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University Interests

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Society for Creative Anachronism

ISU students clad in homemade armor and medieval costumes lunging at each other with swords made of bamboo and duct tape. Envisioning something resembling a Renaissance festival? You got it. The Society for Creative Anachronism (SCA) is a worldwide historical re-enactment group with live-action role playing set in the Middle Ages. The group originally spawned from a few science fiction and fantasy fanatics in Berkeley, Calif., and a division was formed at Iowa State in 1984.

"Each member of SCA begins by developing a persona," says Christina Kitson, new member educator. They begin by choosing a character to play at SCA events and researching the period they want to "live" in. Some members get into the role playing so much that they even register their personas, explains Kitson, senior in communication studies.

A sub-group in SCA is entirely devoted to researching the accuracy of a chosen name and has the ability to register it as a legal alias, a process that can take a year to complete. "Once you register your second name, you can be identified by it — you can even write out checks signing the name of your SCA persona. You can really get into this club at all different levels," Kitson says.

SCA fighting educator Jenny Custer admits "that there are bruises on occasion" from the group's weekly fighting tournaments. Members battle with swords made of rattan, a bamboo-like material. These one-on-one challenges are judged by how hard the blows could potentially hurt the other competitor if they came from a real weapon.

"If someone hits you on the arm and you think it would have been with enough force to take your arm off, you play like you only have one arm," says Custer, junior in electrical engineering. Self-evaluation is encouraged, and each pair mutually decides who is the winner of each battle. The ultimate goal is to be the "King," who gets the position by winning Crown Tournaments, which are held every six months.

Kitson says that while fighting is one of the more popular events in SCA, there are other activities the club participates in during weekly meetings, such as dancing, singing, cooking, and costuming. Members make "garb," unofficial costumes for various events involving medieval re-enactment. Although they don't dress up for weekly meetings, members usually go all out for monthly court meetings in Des Moines at the Thoreau Center, Kitson says.

The chapter at ISU is a canton, which is defined as a kingdom within SCAs "Knowne World." The group in Des Moines is one of 12 national baronies that support other cantons by integrating them into activities and is the source of a number of larger events. Other universities, including Iowa and Drake, also have loyal SCA followings. At ISU, camaraderie is the main component that is stressed among this crowd of non-mainstreamers, as Kitson likens SCA to "a family you can count on."

SCA is a growing group of over 20 members and is always up for some fresh blood. Grab a sword and strap on an armor plate if you're interested — fighter practice is held Wednesday nights at 7 p.m. at the State Gym Track and music and dance practice are Thursdays at 7 p.m. at St. John's Episcopal Church.

Related websites for your perusal:
ISU Society for Creative Anachronism
Homepage: www.stuorg.iastate.edu/scau
The main page for the ISU canton. Complete with local SCA events and links, this is a great source for more information about medieval reenactment here in Ames.

"We don't censor ourselves," Dorsey says, "but it's a lot like sex ed."

Anyone can attend meetings, which include topics such as how to meet a play partner safely, flogging techniques, negotiating a scene, and toy safety.

If you're not too tied up, check out the website at: www.stuorg.iastate.edu/cuffs/ for more information and meeting times.

Other related sites:
Society for Human Sexuality: www.sexuality.org/bdsm.html
With tidbits on just about every facet of bondage, sadism, and masochism, this site includes many links, including a list of songs with related themes. You'll never hear the Eurythmics' "Sweet Dreams" the same way.

Shandra Wendorff is a sophomore in journalism, and no, she is not a member of either club.