

The Weekend *The Big Read*

'It's escapism from the real world – for the cosplayers and the public'

An annual outing at Halloween wasn't enough to satisfy Islanders Leigh Thorne and Matt Le Marquand, whose painstakingly-made character costumes have been winning awards and wowing the public – and even the original actors – at fan conventions for several years. Before heading off to one of the biggest next weekend – London's Comic Con – they spoke to **Ramsay Cudlipp**

AT the time of year when many people are thinking about fancy dress, two Islanders have taken the art of costume-making to another level. But Matt Le Marquand and Leigh Thorne are not thinking about Halloween – instead they have plans to don their incredible outfits this month at MCM London Comic Con, which features one of the largest cosplay events in the world.

Dressed in their painstakingly-produced costumes (Matt has crafted the Raider Power Armour suit from video game Fallout 4 and Leigh has opted for Iron Man Mk1), the pair will aim to earn some prizes for their work, as well as mingling with the crowds and posing for hundreds of photos and selfies during the convention.

'The great thing about cosplay [a portmanteau of 'costume' and 'play'] is that anyone of any age and any ability can take part,' says Matt, a facilities manager.

'There is nowhere else in life where two Ninja Turtles, Darth Vader, a Hobbit and Iron Man will all be having a conversation about Doctor Who in the same place. This only happens at Comic Con.'

The pair started out making Halloween costumes a few years ago, with Leigh crafting an Iron Man 'arm' and Matt dressing as Rorschach, a vigilante from the comic book Watchmen. But after spending hours creating incredible costumes, Leigh and Matt found that it wasn't satisfying enough to don them for one night at Halloween, only to lock them away in the garage for the rest of the year.

'This really hit home when one year we both made what I suppose you could call our "signature" costumes – the ones we'd always wanted to make,' says Matt.

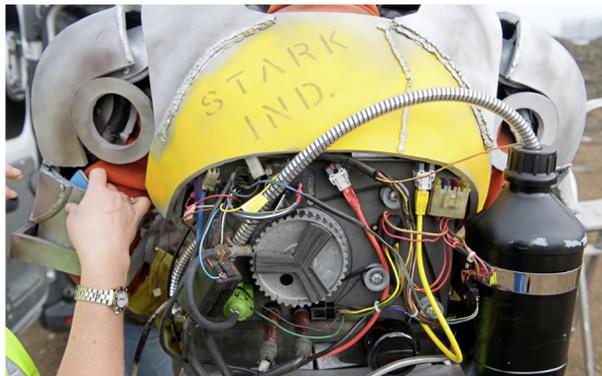


■ It could be a scene from a Hollywood fantasy blockbuster... but in fact it's Matt Le Marquand sporting his Raider Power Armour suit and Leigh Thorne in his Iron Man Mk 1 creation at AAL Recycling's facility at La Collette Picture: DAVID FERGUSON (19594587)



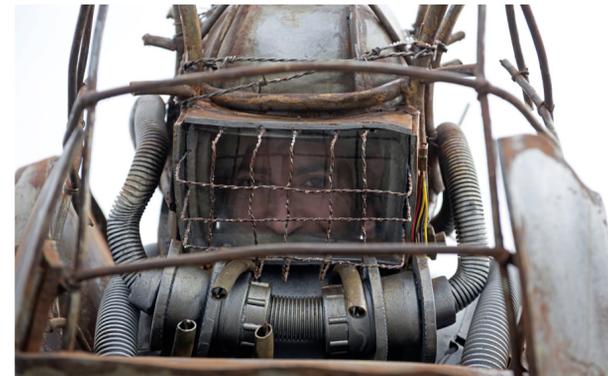
■ Leigh Thorne and Matt Le Marquand as Isaac Clarke and The Black Baron

'Leigh's was Pyramid Head from Silent Hill and mine was The Witch King of Angmar from Lord of the Rings. We took them out around town in horrendous weather conditions and didn't really have a good time at all. We had spent months building them and all for very little. It was around then we decided it was about time we planned a



■ Parts from an old washing machine went into Leigh's Mk 1 suit

trip properly and went to a Comic Con.' Comic Con is a three-day event and Matt and Leigh don a different outfit every day. The first day they wear what they call 'civilian clothing', which tend to be costumes that are easy to walk around in, meaning they can soak up the atmosphere and enjoy the convention as spectators. On the second day they wear their favourite outfits (The Witch King for Matt and Isaac Clarke for Leigh), which are slightly more cumbersome and restrictive, and on the final day they will spend more than an hour carefully loading themselves into their newest costumes – both of which make it hard for the pair to see or move easily.



■ Plastic pipes and garden wire make up much of Matt's source material

'Movement is very constrictive,' says Leigh, who in the day is an ICT and media technician at FCJ Primary School. 'It's hot inside the foam costume and I can't see too well, but seeing the look on the faces of the Comic Con-goers makes it all worth it. I've only worn the Iron Man suit a few times and everyone stops in amazement. People get their phones out for selfies. For that moment, I become Iron Man.'

Both Leigh and Matt have scooped prizes for their efforts. In 2014, Leigh won Best in Parade at the Masquerade category for his RoboCop outfit and last year Matt won a judges' award for his Black Baron costume, which was based



■ Inventor Tony Stark (Robert Downey Jr) is assisted by Yinsen (Shaun Toub) on the Mk 1 prototype, which he used to escape from terrorist group Ten Rings in the first Iron Man film. Below: Leigh is helped by his dad, Robbie, to get into his version of the Mk 1 for our photo shoot



■ Matt builds the legs of his Raider Power Armour suit around plasterer's stilts

'Superheroes will always be one of the biggest draws, though. I mean, who doesn't want to be Batman, Spiderman, Captain America or Iron Man?' The list of costumes created by the pair over the years is impressive and pays homage to various popular video games and movies. Leigh's resumé includes Hicks (Aliens), Borg (Star Trek), Pyramid Head and The Butcher (both Silent Hill), Charlie Pace (Drive Shaft), RoboCop, Léon the professional (Léon), Isaac Clarke (Dead Space 2) and James Sunderland (Silent Hill 2). Matt's creations include Rorschach (Watchmen), Veteran Ranger (Fallout: New Vegas), The Witch King of Angmar (Lord of the Rings) THX1138 (THX1138), Elysium: HULC Grade 3 Exo-skeleton Suit (Elysium), Indiana Jones (Raiders of the Lost Ark) and Victor Kurgan (Highlander). Their key material is foam, which is not only easy to cut and shape but is also very light – an important consideration when the huge outfits might be worn all day at a busy convention. While Matt's Raider Power Armour (Cont on page 36)