

SCHEDULED ZOMBIE APOCALYPSE

Life



NAU HUMANS VS. ZOMBIES



BY MEGAN TROUTMAN

Zombies and humans alike have been training for this moment: on Feb. 23, a new game of Humans vs. Zombies (HvZ) will take over campus once again.

The game is simple. As a human, survive without zombies tagging you, and as a zombie, tag as many humans as possible to increase the zombie population. In addition to the game of tag, there are missions presented throughout the two-week game. Missions include escorting a non-player character across campus without being tagged in order to find hidden supply boxes.

"I like surviving on my own," said junior business major Stephen Pagni. "I'll admit, I like the paranoia aspect about the game — always being on the lookout for zombies and trying to get in and out of a building safely and quietly. Not getting noticed is half the challenge."

Pagni has been playing the game since he first came to NAU, and enjoys playing as a human.

"I like being human for as long as I can because it's a test for seeing how long I can survive in the game," Pagni said.

Gameplay begins with a set number of original zombies roaming around campus wearing unique clothing, otherwise known as indicators. As the original zombies tag humans, the game progresses until two sides are formed: humans and zombies. Humans are required to wear orange arm bands, while zombies wear orange headbands, distinguishing themselves from other students.

"We start with creating an environment of pure paranoia for the players," Pagni said. "It's really funny because they're always on the lookout for the indicator."

HvZ has been an official club for two years, but has been on campus for at least five years. In the past, the HvZ community has ranged anywhere

from 200 to 700 players, depending on the semester. Since it became an official club, numbers have dropped significantly.

"We're working on repairing our player base," said senior CIS major Raymond DeLaRosa. "There's a lot of things you can learn from playing Humans vs. Zombies. There are some life skills you can learn from it, more than just trying to survive."

DeLaRosa is the president of HvZ and enjoys running the game. As president, he is in charge of external sources, or communicating with Associated Students of Northern Arizona University and Northern Arizona University Police Department (NAUPD).

"It can be time consuming. I've had to schedule things in between everything else I have to do as a student and an employee — it's another job just like everything else," DeLaRosa said.

HvZ has to coordinate with NAUPD due to previous incidents mistaking Nerf blasters with guns. DeLaRosa handles all communication with the department, constantly keeping them updated about the game.

"It's very important that we make the distinction that we're using blasters, not guns. We do our best to work with campus PD to make sure everyone's aware that this is going on and it's okay," DeLaRosa said. "They're technically not guns, so it's the slight distinction that allows us to keep playing on campus."

Some Nerf blasters look like guns, so players must paint the guns bright colors in order to distinguish between the two. Others are too powerful, causing welts, and are banned from the game.

"It's easier for us to solve a problem beforehand, before it becomes a lawsuit," DeLaRosa said. "It's easier for us saying, 'this could be a problem, let's stop it,' rather than the school saying this is a problem."

Not only are Nerf blasters used as weapons for tagging, but throwing balled-up socks is also widely acceptable ammunition.

Senior English and electronic media and film major Shannon Murphy prefers using socks as her

weapon of choice.

"I don't have a gun. I use socks. As someone who plays as a zombie a whole lot, we look for the guns," Murphy said. "The blasters are really bright and noticeable, so if someone has a big, bright and noticeable thing, you're going to see them over someone who only has an arm band. So going with socks gives you an element of secrecy."

Murphy has been playing HvZ for two years now, and prefers playing as a zombie.

"I really like being a zombie. You don't have to be looking over your shoulder the whole time because you are actively looking for humans," Murphy said. "I get too paranoid when I'm human."

Players are notified about new missions, updates and meetings through the Facebook group, "NAU Humans vs. Zombies." New players are easily notified through this page.

"I love seeing the new people play and seeing how everyone reacts to the game," Murphy said. "They're always looking over their shoulder with these huge guns and they're really funny."

New players this year will experience a different start to the game than in years past. On Feb. 28 and Mar. 1, the HvZ community at ASU will be joining NAU for a weekend of gameplay and competition.

"There's going to be that interaction between us and another college [ASU], which we haven't had before. They get to play by our rules and we get to make new friends," DeLaRosa said.

The first day NAU will run the game, and the next day ASU will have its chance to lead with its own rules.

"[It will] give us a chance to see how each group does it. Hopefully, we can learn from each other and hopefully we can make some friends. It's good networking," DeLaRosa said.

With a different and exciting start to the two-week game, the HvZ community is excited to begin a new adventure.

"It's a fun game, our players really enjoy it," Pagni said. "It's a great way to get exercise, make friends, and it's just really fun all around. I'm looking forward to this next game!"



Raymond DeLaRosa, the president of NAU Human vs. Zombies (HvZ), preparing for a good game of HvZ to start Feb. 23. (Photo by Garrett Harper)