

Boldly going ...

AggieCon attracts Klingons, sex robots to campus for science fiction convention

By Robert Saucedo
THE BATTALION

Midnight Yell. Elephant Walk. Twelfth man. These are all traditions that Aggies know by heart, which have been taught and reinforced since freshman year. Kelly Sullivan, a senior chemical engineering major, would like to remind Aggies of another tradition — go boldly where many Aggies have gone before — AggieCon.

AggieCon, the largest student-run science fiction convention, is an annual event hosted by Cepheid Variable, the on-campus science-fiction/fantasy/horror programming committee. On March 26 to the 28, the second floor of the MSC will see all manners of men and women mingling alongside with Klingons, Stormtroopers and other creatures of fantasy as the 35th annual AggieCon gets underway.

"We started in 1969, when a large group of kids who were really interested in Star Trek decided they wanted to make a hobby — a group — out of their interest," Sullivan said.

Since the beginning, Cepheid Variable's yearly schedule has orbited around AggieCon.

"It actually didn't start out as a convention. It started off as a dinner panel. It was co-sponsored by the English department," Sullivan said.

In the beginning, AggieCon was primarily used to show old science-fiction movies, but with the advent of VCRs, it now focuses more on literary guests.

"As times change, AggieCon has also evolved with the coming crowd. Reflecting that, this year we have a much larger gaming section. We have a really large computer gaming room. We've seen a much larger demand for anime. AggieCon has gone from a really small literary discussion to something that's really big," Sullivan said.

With a yearly attendance of approximately 12 to 15,000 people, AggieCon has grown into a carnival-like display of genres.

"It's moving much more — guest-wise — toward a literary convention. Our guests of honor this year are Todd McCaffrey and Jacqueline Carey," said Alexis Tucker, a junior chemical engineering major and AggieCon director.

Todd McCaffrey's mother, Anne McCaffrey, is the creator of the Pern series, a collection of books that deals with a world where dragons and humans live together. The younger McCaffrey recently co-authored a book in the series, "Dragon's Kin," with his mother and will continue writing stories in the series.

Jacqueline Carey is the author of the Kushiel trilogy of books.

Besides the literary guests, there will also be two large gaming rooms available.

"It's open 24 hours and in the basement of the MSC. It's the type

of games you'd normally play online like Halo and also the live gaming section," Tucker said. "We have everything from live-action role-playing games to tabletop games. One of the big things this year is that the (Role Playing Game Association), the national organization for Dungeons and Dragons will be hosting a big regional event."

There will also be a free anime room, two showings of the "Rocky Horror Picture Show" on Friday and Saturday night and a collection of panels.

The Texas Aggie Game Developers will be doing a panel. (Ruben DeLuna is going to come with some of "The Battalion" cartoonists and do some panels.

Andy Baldwin, a graduate engineering technology student in charge of public relations for Cepheid Variable, is looking forward to the charity auction benefitting Scotty's House.

"We had a contest to design the program book and we'll be auctioning off some of the original finalist artwork," said Tucker. "Unfortunately, all the cool stuff reminds me that I'm a college student. There's just too much stuff to buy."

AggieCon features a variety of ordinary activities — with an extra hint of imagination.

"The masquerade ball is where people come dressed in costumes and everybody can come to a two-hour dance," Tucker said. "We had somebody call us to make sure it was OK to wear helmets in the MSC ... We always have a few Klingons every year. We even have a guy who dresses up as a sex robot."

The part of AggieCon Sullivan said she looks forward to is working the convention.

"I know it's not a thing a lot of people look forward to doing, but by working I've learned a lot about troubleshooting. As an attendee you get to meet the guests, but as a worker you really get to meet the guests. You get to sit there and talk to them."

As AggieCons come and go, stories are added to the growing collection of lore surrounding this Aggie tradition.

"We have a lot of stories that we don't necessarily want people to know about," Sullivan said. "We had Walter Koenig, who played



IVAN FLORES • THE BATTALION

Chekov on the original Star Trek series come about a decade and a half ago. As lore goes, Chekov disappeared. We didn't see him all Saturday. He showed up at about 2 o'clock on Sunday and said 'I have no idea where I've been, but I had a pretty good time.' As best as we can gather, he hopped from frat party to frat party. We're just wondering if people kept on asking him to tell them about the 'nuclear vessels' again."

AggieCon has also become a reunion of sorts for past Cepheid Variable members.

"We have a couple of seniors who are leaving, and I get sad and tell them I don't want them to leave," Tucker said. "They say 'Don't worry. I'll be back for the Con.'"

AggieCon sets Texas A&M apart from other schools.

"I think it's interesting that the other school up the road in Austin prides itself on being a hippie-liberal school, and they don't even have a science-fiction club," Baldwin said.

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Application forms should be picked up and returned to Dell Bomnskie, Student Media business coordinator, in Room 011A Reed McDonald Building. Deadline for submitting application: noon Tuesday, March 23, 2004. Applicants will be interviewed during the Student Media Board Meeting beginning at 8 a.m. Thursday, March 25, 2004, in room 221F Reed McDonald.

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- The Helpline is staffed by a dedicated and diverse group of student volunteers (undergraduate, graduate, and former students) who have been specially trained in a 6-day training course covering a wide variety of topics like: eating disorders, depression, suicide, relationship issues, multicultural issues and GLBT issues.
- Although the Helpline is not open between 8:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. weekdays (when the Student Counseling Service is open), it operated 24 hours-a-day during the Bonfire tragedy, the September 11 tragedy and when a fellow Aggie died at Fish Camp.
- For Spring 2004, 48 Helpline volunteers and 2 part-time graduate assistants are available.
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