

## **Anime's cult following now a cultural trend - Annual SakuraCon festival this weekend to attract fans (and cosplayers) of all ages**

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For lack of a better term, an anime festival is sort of like a science fiction convention. People gather to talk about and dress as their favorite characters, as well as to purchase merchandise related to their favorite show. So says Kelli Blackwell, managing editor of Animerica Magazine, and an expert on the subject of anime -- Japanese animation that has become very popular among American youth in recent years.

Anime has become so popular here that major video rental stores are stocking it on shelves, where only a few years ago it would have been impossible to find. The Wall Street Journal recently reported that anime generated about \$495 million in revenue in 2003. A few years ago, there were only a few anime festivals. Today, there are more than 20 a year. This weekend, the seventh annual SakuraCon, a large Northwest anime festival, will be held in SeaTac at the Marriott Hotel and Seattle Airport Hilton.

So what's the deal with anime?

Ever since the characters Nova and Derek Wildstar blasted onto the scene with the 1980s popular cartoon, "Star Blazers," Japanese animation has attracted a cult following in America. In recent years, with the popularity of shows like "Pokemon" and "Dragon Ball," younger children have become increasingly fascinated with anime.

Fans like Blackwell say the emotional themes and colorful characters are just some of the reasons children and teens are attracted to the Japanese style animation.

This weekend's SakuraCon anime festival will feature collectibles in Japanese animation, as well as comics and a variety of other items for purchase. Pop star Hiro (the Britney Spears of Japan) will perform at the event.

But a highlight for most at the show will be the attendees who dress as their favorite anime characters.

Blackwell says she loves to attend anime festivals to watch the "cosplayers." "Those are the people who dress up as their favorite characters. They're like trekkies."

She adds, "The influence of anime is so huge. It's crossed over into American culture and the numbers are just huge. They're expecting a record crowd at SakuraCon this year."

A glossary of anime terms:

\* Anime: Japanese animation, or Japanese style animation, characterized by emotional themes and vivid, colorful characters.

\* Manga: Comic books featuring Japanese style themes and culture.

\* Otaku: Someone who appreciates Japanese animation.

\* Jpop: Popular Japanese music that often is married with anime.

\* Cosplaying: Anime fans who dress up as their favorite anime characters.

**SAKURACON ANIME FESTIVAL**

Today through Sunday. Visit [www.sakuracon.org](http://www.sakuracon.org) for schedule information. Tickets: \$25-\$50.

Where: SeaTac Marriott Hotel and Seattle Airport Hilton