade them it can be fun."

"Yes. Well." I cleared my throat. "Look, the transport for this trip is kind of tight, and I'm not sure I can squeeze you two in." I looked at Vera Boatright, hoping she'd take the hint:

Vera did not take hints. She swept her daughter into her arms. "No one takes my little girl on these Godless excursions without me to watch over her!" She did her best to look like a protecting mother, but it was hard work; at ten Becky Boatright was already taller and broader than any other kid in the class. Vera looked like a banty hen trying to protect a half-grown duckling.

"And Brian and Erin and Byron and Arienne all have the flu," Sally added. "That's why there's only eighteen of us."

Only?

"You really don't want to be the only adult in charge of eighteen fourth-graders," Dennis said to me. "Trust me. I've been there."

"I didn't want to do this at all," I muttered, recalculating quickly. Take off four half-fares, add two adult fares, it should come out even-although doubtless Furo Fykrou would find a way to squeeze a little extra out of me for the last-minute change. "Okay, listen up, all of you. The place where I work can be kind of dangerous. You should be all right if you stay right behind me and don't go wandering off or anything. Oh, and don't talk back to anybody; my, er, colleagues are kind of short-tempered, and I'd hate to bring any of you back minus a hand or a foot."

Peals of laughter from the children.

"Where's our bus?" Vera Boatright demanded.

"Don't worry," I told her, "it'll be here any minute. If you'll all just gather around me out here in the parking lot-"

"I'm not supposed to walk in the street without a grown-up holding my hand," piped up one of the midgets.

"Me neither."

"It's not a street, it's a parking-oh, never mind. I'll hold your hands." But I also had to manage the carryall with my sword, shield, and beeper. Dennis came to my aid, grabbing one of the whining kid with each hand and towing them to the center of the parking lot, where I'd arranged to meet with Furo Fykrou to pick us up.

"I think I forgot to take my medication this morning," another kid said.

"Well, you can't go back for it now, you'll miss the field trip," I said, just as the squoogy feeling hit my insides.

When we went solid again, a couple of the lads looked kind of green, but nobody had actually thrown up.

It was a perfect day on Dazau-balmy, not a cloud in the sky, and no wars within walking distance; I'd checked. We were standing in a missy field just outside Duke's Zolvarra. The battlements of the outer town wall encased a huddle of red-tiled house tops and stone towers clustering up the hill to the duke's own keep at the very top.

"Wow," said Becky Boatright, "it looks just like Disneyland!"

"Now, darling, you know the church doesn't approve of Disneyland," Vera Boatright said automatically. She shot me a suspicious glance. "What happened to the bus?"

"I think you had a dizzy fit, Ms. Boatright," Dennis said.

"Mrs.," she snapped. "I'm a decent married woman." She gave me a dirty look.

"Why don't you all follow Mr. Withrow and me to the town gates?" I suggested "Mrs. Boatright, would you please guard the end of the line and make sure there are no stragglers hate to lose anyone before we even begin the tour." I also liked the idea of having eighteen fourth-graders between me and Vera Boatright.

"You owe me one for distracting that woman," Dennis muttered out of the corner of his mouth as we marched up the slight slope to the town wall. "What exactly was our transport anyway?"

"You wouldn't believe me if I told you." I smiled sweetly and he backed off a step. Men Paper-Pushers often do that when I smile; I can't understand it.

"Let me take you out for a beer after the field trip and you can try explaining," Dennis suggested. "We can compare Vera Boatright stories. Did you know she wants to censor the math textbooks for Satanism? I'm supposed to teach geometry without five-sided figures, because the pentagram is used in Satanic invocations."

"Well, it is a powerful figure to be teaching eighth-graders," I allowed, trying to look as though I understood mathemagics.

"I know I forgot my medication," wailed the kid who'd been complaining when we took

"I'm getting hyper. I can feel it coming on."

"Shut up, Jason," said half a dozen other children at once.

"But I get distracted without my medication. I can't stop watching everything all the time. What are those little purple weeds? How come all their flowers are different shapes, like snowflakes? Flowers aren't supposed to do that. And another thing--"

I turned and smiled at Jason. He backed off too. "This isn't Nature Study, it's Career Day," I said as sweetly as I could. Actually I'd never noticed the different shapes of the brakenweed flowers. There really was something strange about the kid. "Come along for a nice demonstration of my work."

Just how true that was I didn't realize until I got my new orders from the Duke's house wizard.

"I told you," I protested, "I'm not taking any jobs this Odnstag." Had Furo Fykrou failed to deliver that message? No, the house wizard was nodding. "Understood. This isn't a new job, though. It's a follow-through on that assignment you screwed up last Thorstag."

Thorstag? Nearly a week ago. What had I been doing around that time, apart from letting Garner talk me into herding the fourth grade around Dazau for Careers Day? Oh, yeah. Those scumbags who snuck into Duke's Zolkarra and snitched his magic tokens. Okay, I had royally screwed up the retrieval job, presenting the duke with five corpses and no tokens, but he'd already blistered my ears and refused to pay me for the day's work. How much worse could things get?

A lot worse.

"Baron Rodograunnizo says those were five of his loyal guard," the house wizard informed me, "and you lured them into the alley for the express purpose of killing and robbing them, there being no witnesses to the contrary, and one of them had his belt-pouch slit off, and you didn't bring back the magic tokens that would enable us to argue they were common thieves."

"Right. So the Duke is not happy. I knew that. What's this follow-on business?"

It seemed the Duke had agreed that Baron Rodograunhizo was entitled to send his champion against me in single combat to settle the truth of their quarrel.

Today.

Well, it wasn't quite the peaceful tour of Duke's Zolkarra that I had planned, but what the heck. These kids saw worse every day on TV. In color.

"Guess what, kiddies," I said as brightly as I could, "the Duke has arranged for you to see a demonstration of actual sword-fighting as part of the Career Day tour." If Rodograunnizo's champion was as incompetent as his hired thieves, I figured this bout should, kill half an hour max. Maybe with luck I could drag it out to two hours and then take them to the Blue Eagle for lunch.

"Come on," I said, "this way to the combat arena!"

"Can we stop at a drugstore?" Jason asked. "I really need my medication."

"I need to go to the bathroom."

"When's lunch?"

I ignored all of them. I had enough trouble getting eighteen fourth-graders into one of the roped-on spectator areas and making sure they understood that they were not to move outside the ropes for any reason. I didn't have time for potty trips. Vera and Dennis could handle the whines; wasn't that what they'd come alone for?

Then I found out who Rodograunnizo's champion was.

"Vordokaunnevik?" I gasped. "You're kidding. He wouldn't work for Rodizo the Revolver. Particularly not in a trumped-up cause like this one."

"Vordo," said Rodograunnizo's house wizard smugly. He was a new one, a flashy dresser like Vordo.

He smoothed down purple sleeves that dangled over his fingertips and stroked the gold embroidery on the cuffs. "Want to reconsider? Concede?"

If he hadn't smirked, and if Vera hadn't come up with one of her nifty quotes about the woman being subject to the man in all things, I might have had the good sense to do just that. There was no way I could take Vordo in a fair fight. I'd seen the man in action.

Besides, that wasn't how I wanted to take him.

But Sallagrauneva was watching. How could I back down in front of her? And Vera Boatright? And what would I use for zolkys if the Duke decided to fire me for refusing challenge?

I figured Vordo and I could work something out once the fight started, when we were out of earshot. He couldn't really want to champion a phony like Rodograunnizo. Not Vordokaunnevik the Great, the undefeated champion of all Dazau. It must be some mistake, else Rodograunnizo had tricked him into taking on the job. I'd explain the setup, we'd put on

nice show of swordplay for the audience, and then I'd let him defeat me in some showy maneuver. The Duke wouldn't be happy about that either, but he couldn't really expect me to win against Vordo.

That theory lasted about fifteen seconds into the match.

When Vordo marched into the arena, there was a wave of applause from all around. Even though most of the spectators were Duke Zolkir's people and theoretically on my side. Well, I couldn't blame them. Hells, I'd have applauded him myself if I hadn't been the next course on the chopping block. Eighteen hands tall, golden from his crested helmet to his gilded shin-guards, his stern face and icy blue eyes striking terror into the hearts of malefactors everywhere-who wouldn't have cheered? I made a sorry show in comparison, shucking my jeans and shirt and fishing around in the carryall for my equipment.

Vordo and I circled each other sidewise a couple of times while the crowd roared and stamped their feet. One good thing about the constant cheering, they couldn't possibly hear what we were saying to one another.

Vordo started out with a couple of casual warm-up insults, the kind of thing you throw out to distract your opponent while you're figuring out which is his weak side and how you're going to open.

"Cut it out, Vordo," I said. "You don't understand. Cousin Rodo's lying. My Aunt Graum always said that branch of the family had no honor. He hired a bunch of incompetent thieves to steal some of Duke Zolkir's magic tokens, and he's mad because I kind of accidentally sliced them up a little more than I meant to when I went after the tokens. You don't want to take that too seriously. Now look, we both know I can't take you out, but I've got this bunch of kids watching, see? I don't want to get all dirty and bruised just before lunch, and neither do you. Let's put on a nice show, two or three bouts of flashing swords, and then I'll let you 'defeat' me and everybody will be happy."

"Nobody lets Vordokaunnevik the Greatest defeat them, stinking camel-dung face," Vordo snarled. He lunged at me and I sidestepped.

"Uh, right. Poor choice of words. But you get my meaning? No need to make a big deal about this. I don't really want to fight you anyway, Vordo. I'd much rather-"

"Nobody wants to fight Vordokaunnevik the Greatest." He bared his beautiful white teeth at me and flexed his arms. For a moment I thought about all the things we could be doing instead of this play-fight. Then his sword came whistling down at an angle that would have removed my left leg if I hadn't moved fast and fancy. It certainly removed my hopes of keeping this fight neat and simple.

For the next few minutes I was fully occupied in staying alive. Speed and accuracy, my

strongest points,

weren't doing me any good this time. Vordo's defenses felt like hitting a wick wall. He was one sneaky swordsman. Looked big and slow and easy, but every time I thought I saw a possible opening and went for it, I felt like I'd hit that wall. He could have taken me five times in the first clash, but he always held back. Almost as if he were playing with me. Could he be reconsidering my offer? I hoped so.

Behind him, on Rodo's side of the arena, I saw that new wizard dancing from one place to another to get a good view of the fight, purple sleeves flying.

"I thought she was such a great fighter," Jason whined, "she isn't even touching him!"

"She is too!" Sally defended me.

Unfortunately, Jason was right.

He said something I didn't catch. I hopped backward on one leg and barely saved my hamstring from one of Vordo's slashing blows; evidently he'd decided to get down to business. From the corner of my eye I saw Sally punch Jason.

"Is not!"

"Is too!"

"Children, stop that this minute!" Vera Boatright shrieked.

She was too late. Half the fourth grade was in the fight. Somebody got knocked against the ropes at the boundary of the arena and suddenly there were little screaming kids all over the place.

"See? See?" Jason yelled at Sally. "Watch when she tries to hit at him. He flickers all out for a second."

I wasn't, at that moment, trying to hit anybody. I was trying not to step on children. Vordo knocked over two kids to get at me and I swung at him again. Jason squealed and pointed. "See? It's just like the magic shield you gain on the third level of Defenders of Doom!"

I almost thought I could see the flicker. Hmm. That gave me an idea. But first we had to get the fourth grade out of danger. I backed away from the kids as fast as I could, until Vordo and I were in the far corner of the arena, with the kids milling around between us and Rodo's spectators. Specifically, they were ruining that new wizard's view of the fight.

This time, when I lunged, the tip of my sword found Vordo's shoulder. He backed off, b

instead of parrying, he turned around and screamed, "Do something!"

"Get those damned kids out of the way!" shouted the wizard. "I can't see you!"

"Ha! Thought so," I gasped (I was gasping for air anyway). "You two come as a package deal, do you? What's he do, give you magic shields? Vordokaunnevik the Cheat!"

Vordo screamed at the wizard again. I took a small nick out of the inch of exposed skin on his knee, Vordo threw his sword at me and ran, trampling a few more children, and shouting obscenities at the wizard.

"Idiot!" the wizard yelled back.

"Get back there and fight," Baron Rodo yelled at Vordo, and then, at the house wizard, "Do something!"

The wizard waved both arms and shouted something in Jomtrie. A small monster with six legs and purple skin and green warts appeared in the arena. It was about as big as a puppy and could have been cute if it hadn't been spitting acid.

Before I could clear the kids out of my way and get at it, Becky Boatright had picked up Vordo's fallen sword. Staggering under the weight, she raised it in a two-handed grip and let the black drop onto the monster. I got there just in time to pick her up and throw her out of range. Some of the blood splattered me, but not enough to do any major damage.

"Why'd you stop me?" Becky howled. "I want to fight evil just like you!"

Vera Boatright screamed and fainted. "Pick her up, Dennis!" I shouted, bracing myself for the next wizardly attack. "Get out of the arena, kids!" The places where the monster's blood splattered me burned like fire-ant stings.

The kids scattered, but Dennis left Vera where she was. "No time!" he shouted back. He tried to jump over the last standing rope barrier, caught one foot at the top and went sprawling in the sand.

" $C(A+B)=CA+CB!$ " screamed the wizard.

"Oh, no," I groaned, "he's using Al-Jibber."

More little purple monsters started growing out of the sand.

"It's the Distributive Law," Dennis muttered as he scrambled to his feet. "So it Distributes his magic. Symmetry ought to turn it around. $A = B \Rightarrow B = A!$ " he called out.

The monsters shrank down into squirming purple patches of sand.

" $d/dx \cos(x) = -\sin(x)$," the wizard called. Green specks of light danced through the air, buzzing and circling us.

"Now he's using K'al-Kul," I groaned.

"Yeah, but it's only derivative. $\int \sin(x) dx = -\cos(x)$!" Dennis called, and the green things coalesced into a curving shape that slowly dissolved.

" $d/dx \tan(x) = \sec^2(x)$!"

A ring of purplish flames surrounded us.

"Not to worry," Dennis said calmly, "I can integrate anything he can throw at us. $\int \sec^2(x) dx = \tan(x)$!"

The flames died down.

" $\int \csc(x) \cot(x) dx = -\csc(x)$!" Dennis added, and the wizard's robe caught on fire. "Gosh," Dennis said, "and some people say higher math isn't relevant."

That ended the fight. While the wizard was rolling on sand to put his fire out, Rodograunnizo fired him and Vordo both, not that Vordo had stuck around to hear the formal severance of contract.

"Looks to me like you lost big," Dennis said. "Don't you owe Riva something? False challenge..."

"I need a new house wizard," Rodo said, looking at Dennis meaningfully.

"Cheating by use of magic in a physical contest..."

"I can pay well."

"You pay Riva," Dennis said. "I don't want your job; I like the one I've got."

"Who're you working for? Zolkir? I can double whatever he's giving you."

"I like teaching," Dennis said. "Now about Riva's compensation..."

Furo Fykrou told me that the sum they eventually settled on would convert into enough Paper-Pusher's money to keep Sally and me solvent for a couple of years. He tried to hire Dennis, too. When Dennis turned him down, he mentioned to me that he could use an appre

who knew something of these strange Paper-Pushers variants of Jomtrie and Al-Jibber and K'al-kul, and it wouldn't hurt if she were handy with a sword. Regretfully, I confessed to him that I didn't know anything about the formulas Dennis had been throwing around.

"I could teach you," Dennis volunteered.

"You would? Oh, that's..." I looked down at the little stack of green bills that Furo Fykr had turned my challenge compensation zolkies into. Enough to keep Sally and me for two years... but not if I squandered it on wizardry teaching fees. "I can't afford it," I said sadly.

Dennis grinned. "Haven't you heard of free public education? I like teaching, Riva, You a nice change of pace from those giggling little eighth-graders."

"You'd teach me for nothing?"

He took my hand for a moment. "I wouldn't exactly call it nothing," he said. He was blushing again. "It's a privilege to spend time with a lovely woman like you, Riva."

Really, the glasses weren't so bad, once you got used to them. On a man who'd hurled himself and his Al-Jibber between me and wizardry monsters, they looked pretty good. As for Vordo... well, I'd learned

that lesson. Mighty thews are nice to look at, but they're not so impressive when your last sight of them is the back view of the champion running away.

Jill Garner called me the day after the field trip. Fortunately I was still on Paper-Pushers studying Make Friends with Mr. Euclid, so I didn't have to pay Furo Fykr for Call Trans-Forwarding.

"What's this I hear about you taking the lads to Fiesta Texas instead of to work?" she demanded.

"I didn't take them to a theme park," I said. "I took them to my workplace."

"Well, one parent said it sounded like a science fiction convention to him. Except those mostly on weekends. And it couldn't have been the Renaissance Faire, because that isn't until October. Riva, you were supposed to show them what the real world of work is like, not take them to a theme park and play games about purple monsters and wizards!"

"Believe me," I said, "they weren't games."

"Well, I want you to know that Vera Boatright is very upset about the whole thing."

"That's too bad," I said. "Sorry, but I have to go now. I'm working." Dennis was coming

over at four o'clock to go over the first chapter of the geometry book with me, and I wanted go through the problem sets before he got here.

A couple of years of Jomtrie and Al-Jibber and K'al-Kul, and I might even be able to talk Furo Fykrou up on his offer of an apprenticeship. That is, if I go back to Dazau at all. Paper-Pushers Planet has its attractions.

Like I said, mighty thews aren't everything.