

POP LIFE

It's the place where geeks are chic, sci-fi is fly and cosplay is the word of the day. Supanova, Australia's biggest pop culture expo, blasts into Brisbane again. And as well as a stellar line-up of celebrity guests, the event attracts some of the coolest, most colourful characters around.

BY SALLY BROWNE

You may not realise it, but superheroes and villains are living all around you. They may have disguised themselves as students or accountants or shop workers during the week, but at the weekend, they're out in force.

Did you see that flash of green? Is that Poison Ivy, horticulturally crazed supervillainess from the Batman universe? And is that really star-spangled crusader Wonder Woman with her golden lasso of truth? If so, where did she park her invisible jet?

As our photographer's camera snaps in Brisbane's King George Square one sunny day, passers-by start taking photos too. Wonder Woman, Poison Ivy and Silk Spectre II have dropped into town and are striking various poses.

They attract plenty of attention. People ask questions. A lovely old lady comes up: "My husband wanted to know what this was for," she says. "You all look so good!"

There's no doubt that these cosplayers (short for costume players), as they're called, like the attention. Dressing as characters from comic books or the world of Japanese anime cartoons is a lot of fun – and can give an instant confidence boost.

Since the trend took off in Japan, it has become big with Gen Y. But where do they go when they're all dressed up? To conventions like Supanova.

Supanova, which comes to Brisbane next weekend (April 1-3), is Australia's largest pop cultural event, celebrating all things fantasy, sci-fi, comic book and gaming related.

The convention, which began in Sydney in 2000, spread to Brisbane in 2003 and now its audience has tripled. The Brisbane event is its largest, and last year 20,000 people turned up, 5000 more than Sydney and double the number in Melbourne.

What once was the realms of geeks and nerds is now drawing more mainstream attention than ever before – especially from females, says event director Daniel Zachariou. Where it was once a skew of 70-30 (males to females) to the event, the balance is now more 50-50.

"Girls have gotten involved more in popular culture over the last few years," Zachariou says. "I think (it's) because of things like anime, where it's more girl-friendly as far as the style of artwork and storytelling is concerned. And then, of course, there are things like *Twilight*, *Harry Potter* and even *Lord of the Rings*. Girls have really embraced that sort of popular culture."

Cosplayers aren't the only folks you'll see at Supanova. There are plenty of stalls, demonstrations and celebrity panels, with people from the world of comic books, computer games, movies and TV discussing their trade. High-profile guests this year include Christopher Lloyd, aka Doc Brown of *Back to the Future* fame, Colin Baker of *Doctor Who*, Tom Felton or Draco Malfoy from *Harry Potter* and stars of series including *Battlestar Galactica*, *No Ordinary Family* and *Buffy*.

The event is a family-friendly affair, and it's OK to come out of the woodwork as a fan. "What used to be geek culture has become a lot more mainstream the last few years," Zachariou says. And interstate, Brisbane particularly is known for its strong counterculture presence.

"Brisbane has always had a counterculture personality," he says. "I remember reading it had one of the largest g0t populations in the world."

So come on out, it's time to get your geek on.

Supanova, RNA Showgrounds, April 1-3. Tickets: ticketek.com.au or 132 849



SHONA GRAY, QLD MADMAN COSPLAY FINALIST 2010
SHERYL NOME FROM MACROSS FRONTIER
There are so many things to love about cosplay as a hobby! Not only do you get to learn useful skills – sewing, embroidering, how to use power tools to make props,



ELLIE ROSE
SILK SPECTRE II FROM WATCHMEN
My character is Silk Spectre II, also known as Laurie Juspeckzyk, daughter of Silk Spectre I. Laurie is kick ass. She's awesome. Her mother was part of the Minutemen from America who would watch over things and make



STEVE BIGGS
STORM TROOPER OF THE 501ST LEGION, REDBACK GARRISON
I was watching a documentary about the guy who started the 501st, Albin Johnson. He was doing all this charity work and I thought that was great. In Brisbane we look after as many charities as we can, like the Cancer Council, kids and

FEATURE

etc – but I've also been privileged to meet, and make friends with, many wonderful people from not only all over Australia, but also the world. I recently came back from a cosplay trip to Singapore to do photoshoots over there. Cosplay is a wonderful opportunity to express your admiration for the creators of the stories you love, while at the same time creating something awesome with your own two hands. I make my costumes myself. I am a full-time student at UQ, studying dual degrees in arts and law. I think that Japanese pop culture is still regarded as a slightly questionable interest to have but it would be nice to gain recognition for the amazing works that are done by many cosplayers.

sure things were OK with security and diplomacy and all that. Her mother is called Sally Jupiter. I work at EB Games, and also do manual labour. I'm a geek. I decided to go to Supanova and thought hey, it'd be kind of cool to dress up and have pink hair. I have many costumes. It's like the Pringles ad, once you pop you just can't stop. Once you make one you just can't stop. This costume was a collaboration between me and a friend who is a latex worker in America. We drew up the plans together and I sent everything to her because she's got the moulds. I met (*Buffy* actor) Eliza Dushku at Supanova and all the sci-fi girls wanted to snap my latex. It sounds like a balloon and you smell like a balloon too.

hospitals. At Dreamworld we raised \$4000 for the flood appeal, just from people giving donations and having photos with us. Everyone loves *Star Wars* and so did I growing up. But I'm more of a sports person. I'm more into the charity side of things, trying to give back to the community. The reaction you get is amazing, especially when they see you go to kids' hospitals. They see you walk into the room and everyone lights up. Our garrison has over 50 active members. At Dreamworld we got so many people asking us how to join. You buy the armour in kit form and put it all together. My outfit cost about \$1500. My kids love it. They think dad's cool. I work at a firm of architects. I'm kind of being outed today.



CASEY BARRATT
CC FROM ANIME SERIES CODE GEASS
My character is this angry mortal witch – she got immortality when she was younger and now she doesn't want it any more, so the aim of her story is for someone to take away her mortality. But she's generally a strong-willed woman. "You do what I say and you do it now!" I'm a bit more on the nerdy side. I always loved cartoons and I watched *Sailor Moon* ever since I was about four. And then I went to Supanova a couple of years ago and I saw the people in costume and I thought, "This is awesome!" I work in aged care. I'm doing language courses in German and am going to try and study international studies next year at uni, and hopefully major in international relations with German and Korean. This costume took me three months to make. Mostly my mum taught me everything because she's a pro at sewing. She does all my patterns for me. It cost about \$300. Mum usually helps me, because I'm like, "Mum, I have to have this costume made in an hour!"



NOELLE DREVES
WONDER WOMAN FROM DC COMICS

Girl power! She's iconic. Not just feminist but feminine too and I like those strong female characters. Little kids love her and that's brilliant. I really loved the theatre ever since I was a little girl so it was just a natural step to get into costuming and cosplay. I also love doing a lot of charity work, and working in libraries, and kids go absolutely nuts for it. They love meeting their heroes. I work at a department store in cosmetics and fragrance. I love my job. I get to do make-up for people all day long. I'm also studying through Griffith University. I'm doing a double degree in science and psychology, criminology and criminal justice. I'm also a comic book artist and at

Supanova I'm debuting my second comic. It's a superhero comic about a character called Danger Moth, set in Australia during the Second World War. I ordered my costume from a brilliant costume maker in the US. She made the corset to my measurements. When you find a good costume maker you stick to them! Dressing in costume makes you feel a lot more confident. You sit up straight. Sometimes you feel a bit awkward walking down the street. You're pretty vulnerable. It depends on whether you feel accomplished with the costume. If you've got pride in your costume, you feel bullet-proof.

Pictures: Adam Armstrong

COMIC SUCCESS A SUPER DRAWCARD



Stewart McKenny might live in an ordinary house in the suburbs of Brisbane, but the accomplished artist illustrates comics for big-time publishers Marvel and DC.

He's turned his pen to *Captain America*, *DC Super Friends* and *Star Wars: Clone Wars Adventures*, which was nominated for the comics' Eisner Award.

Being a big kid himself, he says, he enjoys working on comics aimed at children, and *DC Super Friends* introduces such classic heroes as Superman, Batman, Wonder Woman and Green Lantern to a new generation.

McKenny will be speaking at Supanova this year. "I got my break by showing my portfolio around local Australian pop culture conventions like Supanova," he says. "Then, with published material under my belt, I started attending the huge American comic book conventions, which get over 100,000 people through the door each day."



ERIN ELIZABETH
POISON IVY FROM DC COMICS

I love my 15 minutes of fame! You do it for the love because there's no money involved. Poison Ivy is a bit different to me because she's very superior and a villainess and very eco and I'm not as eco as I should be! I work at Dreamworld and I'm also a milliner. I make hats. I'm studying at TAFE. I used to dress up a lot as a child. Cosplay is definitely getting more popular. You talk to people and they go, "What's cosplay? Oh I always wanted to do that, I didn't know it existed".



GABRIEL MORTON
RYU FROM STREET FIGHTER

I've been a gamer my entire life. Even when I was three I was tuned to the sound of a 20c piece hitting the ground because it meant I could go and play *Galaga*. I always liked Ryu because his goal was self-improvement. It's not about beating people to be better than them. It's about being better than you were the day before. I took up martial arts because of things like *Street Fighter*. The costume was just a Halloween thing originally, then I went to Supanova. And I've dressed up at the Mana Bar, where I work.



CHRIS SARAPUNG
RYUTAROS FROM KAMEN RIDER DEN-O

I got into anime when I was in primary school with such classic shows such as *Dragon Ball Z*, *Sailor Moon*, *Pokemon* and *Digimon*. I got into cosplay after I finished high school. It just seemed interesting. I love the costumes that people wear. Some are just awesome. Right now I'm studying photography with hopes to get a job in fashion or products. At the moment, I'm buying my costumes, but I'm trying hard to make them. Buying them actually costs a lot and I'm starting to run out of money!



CAITLIN FROST
MELAKA FRAY FROM BUFFY

I'm a library assistant. I got into it by being a nerd. You start as simple things like generic zombie No. 17, and then it becomes, "Oh, I really like this character. I wonder if I can do her", and then a friend of yours will rope you into a group one and you'll end up winning something. We won Best Skit at Sydney Supanova last year. The best cosplayers are the ones who become their character. I find a lot of the reward is when people go: "Oh my God, you're this person from this, I didn't know anyone else read that."