

SundayMail 12.9.10

Sunday

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AUSSIE COSSIES

Grown-ups who still love dress-ups P4



When Cleopatra met Indiana

"dress ups" are muttered. Of course, there's an ocean of difference between the imagination of childhood and the "all-grown-up" notion of adulthood. So what is it that makes adults want to dress up?

The reasons vary from guild member to guild member but, for Cook, it's a love of the clothes themselves that fuels her passion for costuming. "Victoriana clothes are just beautiful," she says wistfully. "The clothes fitted properly and you could make the most of whatever figure you had... corsets were a wonderful thing."

Cook, who in the 1980s studied an advanced certificate in garment design and construction, first discovered her love of costuming at a Medieval Fair in Gumeracha. She's now made dozens of costumes from Regency to a *Harry Potter*-inspired Delores Umbridge outfit.

As a member of the Victoriana Society of SA, Cook will often dress up with her fellow society members and perform historic dances at commemorative events or play croquet on the lawns of Government House for open days.

Among her fellow Victorian devotees is Mavis Smith, a spritely 76-year-old retired nurse. Tonight, Smith is dressed in medieval costume – from the 13th century – but Victoriana (1800s) and Edwardian (early 1900s) dresses equally delight her. She's here with her husband John, 76 and daughter Kay Inverarity, 51. Dressing up, it would seem, is a family affair.

"He scrubs up very nice in Victorian costumes... we grow old disgracefully," Smith says with a cheeky laugh.

And costuming is not confined to the annual ball. "Once, my daughter and I went down to the Railway Museum because they wanted us to be in a photo shoot dressed in 1890 costume. We trotted along to the Railway Museum past a building site and we got all these wolf whistles from the guys," Smith, who has made about 15 costumes ranging from medieval to 1910s, recalls.

"But, when we came back, it had been raining and mud was everywhere. The next minute about five of these guys came down and told us to stay put and they got pieces of wood and put them down so we didn't get dirty."

What she loves most about getting into costume is the escape from ordinary life.

"It's one of those things where you can be or do whatever you want," she says. "You have a whole different reality and it's nice to have a whole different reality at times."

"I was watching a program recently about virtual reality and how people can go into virtual reality through their computers and I thought: 'Well, people here in the Costumers' Guild have

been doing virtual reality for years. You don't have to go into a computer game."

John and Mavis aren't the only husband and wife team at the ball. Indiana Jones (aka Dave Humphrey, 38) and Cleopatra (aka Alison Humphrey, 31) will replicate the Smiths and be attending the ball when they are in their 70s.

"Yes, definitely," they chorus together. First bonded by their love of *Star Wars* (they also belong to the Rebel Legion, an international *Star Wars* costuming group), today their love of the movies is what fuels their love of dressing up.

"I think that's how it starts for most of us – we see something in the movies and want to copy it and then we realise we can do more and more," Alison says.

Now the Humphreys put their costumes to good use, using them at events that help raise money for the Cancer Council.

Dave is loving being Indiana Jones for the night. "I haven't worn this for over two years now, but it's just fun to be Indy again because, well, everyone loves Indy," he says. The length of time it takes to make the costumes varies – Dave's Indiana outfit was sourced from the internet, Cleopatra took Alison about five hours. Smith's costume, complete with its intricate headpiece and sweeping cloak, took her 90 hours to make. Cook's Edwardian masterpiece took her three weeks to stitch.

But none of this compares with Pontip Sonthavong, a 28-year-old graphic designer. His costume, of the Master Chief from video game *Halo*, took him six months to make – and it's not even finished yet; there are still a few lights and gadgets that need to be attached.

Six months. Is he insane? Nope. He just loves it. It's been crafted from a process called Pepakura – an internet phenomenon where a pattern is posted and then put together using paper folds.

"The helmet alone has close to 2000 tabs that need to be glued together," Sonthavong explains. It took him half an hour to get dressed and 10 minutes alone to put on his boots.

"I'm always looking for a creative outlet. I make a lot of video game stuff, Sub-Zero from game *Mortal Kombat*, Rorschach from *The Watchmen*, Karl Ruprecht Kroenen from *Hellboy*.

"Most of my costumes tend to cover my face. Why? I suppose a psychology student would have a field day answering that one. I just like to have a mask."

It's very amusing to watch this masked Master Chief talking to Sarah Morrison's yellow-clad Belle from *Beauty and the Beast*, but both are heaping praise on each other's costume.

"This ball is about getting together with people

1. The Van Raaphorst family Joanne, Penny and John in Alice in Wonderland heaven

2. Guild's big wigs Wendy Wildermoth (NSW president), Lynne Cook (national president), Symon Williamson (SA president) and Cherie Woodard (QLD president)

3. Clockwise from top: Jarrad Taylor as Jason Voorhees, Pontip Sonthavong as the Master Chief, Alison Humphrey as Cleopatra and Dave Humphrey as Indiana Jones

4. Bryan Dodd and Mara Dharmarajah recreate a precautionary tale.

5. Lovers of period costuming are Mavis and John Smith and daughter Kay Inverarity, who is a costume historian

Cover details: Mara Dharmarajah channels Red Riding Hood.

■ **Hair/Makeup:** Vickie Morris
www.vickiemorris.com

■ **Photographer:** Matt Turner

■ **Location:** Adelaide Botanic Gardens



LIZ
WALSH

THE dress is nothing short of a work of art – its delicately embroidered grey netting swishes on the ground with each step, its iridescent shot-taffeta sparkles in the light and the beading detail around the neckline is perfect. Every detail of Lynne Cook's dress has been paid loving attention – often painstaking, always meticulous, completely undivided, attention.

Under normal circumstances, if Cook wore this dress outside the confines of her house, she would attract puzzled stares from strangers and quizzical double glances from passers-by. But, tonight, no one bats an eyelid.

Here, in the ornate 1883-built North Adelaide Community Centre, her dusty pink and charcoal 1904 reproduction dinner dress is perfectly at home among the colour and flair of 1860 crinolines, 13th century medieval head pieces, sultans' capes and 19th century bonnets.

But here, this dress is also acquainting itself with Indiana Jones; there's a monkey it hopes to meet later and a Care Bear as well. It can't wait to meet a pair of cyborgs – perhaps they'll discuss the challenges of Australia's minority government. That's the funny thing about tonight – a cyborg and Queen Victoria are best of friends.

This is the Australian Costumers' Guild's annual ball where anything goes – so long as you're in costume. It's the only place you will find Alice in Wonderland doing the Madison alongside Jason Voorhees or a Jedi knight sharing a glass of wine with Little Red Riding Hood.

There are 70 characters in this room (characters in dress as well as personality) and the scene is enough to bring a broad smile to your face.

There's something endlessly childlike about donning a costume. From young girls rifling through their mothers' drawers to boys wrapping themselves in Superman capes, the imagination can run riot when the words

People here in the Costumers' Guild have been doing virtual reality for years. You don't have to go into a computer game



who are like-minded, sharing ideas and sharing the enthusiasm for dressing up," Sonthavong says. While he'll usually dress in a three-piece suit for "regular" parties, Sonthavong loves the process involved in a costume's construction.

"With every project, I'm learning something new or improving on and I'm a bit of a narcissist as well," he says – and by this he means people taking his photograph.

Artist and video store manager by day and costumer by night, Steve Scholz, 43, agrees. At the ball, he's won the people's choice award for his huge alien *Star Wars* Jedi knight character he's named Fuzzy Warbles.

"You just stand out and get to be somebody you're not and eventually you become a minor celebrity for a while – it's awesome, I love it," he says of costuming. "It's exciting to see what someone's been working their arse off to put together."

The Australian Costumers' Guild started in Melbourne 15 years ago when a group of friends started a club. Cook is this group's volunteer and enthusiastic president, who started the guild's Adelaide chapter in 2002 and then took over the reins in 2004 when Melbourne's membership waned.

Today, there are 87 members Australia-wide, 50 of whom are South Australian.

There isn't a typical member and as such, the guild sees itself as the melting pot of all costuming interest groups including (this may surprise you) the Victoriana Society of SA, the New Varangian Guard, the Society for Creative Anachronism, the Noarlunga Volunteer Rifles, the Blue Company, the South Australian Fan Force, the Novus Ordo (*Star Wars* Costuming Alliance of Australia), the 501st (Terror Australis Garrison) and Starship

Mawson. Then there are other sci-fi groups and *Harry Potter* lovers.

But what makes a really good costume? "You can either copy something or make something up," Cook says. "If you're copying something, what makes it good is attention to the detail and doing your research."

If copying is a costuming art form, then Jarrad Taylor – a 33-year-old petrol station attention – is a master. At the ball, he stands alone in a corner, with a bloodied sword dangling at one side. That hockey mask – a la *Friday the 13th*'s menacing villain Jason Voorhees – sends nothing but terrified chills up the spine.

Often dressed in *Star Wars* outfits, the Voorhees guise gives Taylor the fear-factor. On Friday, August 13 this year, he even dressed up as Jason and went into work for no other reason than to "scare the hell" out of his workmates.

"They were all sitting out the back and I came straight out of the walk-in freezer and scared the hell out of them, they all ran," Taylor says.

A lot less scary but equally devoted to attention is Joanne Van Raaphorst, a costume shop owner from Penrith in western Sydney. Her inspiration is Hollywood director Tim Burton's recent whacky re-imagining of *Alice in Wonderland*. Her costume as the Queen of Hearts and that for husband John (the Mad Hatter) and daughter Penny (Alice) are picture-perfect copies of the decadent designs from the film, right down to the bloomers and gold and lace boots. The Queen of Hearts costume, with its hand-stitched detail and crushed velvet head-piece, took Van Raaphorst five months to complete. "It took me two weeks

to make Alice's outfit, because I hand-stitched it and drew on every little flower, because you can't buy the fabric, so I had to do it by hand," she says.

Our cover girl, Mara Dharmarajah and her costuming partner in crime, Bryan Dodd, enjoy the challenges of paired costuming. Their Little Red Riding Hood and the wolf duo has won them Best in Show at the ball. For these two friends, costuming is the ultimate sport; each year bettering themselves and learning more.

"It's so much fun just seeing what each of the members has thought up this year," Dodd says.

Dharmarajah agrees: "We just have fun in all these costumes, together."

While a movie like *Alice in Wonderland* will inspire, so too do movements. Steampunk is one of these. This trend is beginning to garner a huge following in Adelaide, although it hasn't yet reached the mainstream imagination.

Every single one of the costumers at tonight's ball speaks about an outfit inspired by this – a subculture that blends the aesthetics of the Victorian time's steam era with fantasy and sci-fi.

Another common thread between them is their fabric collection – they all have metres upon metres of fabric and boxes filled with buttons and ribbon and beads and fur and cloth.

Cook's fabric is stored in her shed and is data-based. "Three years ago, Spotlight had a sale and there was a fabric in shades of blue and purple with these irregular spots and I thought: 'That's got to be an alien costume; I'm having it!'"

Of course, she hasn't yet made that alien costume. There's a *Star Trek* convention next year where actor William Shatner will be guest of honour – perhaps she'll use it then.

But, for tonight, as the 1904 dinner dress, the 13th century medieval cloak, Master Chief, Jason Voorhees and Kaylee Frye retire for the evening and go back to their coathangers and storage boxes, their owners are just left thinking about what they'll wear next year. "I think we all agree we have more fabric and more items on our to-do lists than we're going to be alive for," Cook says.

Perhaps that's the beauty and ultimate attraction of costuming: the possibilities are endless.



TOP FIVE... Costuming trends

As picked by Angela Winters from Unley Rd's Kool 4 Kats costume shop.

1 Cartoon characters: Among the most popular characters are the Disney characters, Shrek and Princess Fiona, Snow White, Cinderella, Jasmine and Aladdin and Sleeping Beauty. The really obvious characters are always going to be really popular because then people aren't going to be guessing who you're dressed up as.

2 Movie characters: Quite often, popular characters are influenced by what's at the cinemas. At the moment, *Alice in Wonderland* has come out so a lot of people are wanting to do the Mad Hatter or the Queen of Hearts. When the *Dark Knight* came out, everyone wanted to be the Joker. When *Austin Powers* came out, all the rage were Austin Powers parties. Adventurers like Indiana Jones are always popular.

3 Bollywood: A lot of people have travelled to India and so want to recreate that and, because we've had a big influx of Bollywood films, that has helped inspire people. People can also decorate their homes with Bollywoody tents with lots of throw cushions, and often they'll hire belly dancers and snake charmers. It makes a complete party.

4 1980s: This is the whole retro movement, with the younger crowd wanting to go crazy with two-tone hair and punk, new romantics, glam rock, or pop. Then there are the other fashion styles influenced by *Dynasty* and *Dallas* and the likes of Princess Diana with the power suit and the shoulder pads.

5 Sexy girl: This is very important with the 20-somethings. They want to look like an obvious character, but in a more contemporary style. We have traditional versions of a lot of the cartoon characters but, for the younger crowd, they want to have something a little bit more funky.

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