

# VADER'S FIST STRIKES BACK

## – FOR CHARITY

Text by Ron Chiang



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With the latest releases of the *Star Wars* series on the big screen, it is evident that this science-fiction fantasy continues to have a huge draw on people of all ages. Have you ever wondered what it would be like to be part of the Imperial's army? Wonder no more! Below, we hear from the Commanding Officer of the 501st Legion Singapore Garrison, Ron Chiang, who shares about this costuming organisation set out to spread the magic of *Star Wars*.

### Could you please tell us more about the 501st Legion Singapore Garrison and its members?

The 501st Legion is an international costuming *Star Wars* fan club made up of volunteers. Founded in 1997 by Albin Johnson, the Legion has since spread the magic of the *Star Wars* genre worldwide through its authentic-looking costumes and has become a leading force in fan-based charity events.

The Singapore Garrison has been the local subunit of the organisation since 2002. Over the past 15 years, our membership has grown to 109 members, making us one of the largest Garrisons in Asia. Our members are predominantly working professionals in their early thirties and despite common stereotypes, the Legion and Garrison have a significant female membership, many of whom play crucial administrative roles in our organisation.

### How do the members go about preparing their costumes to ensure acceptance?

The entry standards for our costumes are laid out in the Costume Reference Libraries (<https://goo.gl/0kwOu7>) and applicants will have to submit specific photos of their costume for assessment. Detailed information about the costumes can be found from the relevant Detachments. Detachments are subunits within the Legion that specialise in their

assigned costume types. They typically have online forums and tutorials to guide the applicants along.

Besides the Internet, the local Garrison have identified individuals who have significant experience in certain costume types and we will refer our prospective members to them for guidance. Some of these individuals even go the extra mile by hosting meet-up sessions where new recruits are able to witness the costume assembly process and work on their own costumes under supervision.

Our hard costumes typically come in kit form and are bought from fellow overseas fans who have made these kits in their garage. We would then trim and customise the parts to fit the wearer before painting and weathering to match the screen-used props. Some accessories are sourced from around the globe, usually from different makers, and matched with other parts to complete the costume.

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**How did the organisation first get involved in charity work?**

The Legion was involved in charity work from the first day it was started. In fact, it is one of the three pillars of our group. In the local context, we initially had to reach out to organisers to obtain permission to turn up at their events. This was before we were more well-known and sought after. In recent times, as we gained more exposure, we see more event organisers and charities inviting us to their upcoming events and we will usually accept their requests, given a reasonable advance notice. We have also seen an increase in numbers of corporate organisers and event management companies coming to us with requests. However, we would advise and suggest for a charitable cause before confirming our attendance.

**How does the scheduling of appearances work with your volunteer members?**

Once an event is confirmed, our event officers will put up a sign-up thread on

our forum and members are free to select the events they wish to attend. Some may even take leave from their day jobs to attend events they feel closer to.

If a proposed event falls on a weekday, especially during office hours, we will warn organisers that the interest and sign-ups from our members will be significantly lower. When we do have the luxury of choice, we will almost certainly prefer weekends and after office hours.

**What is the typical time commitment for each member?**

Our events usually last between one to two hours, and each member only needs to attend one official event in an officially approved costume per year to be considered active. However, exceptions may be granted due to work or family commitments. The Garrison averages one event every fortnight and one major event every quarter. For major events, our appearances may last around eight hours and we will incorporate shifts into the day.

Additionally, the costumes can be very intricate and hundreds of man hours would go into making sure that the individual bits and pieces of each costume accurately represent what we see on screen, and what we know of the props' history. For some of the newer characters (eg, the Shoretrooper from Rogue One), there is very limited information on the costumes and our interested members will have to work with the international fan community in order to learn more about the assembly and origins of the screen-used costumes.

**What are some of the most memorable charity events?**

I would say that the most memorable charity event for me would be our first group ward visit at the KK Women's and Children's Hospital (KKH) in December 2013. Thanks to the pioneering efforts of one of our members, we were allowed the opportunity to visit a few paediatric wards in costume.

While there were some concerns with regard to infection control and the possibility of scaring some of the patients, KKH's Development staff handled those issues expertly. Our members cherished the experience and felt that it was a very meaningful event. We were also very happy to do it again when we had the opportunity to in the following years. The children were very excited to see us coming and many parents even pushed (figuratively) their unwilling children to take photos with us. I should also mention that the ward nurses were at least equally, if not more, excited to have us over. At the end of the event, we received feedback that we were even more popular than the Disney princesses who had visited the wards. Unbeknown to some of our members, that event marked the start of a very happy (albeit non-exclusive) partnership between the Garrison and KKH. ♦

**Legend**

- 1. Frontal shot of the joint Singapore Garrison and Cathar Base contingent at Chingay 2015
- 2. Group photo on the OCBC Skyway
- 3. Finishing line at the Pink Ribbon Walk 2015
- 4. Group photo on the OCBC Skyway from the recent May the Fourth event at Gardens by the Bay