

scape to a Mystical Time

Story By Michelle Voss

Photography By Dave House



The 23rd Annual Texas Renaissance Festival celebrates the 'Chivalry and Romance' of the 16th century

Like walking into the pages of a fairy tale, the Renaissance Festival captures the aura of times past. Fairy dust lingers in the air and tranquil tunes float through the woods as ribbons stream past from young girl's hair. Spicy aromas waft about as the lush velvet and sparkling gold of costumes dazzle in the light.

With the sound of a trumpet, a jousting match begins and the King's court parades through the crowd. Lush furs and exotic animal skins cling to troops of barbarians as the radiant armor of passing Knights gleams in the sunlight. Dragons and warriors, unicorns and princesses, as well as crystals and wizards all create a magical mood.

Every sight at the festival intoxicates the senses and transports the imagination into a world of fantasy. Everyone is a Lady or Lord in this festival of "Chivalry and Romance" where the mystique of the 16th century comes alive.

Patrons of the festival are diverse and eccentric with more than 300,000 people attending each year.

Lord Blueberry of Microsoft said he enjoys the revelry of the festival.

"I am here for libations of the women, feasting, ale, dancing, and nakedness," Blueberry said. "Do you need more?"

Brother Patrick and Brother William of the Holy Order of St. Bernard the Brewer, patron saint of brewers and distillers, said

they came to the festival to assist the fallen women of the village.

"For venial or small sins, we have 'Get Out of Hell Free' cards," Brother Patrick said. "We can place your name to it, and you can pretty much get away with all your sins for the day."

King Henry VIII of Tudor said the food is what brings him back every year and the fire-breathing dragon is the best new attraction.

"The entertainment upon the stage is bar none," Henry said.

Lord Thredmagyro, a dental assistant, said he prefers pillaging.

"Terrorizing, of course, is my favorite part of the festival," said Thredmagyro.

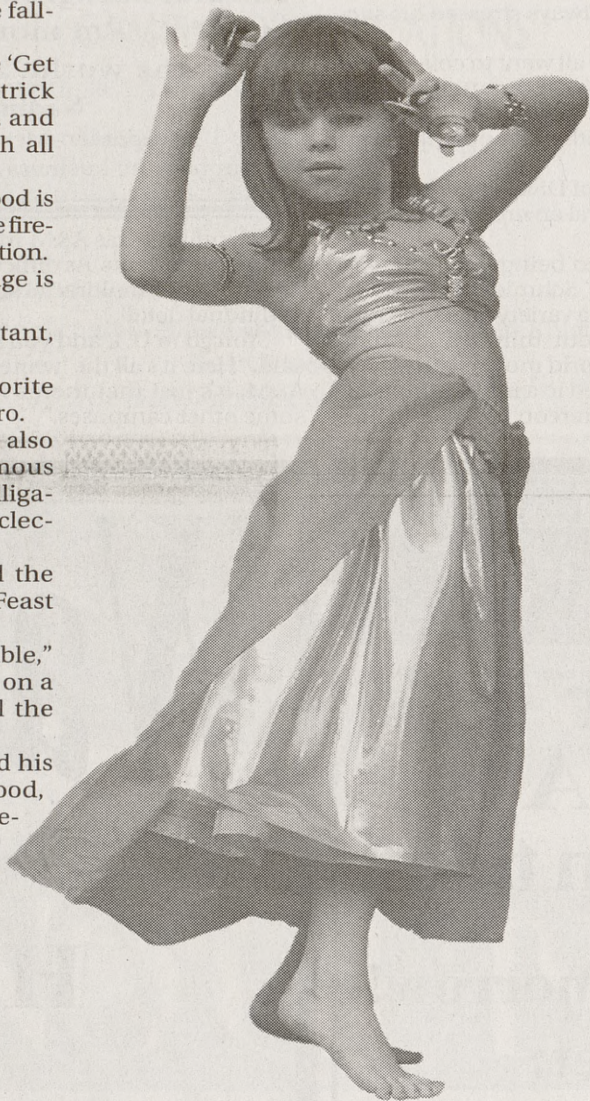
Feasting on the various cuisine is also a major attraction. From the famous turkey legs and scotch eggs to fried alligator and emu trencher, the fare is an eclectic array of foods.

Asdril, a Nordic barbarian, said the seven-course banquet at the King's Feast is a highlight of the festival.

"It's a gourmet meal that is incredible," said Asdril. "For two hours they put on a performance, and you can have all the wine and beer you can drink."

Pretzel vendor Todd Runfeldt said his mother told him not to play with his food, so he figured he would play with someone else's.

"Pretzels are part of a well-bal-



anced diet," said Runfeldt. "They're twisted and kinky, soft but firm and slightly salty because you are what you eat."

As the Renaissance Festival is a step back in time, everyone wandering around embodies the culture of the Renaissance.

As such, King Henry VIII had never seen a tape recorder before and thought the little machine recording his voice was fascinating.

"O, there's a small scribe inside," said the King. "He must be very tiny, indeed. Could he come out?"

Entertainment ranges from wandering minstrels and dancing gypsies to jousting matches and sword fights.

Politically incorrect jugglers, The Flaming Idiots, are one of the comedy routines at the festival. The three members, Pyro, Gyro and Walter perform daring antics like swallowing balloons and juggling pins that are on fire.

Gyro said all of the acts at the festival could headline at any comedy club.

"The festival is the new vaudeville," he said.

Highland bagpiper E.J. Jones, a member of the Celtic band Clandestine, said what he enjoys is playing his bagpipe amidst the presence of so many fine musicians.

"The most lovely thing about the bagpipe is that I don't need amplification," Jones said. "I don't ever have to plug in, and I never worry about being heard. I'm always loud enough."

Belly dancer Carol Shannon, who has

been coming to the Renaissance Festival for 22 years, said she dances for the emotion and joy the festival audiences can give her.

"The people, the beauty, the atmosphere and the feeling are wonderful at the festival," Shannon said. "I get goose bumps when I talk about it. It's a place to escape."

Merchants and artisans line the New Market Village where people can browse an assortment of leather, pottery, jewelry, swords, candles, perfume and woodwork, just to name a few.

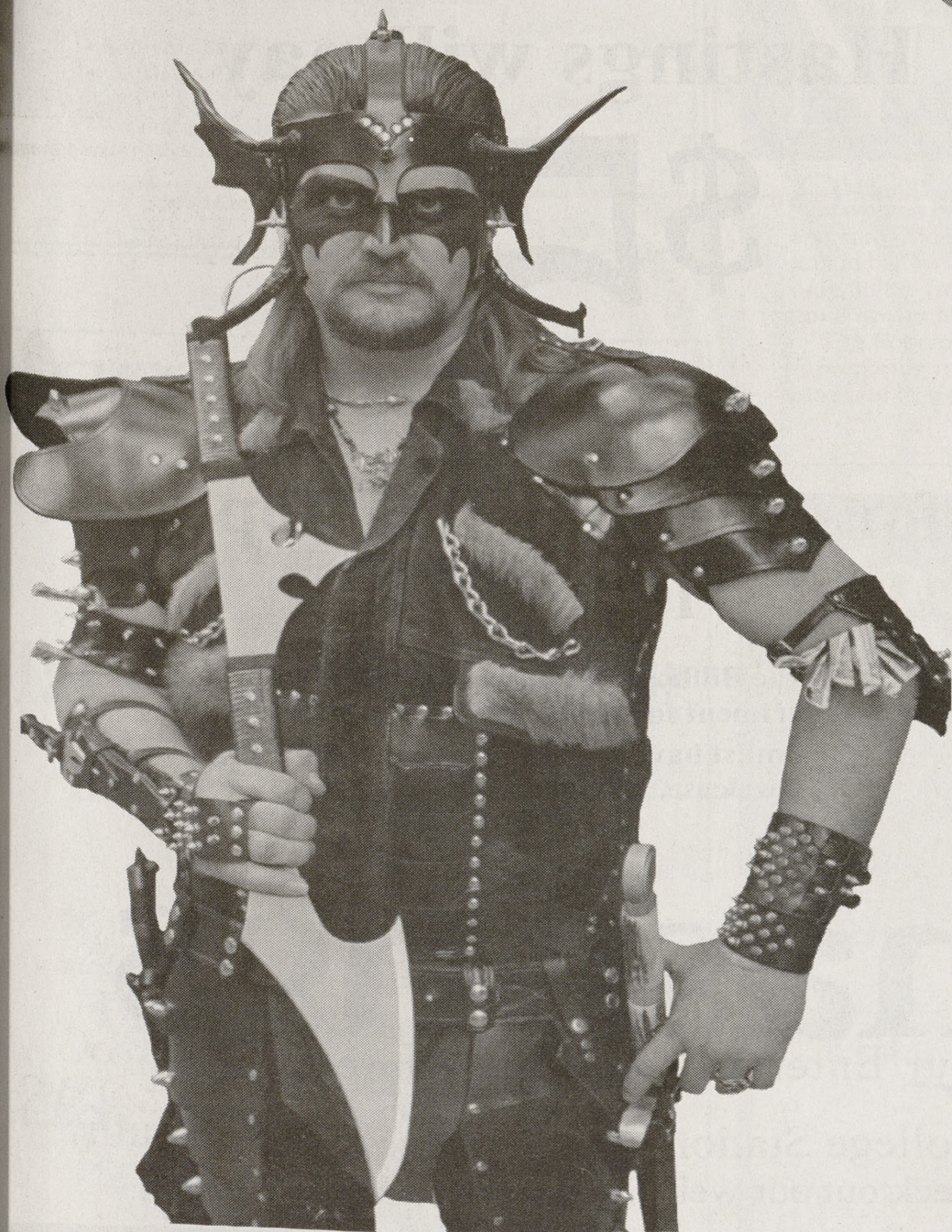
Warlord Kilber K'zar, owner of Castle K'zar, creates custom weaponry, leather armor and fantasy artwork. He said dressing in costume for the festival is an extension of himself.

"My character is a fantasy character, and it just bleeds over into my work," K'zar said. "It's just a base, egomaniacal, kid-like part of me that gets to come out and play."

K'zar said his character likes kids more than he does in real life, so he enjoys interacting with the children as Warlord K'zar by handing out small glass beads, which he calls "dragon tears."

"The festival is Halloween and Christmas rolled up into seven weekends," he said. "If you want to come and see things you can't see anywhere else and do things you can't do anywhere else, this is the place."

In the words of the Flaming Idiots, this is for the "party pagans."



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:

Jen, lead singer and guitarist for the Celtic folk band Clandestine, pauses after performing at the Renaissance Festival.

A jousting knight races to battle at Tournament Field.

A young girl performs, with other belly dancers at the King's Beer Garden.

The Flaming Idiots, Walter, Pyro and Gyro perform their comedy-juggling routine.

Warlord Kilber K'zar, owner of Castle K'zar, a shop specializing in fantasy artwork, stands outside his storefront.

