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Fantasy games not just for 'fanatics'

By Don Kopf

Of The Battalion Staff

Six figures dressed in medieval clothes sit quietly around a table in a small room that is darkened except for the candles flickering gently in the corners. The people take turns casting dice and reporting the results to the ominous figure sitting at the end of the table. Typical Dungeons and Dragons game, right?

Wrong, wrong, wrong. Although people who play role-playing games are of a different breed, they aren't a pack of eerie, dice-worshipping fruitcakes who sit around in the dark while their grades go to pot. In fact, MSC NOVA, the gaming club on the Texas A&M campus, tends to attract extremely intelligent people, according to Gloria Aldredge, a NOVA member.

Many National Merit Scholars and other academic merit scholarship winners are members of NOVA and play games, she said, adding that even those members who aren't scholarship recipients are typically open-minded, creative, imaginative people.

"Just because we play games doesn't mean we aren't normal and don't study and eat," Aldredge said. The only thing that makes NOVA different from another club is that NOVA members enjoy playing games for recreation, she said. NOVA isn't just a game-playing group either, it is a social group that throws parties and has get-togethers.

NOVA members admit that gaming as a whole does have a bad reputation, but say the attitude toward gamers is based on a few high-profile fanatics who let gaming dominate their lives. They stop studying and exercising, and they sacrifice their social life so that they can make more time for games and the characters involved in the games. These are the people who play in darkened rooms with candles and costumes to enhance the fantasy atmosphere.

"We try to avoid fanatics," Aldredge said. If they want to play that way, they can play at home away from NOVA.

While members say they don't like

fanatics, they do admit that there are some dedicated members who have memorized rule books a foot thick. "Star Fleet Battles," a futuristic science fiction game, for example, has thousands of pages full of rules and information about playing the game. Other games aren't nearly that complex and can be learned in a short time.

As a group, gamers can be divided up into two main bodies. There are board-game players and role-playing gamers. The former play board games that tend to deal more with strategy and tactical thinking; they are games that involve objective thinking and logic in order to win. Board games generally take less time to set up and complete than role-playing games.

Role playing games such as "Advanced Dungeons and Dragons," or "Champions" are generally ongoing campaigns that take a while to complete. In a role-playing game, players have a character that interacts with other players' characters in a scenario provided by a game master. The game master runs the game and tells the players what situation their characters are currently facing. The players then use their characters' acquired skills or powers to deal with the problem or challenge.

Characters can be quite elaborate and tend to be either a reflection of the player or the exact opposite of how the player sees himself.

Wade Wallace, a junior English major and NOVA member, said he likes his characters to represent what he would be like if he could be a character.

"My characters tend to be a little nastier and bend the rules a little bit more."

Mike Schiller, a senior business analysis major and NOVA chairman, said he is currently playing a character who is a reflection of himself. His character, Powerful Man, is a superhero in the game "Champions." He is the ultimate nice guy, Schiller said. Powerful Man's friends see him as a little insane because of all the sweet and incredibly nice things he does for everybody.

Aldredge, on the other hand, said



she sometimes plays characters that are her opposite. They tend to be wild and chaotic and sometimes, very evil, she said.

Since players often see themselves in the characters they play, one of the greatest offenses that can happen is to have a character "die," either by chance or stupidity.

"You made a character up and put part of yourself into it, and they just killed it," Aldredge said. Wallace

added that it takes a long time to create another character.

The benefits of gaming are often overlooked by those who do not participate in gaming. There is a lot of planning, thinking, strategizing and creating that goes into playing or even setting up a game, Wallace said. Some company recruiters like to see that an interviewee has a gaming background because they know of all

the thinking and strategy involved, he said.

"Role-playing games make you think," he said. "It's imperative in some games that you think your way out of the situation."

But not all games force players to think so much. According to Aldredge, some games are easy and relaxing to play.

"We go in for beer and play games sometimes because they're quick," she said.

Anyone interested in joining NOVA can see what their games are like on any weekend. On Friday, Saturday and Sunday at 7 p.m., NOVA has rooms reserved in the Memorial Student Center for games. NOVA members are allowed to play twice for free. NOVA annual dues are \$4.

Custodial workers face difficult task of keeping Aggieland clean

By Katsy Pittman

Of The Battalion Staff

How many times have you stacked piles of empty boxes outside of your dorm the first week of school to make room for belongings? Ever thrown a beer bottle in the trash on a late Friday night only to miss and have it splinter into hundreds of fragments? Or go a little crazy while studying and get in a shaving cream skirmish with your roommate?

Chances are good that many students have done one of these things at least one time without

thinking much about the consequences. Unfortunately, the consequences are what Texas A&M's 310 full-time custodial workers have to deal with. "They don't do it to be mean," said Gale Burnett, a custodial worker on the North side of campus. "They just start acting like kids and get a little carried away."

Burnett, who drives to work from Somerville every morning, is trying to save up enough money to continue her college education and support her two daughters, ages four and nine.

"It's not all that hard," Burnett said, even

though she knows the rigors of working eight and a half hours a day in a uniform that can become very hot in non-air-conditioned dorms in the summers, or very cold outside the patio dorms during the winter.

Burnett agreed to the stipulation that her favorite thing on the A&M campus was mentioned. "The girls on the first two floors of McFadden are the best bunch of kids on campus!" she said.

This assertion was soon challenged by Rosie Alvarez, who insists "her" girls on McFadden's third and fourth floors can't be beat.

Alvarez, who has been working at A&M for three months, returned to the A&M campus after a 17-year hiatus.

"I did private work for a family who had little boys," Alvarez said. "Their favorite thing to do was to put rubber snakes in the laundry. I wish I had come back here a long time ago!"

Her least favorite chore is hauling away the piles of trash that accumulate after the girls move in or out of the dorms. Alvarez's sore muscles soon revive, however, along with her feelings for the

girls she has come to know.

"I call them my girls because I feel like I've adopted over 100 of them for nine months," she said. "It's sad when they leave, but I do enjoy watching them grow up."

Growing up does not seem to be a factor in the dorms where custodian Steven Stukes works. That's because he's responsible for Law and Puryear Halls where filth often seems to be the fashion.

"They love shaving cream over there," Stukes said. On a tour of the halls, it seemed evident that the residents also enjoyed pizza fights, toilet paper wads, and chalking up each other's doors.

"They break as many beer bottles as Greek waiters do plates," Stukes said.

Custodial worker Eddie Williams explained why.

"There are a lot of party guys around here that like to drink Miller Lite out of the bottle," he said. "On weekends they make baskets out of the trash cans all over the place. You can always find five or six bottles in the bottom, but after that, they start losing their aim."

Not that drinking or demolishing is in any way condoned on campus. Drinking can lead to disciplinary action at A&M, and making big messes usually leads to some pretty big fees.

The big bills usually get sent on Mondays after a home football game.

"After home games — it's a riot," Williams said. "On Mondays, there's no chance to do anything — just take out the trash."

Although she's taken out the trash at A&M for over 10 years, Berry Ellison, a southside custodial supervisor, said she would do it all again.

"I like the whole job," said Ellison. Her favorite year was when she worked in Underwood Hall, where she became particularly close with some of the residents.

"There was this one girl who had her boyfriend come over constantly. And every day he wouldn't walk into her room until he had given me a big hug."

Ellison's biggest complaint was echoed by many other custodial workers — "The parking!"

Much the same as hordes of A&M students rushing to campus in the morning, all the workers must find a place by 8 a.m. — which usually means they have to arrive by 7 a.m.

Regarding her 10 years at A&M, Ellison's wildest story dealt with two Walton Hall residents. The two students had grown tired of their local custodial worker, who often had reported them for demolishing their room, and one morning they locked him in a hall closet. It wasn't until lunch that his absence was noted and he was freed, Ellison said.

But it might be a good idea to think twice before abducting your dorm caretaker. You could wind up cleaning up your own act — in jail.

African student finds good, bad at A&M

By Katsy Pittman

Of The Battalion Staff

Elias Ayuk is not a typical graduate student. A native from Mamfe, Cameroon, in West Africa, Ayuk will soon leave Texas A&M and the United States with some favorable and not-so-favorable memories.

Although English was a native language in Cameroon, from the moment Ayuk stepped off the plane as an undergraduate student in St. Paul, Minn., he knew some things were going to be different.

"It was very cold," Ayuk said. "And I was wearing a very thin jacket. People were looking at me like, 'This guy must be crazy!'"

Ayuk had a few problems warming up to other American cultural differences, too.

"People had such casual attitudes toward their professors," he said. "But I guess it was good being able to talk to the professor so easily."

He also had to adjust to American attitudes towards senior citizens and women.

"There is much more respect for older people in Cameroon," he said. "Here you can address older people in so much more of a casual manner, but maybe that is good."

"You might be surprised to hear this, too, but we probably treat our women better than the average American."

"Women are high government officials, lecturers in our universities — it is equal opportunity in our country according to sex. Of course, everyone must earn what they get."

In December, Ayuk will leave on an agricultural Rockefeller grant to Togo, another West African country. Although he will miss some things about the A&M campus, there are several things he will not miss.

"The sense of belonging here is very good," Ayuk said. "My department here (Agriculture) is very friendly."

"And of course I will miss Aggie football — I like to see them win. I will definitely call every once in a while to see how they are doing."

The things he won't miss?

For one, the phrase "Highway 6 runs both ways." "Many people here have a closed mind," Ayuk said. "We must learn to argue in order to come up with new ideas. But many times, instead of supporting or contradicting new ideas here, people just condemn."

"If it weren't for open minds, relativity would have never been questioned, the world would still be flat . . . If people aren't ready to receive or evaluate new ideas, why do they even go to a university?"

Regardless of what Ayuk believes, he is not planning to give out constructive criticisms.

"I'm afraid that if I open my mouth, people will tell me I might as well hop on my plane and leave!" Ayuk laughed.

One of the things Ayuk hopes will change after his departure is the awareness of different cultures here on campus.

Ayuk confessed that he is no stranger to preconceived ideas. He admits that when he was considering coming to A&M for his graduate work, he was afraid that all the Texans were "rednecks."

A solution to the problem of cultural awareness at A&M, he said, could be the growing interest in International Week on campus.

"International Week is a good time for A&M students to go out and not be so xenophobic. We could learn from each other. African students could learn from American students, and American students could certainly learn from African students."

An avid *Battalion* reader, Ayuk said some of the Mail Call opinions saddened him, especially those concerning foreign teaching assistants.

"So many students complain they can't understand the foreign TAs (teaching assistants). But I believe many of them don't even try. If they just made an effort, they could probably learn a great deal. I wonder if they realize the foreign students at A&M are having a hard time understanding the Texas accent."

Although Ayuk is leaving after this semester, there will be many other foreign Aggies to take his place. His parting wish is that these students enroll in an A&M that is slightly more tolerant than the one he left.

"I think it is time for students here to be open-minded about all races, about all religious beliefs, about all nations. Maybe then we will truly be a world-class University."

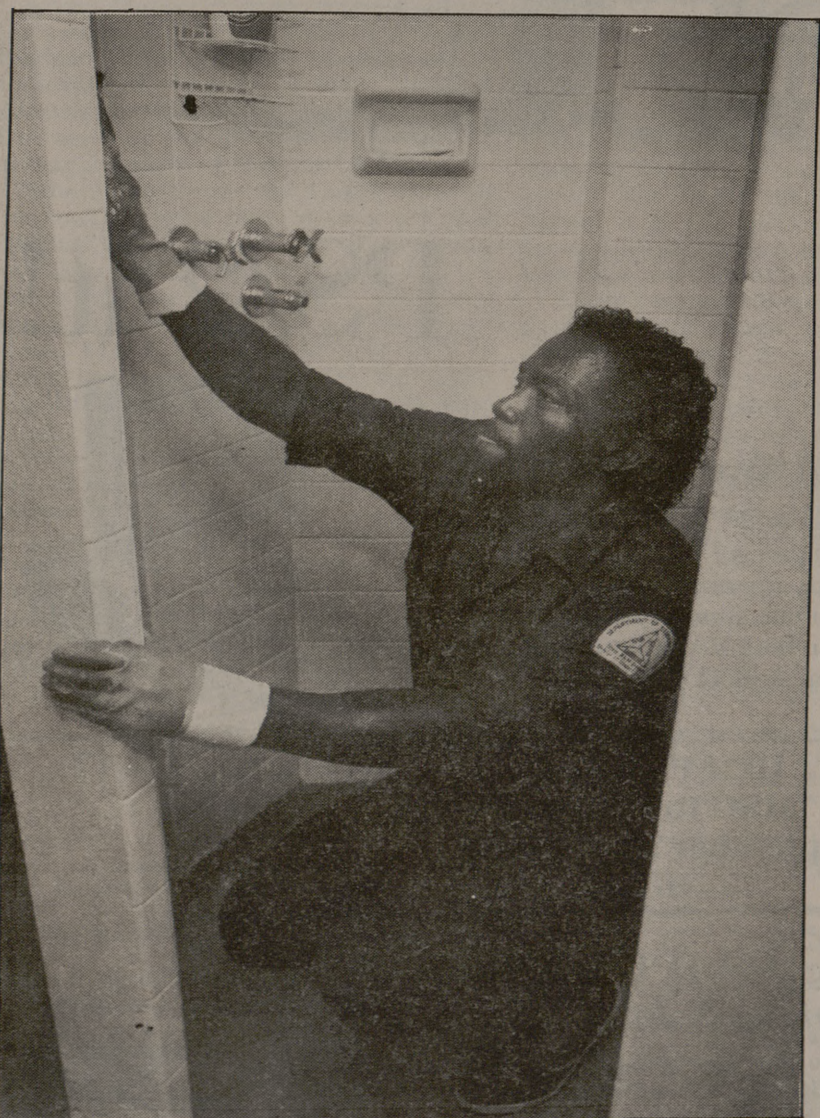


photo by Kathy Haveman

A&M custodial worker Eddie Williams carefully cleans a shower stall in ramp 4 of Puryear Hall.