

heavy armour test. The fighters use wooden swords wrapped with duct tape for safety reasons; otherwise, their suits are kept as authentic as possible. Below: Junior Patti Roberts (Isabeau Beauvallet) and freshman Jeff Turner (Valentine Drake) relax after Turner's losing effort in the light armour list.



A

Rebital of the Middle Ages

By Yvonne Salce

Amidst the wooded, secluded area and surrounded by the aroma of towering pine trees and fresh fruit, Lady Clare Isabeal Seadhachan sits majestically beneath the flowing canopy watching the performance — two lords dueling to the end with a sword in each hand. Her fiery, long braid of hair flows across her Medieval-style dress as she drinks from her goblet and feasts upon grapes, cheese and pieces of bread.

With her are other ladies and lords of The Shire of the Shadowlands who, if seen from a distance, resemble an old Errol Flynn movie or a scene shared between Sir Lancelot and King Arthur. But the setting is neither a film nor the Texas Renaissance Festival — it is a group of men, women and children who gather every weekend to study and enjoy the lifestyles of the Middle Ages by re-creating them.

Members of the 25-year-old organization The Society for Creative Anachronism research the way people lived in Western Europe and its trade nations between 600 and 1650 AD. They practice the skills and crafts in the traditional garb of the Middle Ages. The Shire of the Shadowlands is the local group that includes members from Texas A&M University and Bryan-College Station.

Hidden in the wooded areas around Huntsville, The Shire of the Shadowlands and oth-

ers gathered to escape the mundane world and retreated last weekend to enjoy heraldry, fighting and weaponry, feasting, merrymaking and intrigue.

Once settled in their tents with coats of arms displayed, each individual — who may have just driven in from a test, work or other mundane tasks — assumes a different persona. Each person in SCA creates his own name, history, nationality, age and even gender within the period.

Elizabeth Claire Shahan, whose persona name is "Clare Isabeal Seadhachan," chose her name and history because it actually does follow her true family lineage. She says people often pick a time period because they like the style of dress.

"Some prefer to pick a persona because the garb or dress for that time period looks good on them," says Shahan, who recently grad-

uated from Texas A&M with a degree in horticulture.

On the other hand, a person may choose a persona because they're interested in a certain time period.

Roy Heath, "Erc Fitzmungo," says there are two ways people can develop their persona within SCA.

"The ideal way is to have an interest in a time period and research it by asking professors and reading books. This way you have a history of yourself.

"Another way," he says, "is to come across a name you like and then work backwards."

In any event, a person can have multiple personas and does not have to know everything about their time period. Many learn more about their past and other time periods as they participate in SCA events.

The morning activities include making a fire,

armor check for heavy and light fighters, setting up the Pavillion and morning court.

All the Lords and Ladies and Barons and Baronesses gather for morning court. It is here they learn about the day's activities, regulations for fighting and games such as "The Quest" and the rules for assassins.

The Quest is an all-day game. Participants are given a riddle to solve that eventually leads to a treasure.

But probably the most fun and interesting game is one of assassination.

Michael Farlow, "Michael Thomas," says assassins were a large part of the Middle Ages.

"People hired assassins to get ahead politically or to get rid of someone they didn't like," Farlow says.

According to the Assassins Guild Charter, "the main purpose of the assassin game is to create a sinister atmosphere to add to the

enjoyment of others in the SCA." For someone to hire an assassin, they must first take out a contract on that individual with the Mistress of the Assassin Guild. She decides the cost, and contacts the person to be assassinated. He or she may decline or accept. If they accept, an assassin is hired and the person awaits their attack.

After morning court, members head to their pavillions, but not before shouting in unison, "Long live the Queen!"

Each shire has its own pavillion that faces the fighting arena. There, ladies and lords gather to eat and drink. They practice the courtly graces so popular in the Middle Ages and partake in traditional customs.

One custom known as the "cloved fruit" was practiced widely in the Middle Ages. According to history, men and women in the Middle Ages had teeth on the verge of being rotten,

they often couldn't eat their food until it was almost rotten, so they had bad breath.

Shahan describes the cloved fruit and why it was so popular.

"The cloved fruit is a piece of fruit with cloves stuck in it. Biting the clove from the fruit enhances the breath and made for better kissing."

As legend has it, she says, if a cloved fruit is offered to a lady, she can accept it by biting the clove and giving the man a kiss.

Whether it be cloved fruit or assassinations, the practice of "accepting" and "denying" an offer is widely used in SCA, especially with the fighting events. If an individual wishes to duel another, the challenger throws a gauntlet at the person's feet. If that person wishes to accept, he or she will pick up the gauntlet.

It is usually to that person's advantage, not

continued



Photos By Phelan M. Ebenhack

cover story