

Our Chains of Oppression

Attending the *Animania Festival* for the very first time was like a walking dream, I have finally seen the glorious event only heard of in passing by the very friends who converted me. I am an Otaku, in a sense. I love the anime; I love the manga, the games and the music. I love all of these things plus more.

“But what is the *Animania Festival*? And what the hell are these otaku’?” Some of you might be asking yourselves. Well, the *Animania Festival* is an event hosted by the delightful hosts who do up the Australian Technology Park in Eveleigh twice a year for the Otaku public who are broad enthusiasts of the Japanese culture associated with them such as anime, manga, games and more.

This festival may not be part of the upper echelons of organised events like the *Royal Easter Show*, but, it is one of the only events of its kind in Australia and that’s special! There are in fact three festivals total in Australia, there is the: *Animania Festival* (Of course), *Supanova Pop Culture Expo* and *Smash!* (Sydney Manga and Anime Show).

These three events are each different in their own way but are all inextricably linked to the inner nerd, who yearns to be free of their chains of oppression, wrapped around them by the very society they live in and which looks down upon them with a judgmental gaze. But enough is enough, this is their time to shine, my time to shine. We will rise up and take the city of Sydney in our zany and colourful storm.

At precisely 0700 hours, I boarded a train from Gosford, armed to the teeth in my cosplay of the flamboyant and cheerful Spain from the world renowned anime *Hetalia Axis Powers*. Looking around I expected there to be more warriors, waiting to mount the mythical metal locomotive known more commonly by the name of the “train.” I sighed sadly as the train waited for stragglers. Suddenly a group of young men garbed in outrageous battle gear rushed onto the train, their swords and guns, quivered in nervous hands at the anticipation of the assault. Reinforcements had finally arrived!

Strolling down into my carriage the group regarded me and I them with the same curiosity, we didn’t speak but we nodded in acknowledgment, and waited as our journey slowly began. As we hurtled down the coast of New South Wales more and more troops boarded the train, young men and woman carried their respective weapons with eager hearts, unable to contain their excitement as the bullet of steel drew closer and closer to our destination.

As the country side turned into an urban jungle, silence fell over our unit; the locomotive slowed and drew in at our checkpoint. Final preparations were made at 0930 hours as we hoisted our packs onto tired backs and marched through the sleepy Saturday suburb of Redfern, the locals gawked in open fascination and horror as the march took us from Redfern station to the Australian Technology Park just over in Eveleigh.

The old buildings in the rail yard loomed in the distance as our small legion advanced on the old industrial fortress, rounding the building we were presented with a tremendous sight; before us stretched queues of fellow brothers and sisters waiting impatiently for the mystic *Animania Festival* to begin.

Suddenly my fellow clanswoman bounced into view, dressed in a pink satin dress covered in purple polka dots with black lace trims, long curled pink hair brought up in two pony tails with various candy armour accessories.

But Lillian wasn't alone; she had brought assistants of her own from various tribes around the state, horned men and woman from the troll tribe of Homestuck stood around her as the lines slowly began to compress and crush the Otaku' against each other. Watches were checked regularly as time slowed and people waited for the fortress doors to be opened to allow the milling crowd to enter the hallowed structure.

Suddenly, the battle cry rang out and the army of nerds rushed forward pulling tickets from hidden pockets to show the burly guards obstructing the various gates. It was all a rush, the adrenaline pumped through me; my heart pulsed madly against my ribcage as my ticket was scanned and I was admitted into the fold. And suddenly it all changed, there was no need to be tense or be on the lookout for imminent discrimination, it was like getting a super dreadnaught class item drop over and over again, that feeling of satisfaction and intense happiness washed over anyone and everyone who entered that palace of pop culture.

Instead of a soldier facing the oppression of society, I was just a young teen out with friends at a convention having a blast; colour assaulted us from all angles as the battle gear of the others simply became carefully crafted costumes that dazzled us with their intricate detail. The glitz and glamour descended like a cloud over the convention, laughter and shouting rose to the roof like an aria of joy, dipping and rising on the bliss of the overly energetic crowd.

Mannequin's stood off to the side wearing the costumes crafted by expert designers who poured their blood, sweat and tears into these colourful creations of class and sophistication. Tables stretched across the foyer with people gliding pencils across the soft white of paper, spilling images of cartoon people and animals across the pages. The light of LCD screens blazed across the floor whilst people played the old Mario Cart on the ancient but still terrific technological relic, the Nintendo 64.

Youths danced to music lead by the universally known hologram Hatsune Miku, her long green hair spiralling about her dancing figure whilst her computer generated vocals soared into the heights of the banisters. The famous cosplaying trio Anita, Anna and Ailee spoke passionately about the art of cosplaying and performing skits to crowds, giving advice to the next generation of potentially famous cosplayers.

Lillian and I roamed through the jostling mass of individuals to look at the small scale market within the sacred building. People crowded around the various stallholders tables perusing the array of weird stuff; we looked at digitally drawn artwork, hand drawn comics, original jewellery, miniature figurines and so much more. There was so much, and yet, not enough, we went around and around and discovered something new each time.

Hours passed in this strange land of fun and we grew weary. Deciding to take a break, we managed to reunite with the group of trolls we met earlier and hijacked the nearest leather couch to use as a resting area. I sat next to a boy with long flowing hair, I was shocked to hear him introduce him-self as "Mary" instead of something like "Mark" at first I thought he was referring to his character's

name but then he went on to explain he was a girl trapped in a male body, I was so shocked I think some of my hair went white.

Among this small group there were some very zany individuals who each had their own quirks and personalities; they were very kind people who were not afraid to let their freak flag fly. And in a way, I think they have taught me not to be afraid of who I am and to let myself go a bit more. They were not alone as individuals; everyone who came to the *Animania Festival* was allowed to be free and exposed themselves for all to see.

Unfortunately time marches on and all good things must end, it was 1600 hours and we needed to leave the safe sanctuary of the Australian Technology Park and resume our normal lives, Lillian and I said our farewells and made our way back to the train station to embark on the long train ride back to Gosford. But it was different this time; I had shed those heavy chains of repression and was ready to move on letting more of my inner nerd out for the world to see.

The many cosplayers we had travelled down with surrounded us now with their colourful costumes tinted an orange hue under the afternoon setting sun, weariness hung like a haze around our aching heads, there were no locals to stare at us this time at the train station but even if there was it wouldn't have mattered.

We had all gained some new awareness that allowed us to look past the self-consciousness we once had, it was a new freedom we had acquired and we no longer had to fight society as the soldiers we once were when we came, it doesn't matter what society thinks of us. We are amazing individuals who will continue to grow as people and build bright futures for ourselves and it is all thanks to the *Animania Festival*. I want to go again, but that won't be until next September.