

The Weekend *The Big Read*

'You always have to make something that excites you'

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suit looks as if it's made from rusted, clanking bits of metal, it is mainly comprised of plastic pipes, garden wire, poly-tubing, a set of American football shoulder pads, pieces of a vacuum cleaner, biking gloves, Perspex, old guitar strings, computer fans and even the kitchen sink (well, bits of it).

'As the character's suit is meant to be constructed from junk metal and nothing on the costume is symmetrical or evenly cut, I decided to cut all the pieces from EVA foam free hand. This means no stencils and very few exact lines – just measuring up and cutting with either a hot knife or scissors. I had no real plan after that and just kept going, bit by bit, night after night locked away in the garage for about two hours at a time.

'I learned so much from making the costume, including how to make realistic fake barbed-wire and how to apply a real rust effect to foam so it looks like old rusting metal. This includes spraying iron powder with a solution made up from salt, vinegar and hydrogen peroxide.

'You always have to make something that excites you. I loved the game [Fallout 4] and the thought of stomping around in my own power armour was too tempting not to try.

'Early on I decided I would make it exactly to scale, which meant using the stilts. This was a first for me and provided all kinds of problems in scaling the costume up as it would be far bigger than me, also potentially far more dangerous. I started with buying a set of plasterer's stilts, practised on them for a few weeks and then built from the ground up, starting with the boots and legs and then the torso and so on.

'It certainly took way longer and was far more challenging than I first thought.'

What may be more challenging than the build is actually moving around the convention while dressed in the suit. Matt will require a 'spotter' to act as his eyes and ears, and he's fitted a microphone and speaker so that he can communicate with the outside world.

'It is probably the most uncomfortable costume to wear that I have ever made, mainly because of the plasterer's stilts and the sheer weight on your shoulders. My visibility is limited to a 20 by 10 cm Perspex screen with no view of the floor directly in front of me. I can't hear anyone very easily as there will be two fans blowing cold air into my helmet to stop the Perspex screen from steaming up.

'When wearing the costume you can't eat, drink, sit down or go to the toilet and because of the weight, helmet and tight-fitting sections you sweat. A lot.

'But, for all that, will it be painful to wear? Yes. Will it be worth it? Absolutely.'

For his Iron Man creation, Leigh had intended to use sheet metal for parts of the build, and started his project by cutting out sections using templates –



■ Is that really you, Dad? Matt wearing his work-in-progress armour poses for a picture with his six-year-old daughter, Mia

basing his design on online images, stills from the film and 3D models. But after suffering a few issues with his hands and finding it a struggle to cut the metal, he reverted to foam, namely children's play mats.

'I have always wanted to build an Iron Man costume,' he says. 'He's a fantastic character and I've always liked the fact that Tony Stark is really just an ordinary guy who builds his suits. I've always liked the Mk1 and wished the suit had more screen time. I used Google images

to inspire myself and discovered that the Mk1 is probably the least made Iron Man costume.

'I would spend hours online in cosplay and prop forums talking to cosplayers from around the world, getting inspiration and motivation.

'I used American football armour to build on to, to get the correct width of the Mk1. My friend was also scrapping an old motorbike and I used multiple parts to create the chest arc and rear motor. My washing machine broke down so various

parts ended up getting hot-glued onto my costume. From a cosplay perspective, it gets hot inside a large foam costume and you spend the day posing for photos and sweating, so you must drink lots of water and remember deodorant. Nobody likes a smelly robot.'

Both Matt and Leigh say that the response from fellow cosplayers and people at the convention makes all the time and discomfort worth it, and Leigh has even earned the approval of some celebrities.

'Last year Jodelle Ferland from the film *Silent Hill* was amazed by my Pyramid Head costume and said: "This is the best *Silent Hill* Pyramid Head cosplay I've seen!" before getting her sister to take a few shots of us together on her phone. Jean Reno, the actor who played Léon the Professional, has also contacted me saying that my Léon is "cool", but pointed out that my beard was not as good as his!'

Both Leigh and Matt have big plans for the future, with Matt's heart set on building a huge 'Big Daddy' costume (a monstrous character from the popular video game *Bioshock*) and Leigh planning to use a 3D printer to recreate the DeLorean time machine car from *Back to the Future*.

For now they are concentrating on this month's Comic-Con, their third event in four years, where they will enjoy wearing the fruits of their labour.

'That's what it's all about for me, becoming the character for a short time and walking in their (big) shoes,' says Leigh.

'It's escapism from the real world and it is enjoyable for everyone, from the cosplayers and creators themselves to the public who stand back in amazement.'

■ All of the fun of Comic-Con is hopefully coming to Jersey next year, in the form of the Channel Island Convention (CICon). Find out more at ciconevents.com or on the Facebook page (@CiConJsy)



■ Matt's helmet mid-build



■ For our photo shoot, we asked AAL Recycling Ltd if we could borrow their premises, thinking that the haulage company's site would make a perfect backdrop for two characters whose outfits are 'recycled'. Thank you to Rozena and Alan at AAL Recycling Ltd for their assistance and for opening the doors to us on a Saturday morning