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**A Hero's Tailor**

Creating Cosplay for Larger-Than-Life Characters

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# **A Hero's Tailor**

Creating Cosplay for Larger-Than-Life Characters

**by**

**Samantha Ree Cole**

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## **Abstract**

### **A Hero's Tailor**

Creating Cosplay for Larger-Than-Life Characters

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Cosplay has become a worldwide phenomenon. Cosplayers take 2 dimensional character and replicate their looks in real life. These Cosplays are astounding feats of ingenuity and engineering. Seen as mostly as a weekend hobby, Cosplayers are creating a commercialized world of makers and models. Many studies have been done on play theory, gender identity, and sexualization in Cosplay. *A Hero's Tailor* seeks to focus on the creation of Cosplay through a case study and an autoethnography study. Through a case study in the form of interviews with Cosplayers of various skill levels. They will be asked why they Cosplay and their methods of creation. The results of these interviews will help describe the process of how Cosplayers develop their Cosplay from inception to finished product. This study will also explore the reasons Cosplayers create. Finally, the study concludes with the creation of a Cosplayer for myself. In the build of the Cosplay, I will use skills as a Costume Technician combined with what I learned from the Cosplay community. Across this thesis I want to bring the creation process to the forefront.

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## Introduction

A girl walks past in cat ears and a maid's dress. She's followed by an impressive Ironman suit carrying a large body pillow with an animated character on it. Someone calls out to take a group picture of *World of Warcraft* orcs. A line of Spidermen dance past in formation. Cameras and phones are shooting and recording everything. All the while Spock and Captain Kirk sit on the floor talking about an episode of *Star Trek*. What on Earth is going on? This is Cosplay. A bright world of people sharing their love of characters from various forms of entertainment. A space where makers, actors, and innovators gather at various events wearing costumes, either made or purchased, from their favorite media.

What is Cosplay? Cosplay has been seen as weird year-round Halloween. In theatre, Cosplay is often sneered at as a hobby done by nonprofessionals hot gluing their costumes together and ignoring any logical construction methodologies. Cosplay, however, has come a long way from its humble origins at the turn of the century. Cosplayers have been creating larger than life characters inspired by the page or screen into fully articulated costumes.

At heart I am a geek, a lover of comic books, anime, and video games. I grew up watching Sailor Moon and Dragonball Z, Japanese animes and seeing Disney princesses on the big screen. My friends and I would wrap sheets around our waist as makeshift ballgowns and dance around like Belle or Sleeping Beauty. We made paper tiaras and taped them to our heads to be the Sailor Scouts. This was Cosplay, we just didn't have word for it. Growing up I learned about conventions where people who loved media like I did gathered, dressed up as their favorite characters, and celebrated.

I became a costume technician because I love figuring out how costumes come together. There was also the feeling of going to the shows I worked on and feeling the audiences' reactions to pieces I built. Once out of school I had more time to explore the thing called



Cosplay. Cosplay brings together the three things I love together: costuming, storytelling, and fantasy/superheroes.

Cosplay has been studied in various ways like gender identity, play theory, citations, and photography. However, when I started to research the topic, I found little about the creation of a Cosplay itself. What are the reasons people Cosplay? What tools are used or developed for Cosplay? How do Cosplayers source information? What is it like to build a Cosplay from start to finish? Cosplay is used as a noun and a verb. Cosplay, noun, is the costume created based on a printed media. Cosplay, verb, is the act of wearing the created costumes.

For this thesis I will be mixing several types of studies to explore creating Cosplay. The first method is a case study where I am focusing on a single group, in my case Cosplayers. A case study allows for studying “a unique individual or opportunity” and “represents a typical instance of other comparable cases” (Saldana,148). For my case study, I interviewed Cosplayers of different backgrounds, discuss their creation process, and skills going into their creation. Blending into my case study methodology is an autoethnography study. This method “asks the researchers to turn a reflexive gaze toward themselves” (Saldana, 158). As a Cosplayer myself, I created a second “case” based on my own experience. In this approach I documented my process and skills used when creating my own Cosplay and noted how my background affected my choices.

Across this thesis I offer five chapters discussing Cosplay. I begin with a history of Cosplay and the origin of the word Cosplay. I move into chapter two where I break down my interviews with Cosplayers. From that information, chapter three discuss the process a Cosplayer goes through when building a Cosplay. This chapter include a breakdown of popular materials used by Cosplayer. Chapter four delves into the reason Cosplayers make ranging from love of character to competitions. Finally, chapter five is the breakdown of my process of creating a Cosplay for myself. Through this thesis I hope to expand on the process of creating a Cosplay.

## Chapter 1

### What is Cosplay?

Cosplay has become a global phenomenon rooted in dressing in costume to resemble a character from printed and animated media. Every year cosplayers out do themselves in what they create and what characters are brought to life. However, before I can talk about contemporary Cosplay, I must first talk about how it came to be. For this thesis, I will focus only on the evolution of Cosplay in the United States. Masquerades and Carnival-esque parties had been around for centuries. As discussed in Ron Miller's article "Was Mr. Skygack the First Alien Character in Comics?", the first recorded incident of someone dressing up as a character from print media is a couple in Cincinnati OH in 1908. William Fell and his wife arrived at a local party dressed as characters from newspaper cartoons. Fell dressed as Mr. Skygack a character from *Mr. Skygack, from Mars* (Illustration 1.1) and his wife dressed as Miss Dillpickles, a character from a different comic (Miller). In 1910 another young lady created a Skygack costume and wore it to a masquerade ball where she won first prize in a costume competition. The first photograph of a person wearing a costume based on a picture media character also involved Mr. Skygack. August Olson won first prize at a local contest and was photographed wearing his costume (Miller). Not much is discussed on the creation of his piece, but those that saw it were surprised by his creativeness in reproducing Mr. Skygacks unusual head shape. (Illustration 1.2)



Illustration 1.1 *Mr. Skygak, From Mars* Cosplay.



Illustration 1.2 Article clipping of

According to Paul Mountfort and company's book *Planet Cosplay*, the next big milestone in Cosplay was the first national event called, WonderCon. The term "Con" is an abbreviation for Convention and will be used as such for the rest of the paper. WonderCon took place in New York from July 2 to 4, 1939. WonderCon was a science fiction convention with 200 in attendance (Mountfort et al. 49). Carol Pinchefsky noted in her article "The First Cosplay" what stood out was a young couple, Myrtle R Jones and Forrest J Ackerman, who arrived in their home-made costumes based on H.G. Wells' *Things to Come* (ci 1936) (Figure 1.3). Jones had created the costumes for herself and for Ackerman (Pinchefsky). At this WonderCon participants dressed in fashions that were imaginative ideas of what fashion of the future would be like. A noteworthy point is the inclusion of modern fabrics such as rayon (Mountfort et al 49). Other WonderCon events to follow saw a rise in craftsmanship of costumes and use of new materials. At the WonderCon 3 in 1941, a costume piece became known as the "\$1000 Cosplay" (Pinchefsky). This costume received its name because of the material used by the attendee, Walter J. Daughterty, who created a shoulder and head piece that included the use of metal supports (Figure 1.4). The supports were made from aluminum which at the time cost a great

deal to refine (Pinchefskey). This is another example of Cosplayers using new technology and materials to recreate their favorite characters.



Illustration 1.3 Forrest J Ackerman and Myrtle R Jones



Illustration 1.4 Walter J Daugherty “\$1000 Cosplay”

The 1940s and 1950s saw a steady rise in attendance to WonderCon and other Cons popping up in Chicago and St Louis, but it was the late 1960s and 70s that saw a boom in cons and cosplay thanks to Trekkies. Trekkies are the nickname given to fans of the tv show *Star Trek: The Original Series* (1966-69). In 1967 at WonderCon, “at least 7 attendees reportedly costumed as Mr. Spock” from *Star Trek* with his blue shirt, bowl haircut, and pointed ears. The first Star Trek Con, devoted strictly to *Star Trek*, was held in 1972 (Mountfort et al. 26). This was a shift as most Cons to date has been blanketed as general science fiction and fantasy themed events. Fans from many different fandoms intermingled at the Cons. The Star Trek Con was solely for fans of the series. This was also the time that dressing up as costumed superheroes became immensely popular. While the origin of most superhero comics traces back to the Second World War, it was the rise of the film and television adaptation that sparked the costume craze. The 1970s was a decade of famous movies and franchises that to this day are still referenced like *Star Wars* and *Rocky Horror Picture Show*. 1970 was the inaugural year of the

Golden State Comic Book Convention located in San Diego. The Con changed its name in 1973 to the more recognized San Diego Comic Con which is now one of the largest conventions in the United States. The con changed its name again in 1995 to Comic Con International: San Diego (“About Comic-Con International.”). More on this Con later.

The larger groups devoted to a tv show, movie, or comic became known as fandoms. Trekkie is an example of a name for the fandom of *Star Trek*. These people meet up to share their love of the show, discussing ideas and theories about the media. Cons were a place for the fandoms to express their interest in the media with other likeminded individuals. One can also belong to more than one fandom at a time. Though some use to joke that you either are a fan of *Star Wars* or *Star Trek* but not both. In modern days, these fandoms now have online forums and chat rooms dedicated to interacting with each other.

We must now talk about the origin of the word Cosplay and how it is used today. By the 1970s anime, Japanese animation, and manga, Japanese comics, were being imported into the United States (Mountfort et al 55). It was not as widely popular as it is today, but the numbers were strong coming into the 1980s. A scholar and writer of many articles and books about Cosplay, Theresa M. Winge traces the origin of the word Cosplay in her book *Cosplay: The Illegitimate Child of SF Masquerades* to the Japanese writer Nobuyuki Takahashi in 1983 when he visited WorldCom in Los Angeles, California (Winge 3). Takahashi was a writer for a magazine called, *My Anime*, and noticed a stark difference between East and West costumed culture. In the States there were more females crossdressing as male characters. In Japan there were designated spaces to dress up and present your costumes, whereas in the States you could go anywhere even outside the con itself already dressed up (Mountfort et al. 55-56). Michael Bruno reflects on hearing from the created originator of the word Cosplay in his article “Cosplay: The Illegitimate Child of SF Masquerades.” Takahashi wanted something that was neither Japanese nor America, but a combination of both to show the blending of the American costuming tradition with Japanese culture. He finally settled on “Cosplay” by using the Japanese habit of shortening words into easier to say bits on “Costume Play” (Bruno). “This was taking the term *kosupure* (Cosplay) from *kosuchuumu purie* (costume play)” (Mountfort et al. 55). Cosplay has distinguished itself from other forms of costumed performance and celebrations by being heavily rooted in textual and visual sources. As Mountfort writes in his essay *Cosplay a Citation*:

Where Cosplay differs from dressing up more generally is in its specific indebtedness to source media on which it is heavily reliant. Cosplay also differs from other dramatic performances for the theatre or screen in that Cosplayers do not seek to realize an entire script in a sustained performance but in smaller “parcellized” portions of an original, seldom longer than short skits (23-24).

As part of their Cosplay, Cosplayers (those who participate in Cosplay) will practice poses or sayings of the character they have dressed as. At Cons, the Cosplayers can be seen striking these poses for photographs with other attendees.

Today Cons are quite different from where they started. For example, Comic Con International: San Diego, from humble origins, is now one of the largest Cons in the world. Attendance at Comic Con in recent years has reached, according to their website, up to 130,000 within the main convention hall (“About Comic-Con International”). It is so large that satellite locations have been created to provide for the ever-expanding event. Comic Con has even expanded to have Cons in other cities across the United States. Comic Con San Diego has become the event where most entertainment companies release information about their latest projects. It was at Comic Con San Diego that we learned of *The Avengers* series that became a global phenomenon. In Japan, the largest Con is actually for the selling of self-published manga, Comiket. Here Cosplayers stand in a designated area for photo opportunities and meet other Cosplayers. Cosplayers now travel the world to attend Cons in other countries. Many Cosplayers build their costumes in the hope to qualify for the World Cosplay Summit. The World Cosplay Summit has been held in Nagoya Japan since 2003. Teams of two Cosplayers qualify in their home country to represent at the Summit (World). The teams are judged on craftsmanship and on their performance of the skit they prepare based on the property they Cosplay as.

Some Cosplayers have also become well known within the Cosplay communities. These professional Cosplayers are known for a variety of reasons. For example, some Cosplayers are so well-known for their technical skills that others seek out these professionals for help. These Cosplayers have made businesses out of their skills. The Cosplayer, Crooked Feather, builds articulating and non-articulating wings for herself and others. There are Cosplayers known for their wig styling skills and do commissions for other Cosplayers. With social media, Cosplayers

can share their process and give insight into the Cosplays. These Cosplayers also create books to sell synthesizing their knowledge from their many builds. Another way Cosplayers professionalize their work is by selling merchandise with their image printed on it. Photos, pictures books, and personalized messages are sold at booths at Cons or on the Cosplayers personal website. These Cosplayers are also often invited to Cons as judges for competitions or to participate on panels discussing their work.

Cosplay has been around for more than a century now and is only growing. From its meek begins to a phenomenon that spans the globe. Cosplayers have found a way to adapt new technologies to their building process and costumes. They have learned how to monetize their skills and art. Today Cons can be found almost anywhere from small towns to metropolises.

## Chapter 2

### Cosplay interviews

“(At Cons) you can see the same level of quality of craftsmanship for costumes at a comic con that you would see on Broadway. I guarantee it. And the thing to remember is, of course, cosplayers are people doing it in their in their garage or at their kitchen table or whatever with no budget. And not necessarily a whole lot of training. And they are producing costumes that I think quality wise are on par with Broadway or with Hollywood. And that's the exciting thing to me about cosplay is how creative people can get besides the interaction because we're all really big geeks. (Cosplayer Interviewed Kasey Myers)”

As argued in the selection from my Cosplayer’s Interview with Kasey Myers above, cosplayers come from many different backgrounds and skill levels. They do the same thing as costume technicians in theatre. They look at a two-dimensional design and figure out how to bring it into the real world. To understand this process more, I interviewed a range of Cosplayers of different background about their creation process. In this chapter I will introduced the Cosplayers I interviews followed by the questions asked.

For my case study of the creation of Cosplay I interviewed ten Cosplayers (eight from the United States and two from overseas): Table 2.1.

Name	Location	About
AshenQueen (Ashley Sharp)	Arizona	Costume designer and Cosplayer
Garrett Garcia	Texas	Member of 501 <sup>st</sup> Lord Vader’s Fist. Focus on prop creation.
GeloGrayson (Angelo Grayson)	Philippines	Professional Cosplayer. Shares building process online.
Kasey Myers	Texas	Study costume design. Member of the Society for Creative Anachronism for



		20 + years
It's_Tenny (Kristen Hunn)	Texas	Casual Cosplayer. Member of <i>Star Wars</i> Saber Guild
EverydayRogue (Krystal Dube-Gaspar)	Massachusetts	Casual Cosplayer. Host of podcast "It's like a Podcast or Whatever"
PaisleyandGlue (Maggie Hofmann)	Illinois	Previously worked at Chicago Shakespeare as Draper. Cosplayed on the side until COVID 19 pandemic. Now creates content sharing her Cosplay process. Winner of 2020 C2E2 Armor Category.
Michael Buongurio	Texas	Famous for Judge Dredd cosplay with Wife. Judge cosplay competitions around the world. Cosplay since the 1980s
Pretzel Cosplay (Joyce)	Netherlands	Professional Cosplayer. Sales patterns and books along with creating content on social media.
Sam Brooker	Illinois	Cosplay known for special effects Cosplay. Winner of 2020 C2E2 FX category.

I asked each of the ten participants the same series of six questions, plus one if they did competitions. My questions included:

1. What is your name and Cosplay persona/handle?
2. How long have you been Cosplaying?
3. What is your favorite Cosplay you have done?
4. Why that one?
5. How did you approach creating that Cosplay?

6. What do you do if you have a character you want to Cosplay but aren't sure how to make it?
7. How does building for competition vary from building for personal?

Next, I will summarize and synthesize key information shared in response to each question across the group of Cosplayers interviewed. For each question, I worked to share common trends in the Cosplayers responses.

### **QUESTION ONE - WHAT IS YOUR NAME AND COSPLAY PERSONA/HANDLE?**

Cosplayers use created names or handles for their social media. Their names can be combinations or play on their name like the Cosplayers, "Its\_Tenny" or "Gelograyson." It's\_Tenny is a shorten version of her name Kristen and Gelo Grayson is simply his name. The name can relate to something they have interest in or a character they identify with such as Everyday Rogue or AshenQueen. Everyday Rogue's favorite character is Rogue from *X men* specifically the 1990s version of the character. When asked about why she focused on that character Everyday Rogue said, "I was actually at an interesting time in my life where I was like, I don't want anyone to touch me" (Dube-Gaspar) like the character who avoided touching people because of her power. Some names are clever turns on common terms; PaisleyandGlue, Pretzl, BioCosplay. There are also Cosplayers who use their persona for anonymity and never use their real name. An interviewed Cosplayer named Garret Garcia talked about some of the reasons people give out their real name. "I've actually had some friends doxed (sharing private information about a person for ill purposes)" (Garcia). That is a danger of being on social media and being a well-known Cosplayer. In summary, the use of a Cosplay handle has a variety of functions but the most common is the ability to separate the Cosplayer's personal life from their Cosplay life.

### **QUESTION TWO - HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN COSPLAYING?**

The interviewed Cosplayers have varied years of experience. Some begin the count of years from when they first started Cosplaying. For Michael Buongurio, he started Cosplaying

“Back before Cosplay was even a word.” Michael had gone to *Star Trek* conventions then live action role playing (LARP) in the 90s. Michael and his wife are now known for their Judge Dredd’s. Michael’s experience represents a common theme across my interviews; not everyone started immediately Cosplaying. Kasey Myers says she’s only been Cosplaying for 8 years but had been in the Society for Creative Anachronism for 20 years. Her focus was on “Medieval Russian” costuming (Myers). Her pivot to Cosplay came as the Marvel Superhero Movies started coming out. Cosplayers like Gelograyson have been doing it for a shorter time, starting in 2014. However, in the last four years he has developed his skill into a business and is sought for commissions and advice. Most Cosplayers start in their teens or twenties but there is no age limit on Cosplay. As long as one enjoys it you can keep Cosplaying.

#### **QUESTIONS THREE AND FOUR - WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE COSPLAY YOU HAVE DONE? WHY THAT ONE?**

Through my analysis of my interviews, it was clear that there are a wide range of reasons which support a Cosplayer’s favorite Cosplay. The reasons vary from the specific Cosplay. To being their favorite character. To the build process. To the reception the specific Cosplay receives from others. It’s\_Tenny’s has a soft spot for her Evil Queen from Disney’s *Snow White*. She loves how she can connect to younger Cosplays over the character thanks to the Disney movie the *Descendants* where the Evil Queen is one of the main character’s moms. It’s\_Tenny also shared she “really liked being an older character. . . playing a 14-year-old princess is not as appealing anymore.” She “really liked being a little bit of like the non- traditional character” (Hunn).



Illustration 2.1 It's\_Tenny as Evil Queen

For others like Preztl it was about the creative process. Her favorite Cosplay she created was a human armored version of the *Pokémon* Leafeon a grass type character (Illustration 2.2). Preztl says it being her own designer allowed her to be a lot more creative with the details of the costume pieces (Goor). The illustration below is the finished Cosplay of her Leafeon armor.



Illustration 2.2 Pretzl Original Design Leafeon

Cosplayer PaislyandGlue could not decide her favorite Cosplay between her Wonder Woman (Illustration 2.3), based on the new DC movie of the character featuring Gal Gadot, and the Disney villain Maleficent (Illustration 2.4) that she designed herself. Each had a reason for being her favorite. Her Wonder Woman “gets a such a great, strong reaction from people when (she’s) out doing charity things, especially kids, so (she) thinks (Wonder Woman) will always have a really soft, soft spot in my heart” (Hofmann). Maleficent was an original take on the character so she enjoyed the process of creating her.



Illustration 2.3 Wonder Woman

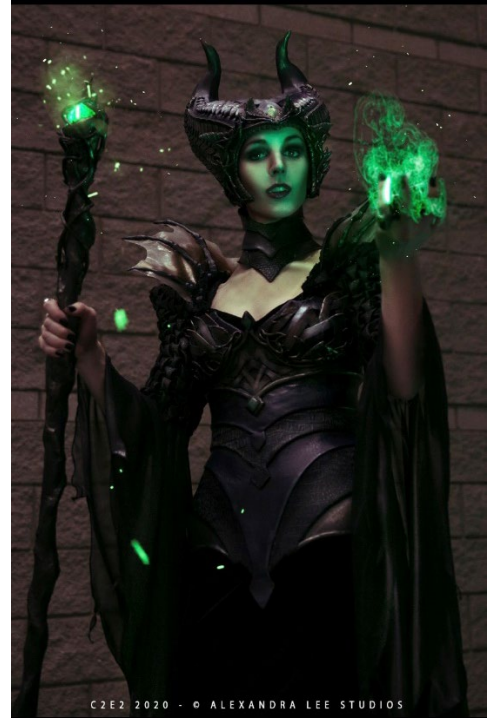


Illustration 2. 4 Maleficent

Through my interviews I noted that Cosplayers have a wide range of reasons for why a Cosplay is their favorite including: (1) personal connection to the character, (2) the costume's comfort, and (3) flexing their skills. Whatever the reason, each Cosplayer puts plenty of work into creating their Cosplays.

#### **QUESTION FIVE - HOW DID YOU APPROACH CREATING THAT COSPLAY?**

Across all the interviews the consensus for starting a build is doing the research. Cosplayer AshenQueen shared a general overview of how she researches for a Cosplay. First, she gathers any reference images of the character that she can find from as many angles as possible. This helps with identifying details of how the clothes are worn, attached, the decorations, and other details on the character like tattoos or jewelry. She “see[s] if the cosplay has been done before” looking at how that Cosplayer approached it and if she wanted to try similar methods. After she looks for tutorials or patterns that could be modified for the character

(Sharp). It's \_Tenny shared her process using her Evil Queen from Disney's *Snow White* as an example:

First of all is kind of studying the actual source material and kind of breaking down what you need to replicate from the source material. I spent a lot of time on that one with the colors, because a lot of her actual Cannon color is actually like a purple. (Referring to the Evil Queens dress) And it's like a purple and white like so if you look at like the face characters in Disney, a lot of her material, a lot of the, like, figurines, I like that she's in purple, but I put her in blue (Hunn).

It's \_Tenny also says the biggest challenge is “What choices am I gonna make that make it recognizable?” (Hunn). For many Cosplayers, “making it recognizable” is the greatest challenge especially if they do an original take on the character. Everyday Rogue puts her own spin the *X-man* character Rogue. One of her favorite creations was mashing up Rogue with Rosie the Riveter. The key for her was Rogue's iconic hair with white strips in the front and her colors green and yellow. Everyday Rogue admits “the recognizable factor of the 90s Rogue has its own glory, but the mashups are also really fun” (Dube-Gaspar). The approach for creating any Cosplay varies but the starting point is the same: research.

#### **QUESTION SIX - WHAT DO YOU DO IF YOU HAVE A CHARACTER YOU WANT TO COSPLAY BUT AREN'T SURE HOW TO MAKE IT?**

The interviewed Cosplayers were asked this question and collectively said they had a future planned Cosplay, or a dream one, they wanted to build. All shared that they had one that they were holding off for various reasons. Some need to acquiring the skills for creating the character. Some of the Cosplayers shared there are materials they had no experience with and, at the moment, no time to learn them. Others say the problem solving is part of the fun. Gelograyson is one of those. When faced with a new build he is unsure of he shared:

I first assess what materials and skills are available to me and figure out the best way forward. If there's something beyond my reach monetarily or skill wise, it can go one of three ways. Either I use whatever I have in my disposal and figure out how, save up for equipment that

will help me create whatever I need, or invest money to someone who can do it better for me and maybe learn from them as well (Gelograyson).

AshenQueen relies on trial and error for some of the creation of characters. She also suggested looking at something unconventional like materials or other people's build of different Cosplays. Materials from an old project can additionally inspire a way of building (Sharp). All the interviewed Cosplayers shared that if they are stuck or feel they need more help the Cosplay community is a great source as well. Cosplayers are often never afraid to share.

#### **QUESTION SEVEN - HOW DOES BUILDING FOR COMPETITION VARY FROM BUILDING FOR PERSONAL?**

Four of the Cosplayers had competed in a competition at some level. BioCospaly has won several awards at competitions. When building for competition he "build[s] it to the best of (his) ability" (Brooker). He tries to add extra details for competitions to the Cosplay. When building for himself, he "make smaller props or pieces just for fun and tend to use that as an excuse to try out a new technique so even though it's just for fun, (he is) learning something new" (Brooker). PaisleyandGlue won the Regional Armor award at the Chicago based Con C2E2 with her original design of Maleficent from Disney's *Snow White*. At C2E2 there are three categories to compete in Armor, Needlework (Sewing), and FX (Special Effects) ("Rules"). When PaisleyandGlue decided to enter the competition, she aimed to be an overall winner. Clearly, she had done well by winning the Regional Armor category in 2020.

When I was designing her (Maleficent), I had that thought of that I needed some elements of each of those categories. . . So, when I was choosing and actually I almost did too good of a job. Like put the different elements in there because then I couldn't decide which one to enter in. . . And I ended up because it was a lot of sewing but then there was a lot of armor and then I had the wings. So, I didn't know about the effects. And I ended up going with armor (Hofmann).

Through my summarization and synthesis of the interview data I noticed there were several factors that shaped how Cosplayers develop their Cosplays. Specifically, I noted that



Cosplayers come from varying background of skill and have varying access to tools and materials. From my analysis of my interviews, I began to construct an understanding of the steps that many Cosplayers follow to construct their Cosplays. In chapter three I will delve deeper into the process of creating a Cosplay based on tips provided by the Cosplayers and my own knowledge and research as a Costume Technician.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Research, Planning, and Materials**

Chapter three is divided into three portions: Research, Planning, and Materials. These are the building blocks of creating a Cosplay. The Cosplayers interviewed for this thesis shared part of their making processes. Much like theatrical costume design and construction, Cosplayer work from a two-dimensional figure. In theatrical costuming, designers work from a script to create rendering of that look for a character. From this rendering a Costume Technician builds the costume while asking the Costume Designer any clarity questions. Cosplayers don't have access to the designers or creators of a character. They must rely on their research and planning to inform their build. What follows is breaking down the steps a Cosplayer goes through when creating their costumes.

#### **RESEARCH**

The first step in creating a Cosplay is choosing the character. Cosplayers vary as to how they choose what character they create. For AshenQueen and Everyday Rogue it is a character they connect with. Some Cosplayers choose to do the latest or most popular characters. After the Marvel movies by Disney were released, there was a clear spike in Captain Americas and Ironmen at Cons. It's\_Tenny does the opposite and choses to "do a cosplay that's known, rather than something that's like, obscure, so people tend to connect with it. It's known but not so overdone" (Hunn). Gelograyson chooses a Cosplay based on a character he likes and what challenges the character presents. Once a Cosplayer has chosen a character, they must consider several questions. It's\_Tenny offers some of these: "What is it that I need to replicate from this to make it recognizable? What choices am I gonna make that make it recognizable?" (Hunn). Cosplay is heavily reliant on a source material so being recognizable is important.

Once a character is picked next comes the choice of what version of the character the Cosplay is creating. There are three types of research Cosplayers use to base their Cosplay from. First is the Primary Source. This depends on the media the character is from, Comics, Movies, TV, Video games, etc. Gelograyson built the character Noelle from the video game *Genshin*

*Impact.* He took several still shots from the game as a reference. With newer video games there is also the ability to find 3 dimensional models of the characters that can be viewed from all angles and see close-up details (Grayson). Depending on the character from a comic, Cosplayers can look through the comic books themselves for panels showing different angles. For TV and animation after scouring for still shots of the character from different angles there is also printed material the productions release to magazines or online format. This can lead into the second source of research, Concept Designs.

Concept Designs are created during creation process of a property. Once a project is finished artists who worked on it or the company themselves start releasing information either to magazines, corporate websites, or on personal websites. The shared images can be early designs of the character through the evolution of what the final design is. There are also more detailed images of supporting or background characters released on websites and online forums. BioCosplay did a side character Treasure Goblin from the video game series *Diablo*. BioCosplay used images from the game, concept renderings, fan created art, and his “own spin on it” (Brooker). The character is a fan favorite and his interpretation won him first place in the FX category at C2E2 in Chicago.



Illustration 3.1 BioCosplay Treasure Goblin from *Diablo*

Part of BioCosplay’s creation of the Treasure Goblin used fan interpretations. Cosplayers and Artist will create their own interpretation of the character based off an idea, style, or joke.

Everyday Rogue created two alternate looks for the character Rogue from X-men. One called Rogie the Riveter based on World War II character Rosie the Riveter. Another was “Can’t Touch This Rogue” mashing up the Rogue character with the style of the musical artist MC Hammer in his music video for “Can’t Touch This” (Dube-Gasper). Cosplayers like Pretzl and PaisleyandGlue created their own designed interpretations of characters. Pretzl created an armored human version of the Pokémon Leafreon by Nintendo (Illustration 3.2). She said the inspiration was “was forest, leaves, nature, green, and Valkyrie as a theme” (Goor). When designing this Cosplay Pretzel “make[s] multiple sketches to figure out how to do certain parts of the costume” (Goor). (She) also love(s) to “browse on YouTube for ideas on how other cosplayers created specific costumes” (Goor). The design can also evolve as it is being built as ideas come through the build process (Illustration 3.3).



Illustration 3.2 Pokémon  
Leafreon



Illustration 3.3 Pretzl  
Leafreon  
Armor  
Design



Illustration 3.4 Pretzl Leafreon  
Cosplay



For Cosplayer PaisleyandGlue she designed and built her Maleficent Cosplay for a competition. PaisleyandGlue has a background in Costume Design and works professionally as a Costume Technician in Chicago. When creating Maleficent, she got to “flex those designs muscles and really kind of make it what I wanted it to be” (Hofmann). PaisleyandGlue combined her research skills from her education and work along with incarnations of the character itself (Illustrations 3.5 and 3.6).



Illustration 3.5 Maleficent Design by PaisleyandGlue



Illustration 3.6 Maleficent Cosplay by PaisleyandGlue

Photo by Alexandra Lee

## PLANNING

After the character and the design are chosen comes the Planning stage. This stage breaks down into the logistics of creating the Cosplay. Most Cosplays are built for a Con, competition, event, or a job. These have set dates. The Cosplayer then works backwards from this to

determine the timeline for creating the Cosplay. This can be started from a year plus out or a few weeks before the event. The plan considers when to order pieces and material, the building process, and finishing the Cosplay. The hope is to avoid the Con Crunch.

“Con Crunch” is a community used word with no credited creator. Con Crunch is the time right before the Con or event when the Cosplayer is still nowhere near done with their Cosplay. For various reason thing go wrong, parts don’t arrive, or poor time management was used, and the Cosplayer has to finish their Cosplay at the last moment. Some work right up until the night before the Con (Ann). Even with the best planning some Cosplayers cannot avoid the crunch.

The first step in planning is breaking down the Cosplay into pieces. A Cosplayer will choose what they will build, buy, or commission by a builder. No matter what a Cosplayer chooses they are still Cosplaying. Theresa Winge commented on Cosplay makers at all levels:

Cosplayers exist at various places along the Cosplay continuum, which is based on their level of commitment. At one end are the Cosplayers content with dressing (e.g., wig, makeup, and costume) as their chosen character and attending conventions and events for socializing and having fun. At the other end are those Cosplayers obsessed with a given character, re-creating that character with meticulous attention to detail and preforming as that character as often as time and money will allow. Between these two extremes there are Cosplayers who research, study, and practice their characters and participate in Cosplay events. Regardless of his or her place on the Cosplay continuum, each cosplayer has and extraordinary level of dedication and commitment to the depiction of the chosen character, based on individual objectives that may include, but are not limited to, the following criteria: humor, accurate depiction, and casual participation. (“Costuming the Imagination” 68).

There are different options for the Cosplayer in creating their Cosplays. There are completely premade Cosplays that are sold on websites or by other Cosplayers. Some choose to do this because of time or personal skill level. Cosplayers can also combine premade Cosplay parts with pieces they create themselves. If a Cosplayer is going to create the Cosplay themselves, they will break down what to build and what needs to be purchased. Purchased pieces are often wigs, shoes, base clothes, or small accessories.

Built pieces range from pieces sewn, foam smithing, Worbla, metal craft, 3D printing, and others. (The materials will be broken down in the next chapter.) Choice of materials is based on familiarity with the material and the final look. The Cosplayer will also figure out how to get in and out of the pieces.

When a Cosplayer reaches a question on construction they can tap into the community for help. There are forums, chat rooms, and websites dedicated to Cosplayers sharing tips and techniques. Some professional Cosplayers and material distributors create How To videos or tutorials. A quick search on YouTube of Cosplay Tips brings up pages and pages of videos of Cosplayers offering their advice from their experience. Everyday Rogue shared her experience when reaching out other Cosplayers. She commented on the generosity and kindness makes her feel comfortable reaching out to the community and even famous Cosplayers. Everyday Rogue even recalled when a Cosplayer gave a great deal of time helping her on her Cosplay.

Kasey Myers reaches out to her friends in the Cosplay, costume, and SCA when she has a problem. She calls it “research by committee” (Myers).

## **MATERIALS**

When deciding on what to build Cosplayers consider the materials and techniques they could use. Cosplayers are resourceful and have developed materials and techniques that are now commonplace in many craft stores and online distributors. For soft pieces they consider options of fabric from different vendors. Harder pieces like armor, face mask, or unique one-of-kind object, Cosplayers have the option of Foam, Worbla, and in more recent years 3D printing. Painting and finishing of these pieces also borrow from other industries for techniques. If a piece is out of the Cosplayers comfort zone to make or there is not enough time to learn to make it Cosplayers can look to others to create that piece. They commission another to make the piece.

Today sourcing fabric is easier than ever before. Many towns now have Joann’s or other fabric chains. Even stores across the country can be at a Cosplayers’ fingertips thanks to the internet. Stores like Mood Fabrics in New York City has a website and offers swatches (small samples of the fabric) for a fee before ordering yardage. There are websites like Fabric.com that add to shopping options. Websites like Spoonflower allow one to print custom designs onto a range of fabrics. Finding the right color, texture, and weight can bring a Cosplay to life.

A 3D-printed skull model is shown, completely covered in crinkled aluminum foil. The foil is held in place by several strips of black tape, particularly around the eye sockets and jawline. The model is positioned on a green cutting mat with a yellow grid pattern. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

A sculpture of a human head in profile, facing left. The head is covered in a complex network of black lines and handwritten letters (A-Z). The lines form a grid-like pattern, with some lines curving around the eye and mouth. The letters are scattered across the surface, often placed near the lines. The sculpture is made of a light-colored material, possibly plaster or wood, and is mounted on a dark, textured base.

25





Illustration 3.9 Head cut out of foam tested on wear's head. Some alterations can help here to allow a better fit.



Illustration 3.10 A wood burning tool and rotary tool is used to add texture along with foam clay teeth



Illustration 3.11 Eyes are added, and areas are smoothed with putty/epoxy/foam clay

Another option is to buy patterns from Cosplayers who have made the Cosplay before. Cosplayers will share their patterns and directions for props and clothing. The best way to cut foam is with a utility or a craft knife. If pieces need to be curved over a shape a heat gun can be used. The foam is heated on both sides then pressed over an object close to the shape and held there until cooled. Contact cement is used to connect the foam together. This glue should be used outside or in a ventilated space designed to remove contaminants from the room. Ventilation systems can include box fans with a filter on the outside forcing the air out of the space. For additional texture sellers also sell premade shapes like dowels that are beveled or rounded. A new addition to the foam product line is Foam Clay which can be molded on to the sheet foam into desired shapes, sculpted with clay tools or by hand, dried and finished with paint. The Foam Clay dries the same density as the foam sheets.

A recent and rising material in Cosplay is Worbla. Worbla, according to the official seller's website [CosplaySupplies.com](http://CosplaySupplies.com), "is a German brand of non-toxic thermoplastics that come in sheet and pellet forms" (Worbla). Worbla comes in a variety of colors and textures. The most common colors are brown and black. They are named *Finest Art* and *Black Arts*, respectively. Worbla is heated with a heat gun to until it is flexible enough to be shaped into a 3-dimensional form. After it cools it is quite sturdy. Worbla can burn if heated to long or repeated heated in one area at a high temperature. One side of Worbla is shiny while the other is matte. The shiny surface indicates the adhesive side. Once heated, separate pieces can be pressed together to create larger objects. Below is a process done by Pretzl for her breast plate armor for her *Leafeon* armor (Illustration 3.12). Here Pretzl uses a method she learned from another Cosplayer, *KamuiCosplay*, on sandwiching a 2mm piece of foam between two layers of Worbla. Pretzl also shows how she drapes the Worbla over an orb shape to create breast cups for her armor.



Illustration 3.12 Worbla breast plate created by Pretzl.

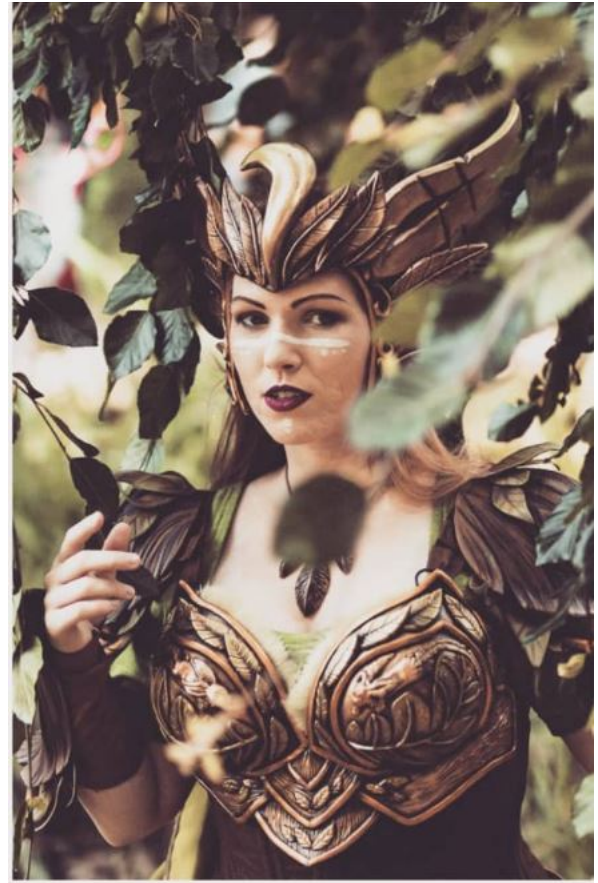


Illustration 3.13 Leafeon Breast plate by Pretzl

Another emerging process is 3D printing. With 3D printers becoming more affordable many Cosplayers have to use 3D printing to create fully accurate accessories or parts. Gelograyson says he identifies as a prop maker who makes costume pieces as well. Glancing through his social media he shares his process of 3D printing. The first step is creating a model in a modeling software like Blender, Fusion 360, Cura, and others. These programs allow the creator to zoom into the tiniest of details that are normally hard to recreate by hand or perfectly mirror sides. Once the model is made, the code is sent to a 3D printer. Plastic filament is fed into a nozzle that heat it and travels from the bed of the printer up to create the shape. Once printed the pieces must be sanded and primed before painting. Below is a tiara made by Gelograyson. First is the tiara in a 3D modeling software. Second is the printed tiara before sanding and

painting. 3D prints typically need to be sanded and primed due to the ridges created from the printing process. The final photo is the finished tiara attached to a headband by clear plastic strips, so it looks to be floating above the head.

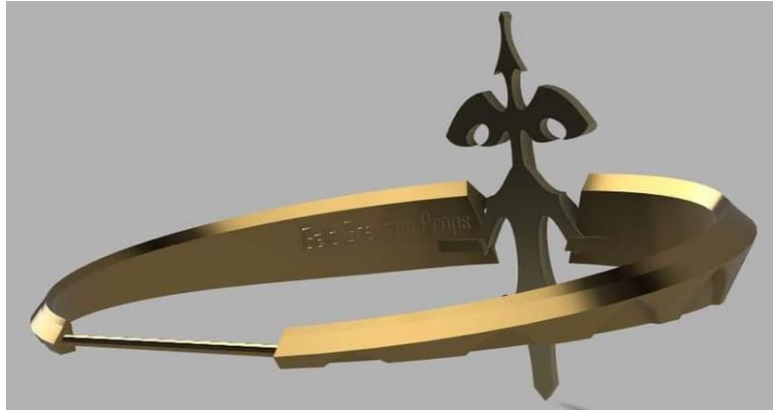


Illustration 3.14 3D Rendering of Crown by GeloGrayson



Illustration 3.15 Printed Crown



Illustration 3.16 Final Crown Creation

No matter which product or process is used, foam, Worbla, or 3D printing, a Cosplayer must paint the final product to bring it into the world of the character. The painting process can vary depending on what the piece is made from. Worbla can be coated with white glue, gesso, or Mod Podge (a kind of glue/sealer) then painted. Foam is trickier depending on how the piece is used. Foam is a flexible medium so the primer must be flexible as well. Not using a flexible base and paint can result in cracks or wrinkles in the piece over time. Some Cosplayers here in the United States use a flexible product called, Plasti Dip. This product comes in a spray can and must be used outside or in a room with forced air ventilation. Plasti Dip can bubble if the surface is not smooth or if the can is not heated in warm water before spraying. Another foam primer is Hexflex which comes in a range of colors so the piece can be primed and base coated at the same time. For 3D printing needs a filler primer to even out the striations made when printing. It can also be coated similarly to Worbla.

Based on how you sealed the object, painting can be as simple as applying acrylics or using spray paint. Foam does better with similarly flexible paints but can be painted with acrylics if needed. For metallics Cosplayers tap into model makers and automotive painting. Gelograyson uses vinyl wrap on his props which are most often used on wrapping cars. Companies like Plaid paint has release flexible paint that are also metallic. Applying the paint varies on what finish is desired. Airbrushes, sponges, and large soft make up brushes are used for painting to avoid

strokes made by typical paint brushes. Several layers may be needed for full coverage and an even look. Once painted the pieces are sealed with varnish or spray sealers which can give a shiny or matte finish. Cosplayers can also reuse some of the primers like Mod Podge and white glue that dry clear as a sealer.

For projects that are out of a Cosplayers skill level they can commission another Cosplayer or maker to create them. There are Cosplayers as mentioned before that find a niche accessory they create that others buy from them. They offer customization depending on what the buyer needs. Cost of the commission vary based on the size of the pieces, materials used, time, and detail in the piece. As Winge noted there is no detraction if a Cosplayer uses a bought piece. They are still Cosplaying and showing love for the character while supporting other artist and Cosplayers.

No matter the Cosplay, the process is roughly the same. They must research what character and design they want to create and how to build it. They plan out the build for an event or Con. Cosplayers have a wide variety of tools and techniques to build their pieces. It is impressive Cosplayers' ingenuity in creating their pieces.



## Chapter 4

### Casual, Community, Competition, and Commercial

The reason for Cosplaying varies from Cosplayer to Cosplayer. This chapter looks at the most common reasons Cosplayers build. Casual - which is building for oneself. Community - building a Cosplay for a community purpose. Competitions - building for competing at a Con. Commercial building as a professional.

#### CASUAL

Casual Cosplay building centers around the creators. Cosplayers build Cosplays to share their love of a character in a media. Cosplayers will build to test their skills and new techniques. Gelograyson say that not knowing how to make things drives his creativity. BioCosplay “make smaller props or pieces just for fun and tend to use that as an excuse to try out a new technique so even though it’s just for fun” (Brooker). They may see another Cosplayer use a process they had not tried before and want to try it themselves.

When going to Cons, Cosplayers or the Con will plan meet ups or take group photos. Cons will have designated places for these. These range from franchise like *Star War*, *Star Trek*, *Final Fantasy*, DC Comic and Marvel to specific medias like a current anime or popular tv show. These are a great way for Cosplayers to network or make friends with others that share the love of the media. It is also great for fans of the properties to get photos of their favorite characters in real life.

#### COMMUNITY

Cosplay can be for charity or special promotions. In Austin Texas, the Heroes of Texas are a group of Cosplayers, or as member Greg Burrow shared, a “CAUSEplay group.” The group visits hospitals, works with Make-a-wish Foundation and CASA, and attends other community events. The group is comprised of local Cosplayers who most often dress as superheroes. Greg dresses as Adam West’s Batman. He talked about his choice of doing this Batman over the newer versions of him. “When I got to a children’s hospital as a Adam West Batman, it brings

smiles. Not scares. It doesn't scare anybody. They may get a little scared cause it like too real" (Greg).

Greg and other Cosplayers do these events for the kids and other big community events. Cosplayers will form groups based around different properties like Disney princess or Marvel Superheroes. These groups are not officially associated with the properties so they must be careful how they market themselves and try avoiding any copyright infringement. At the birthday parties the Cosplayers will do sing-a-longs, in-character skits, or party games as entertainment. It's\_Tenny was a part of a princess and pirate group before moving to Texas. She would change between Ariel from the *Little Mermaid* to a generic mermaid. More recently she has joined a *Star Wars* group known as the Saber Guild. This leads into the next part of community.

There are Cosplay groups that are worldwide. Most of these groups are *Star Wars* related. Saber Guild which is group that dress as *Star Wars* characters and perform choreographed light saber fights for events. It's\_Tenny does them most often for birthday parties as a Sith, the bad guys. Other groups are the 501<sup>st</sup>, Mandalorian Mercs Costume Club, Dark Empire, and the R2 Builders. The largest group is the 501<sup>st</sup> Legion Vader's Fist. According to the official group's charter:

The Legion is an all-volunteer organization formed for the express purpose of bringing together costume enthusiasts under a collective identity within which to operate. The Legion seeks to promote interest in Star Wars through the building and wearing of quality costumes, and to facilitate the use of these costumes for Star Wars-related events as well as contributions to the local community through costumed charity and volunteer work ("The 501<sup>st</sup> Legion").

The 501<sup>st</sup> has created a document called the Costume Reference Library. This breaks down into specific characters and how to recreate the looks. The looks are broken down into the individual parts like helmets, armor, uniforms, even shoes. This Reference Library is to help the members of the group recreate screen accurate looks. Below is an example of a helmet for a Storm Trooper from *Star Wars: A New Hope* (Illustration 4.1). The detail that these Cosplayers and costumers put into their work does not go unnoticed. When filming the Disney+ Tv show *The Mandalorian*, Season 1 episodes 7 and 8, a local chapter of the 501<sup>st</sup> was contacted to fill in as extras (Dominguez). Despite how strict it seems the 501<sup>st</sup> welcomes all to become members.





### Helmet

- Traps (trapezoids on dome of helmet) and tears (area beneath the corners of eye lenses) are gray.
- Rear traps and tears have vertical black lines.
- Lenses may be flat or bubble, green or smoke, sufficiently dark enough to obscure the costumer's eyes.
- The "ear" bars may have three or four bumps and are grey or painted grey, with a black outline.
  - Painting the bumps with a rank stripe (highlighted) in black is optional.
- Frown is painted gray and does not leave the teeth area. Six total teeth on the frown are cut out and the frown is tapered at the ends.
- Tube stripes are medium blue, and include (11) or (13) per side, but can be between (9) and (16) per side with the curve bends extending backwards.
- Vocoder (vertically ribbed chin detail) is painted black.
- Aerators/Hovi-MIX tips (cylinders on either side of the vocoder) are black or painted black.
- Tears, traps, and tube stripes may be hand painted, decals, or decals that replicate hand painted.
- Mesh may be used behind the frown to obscure the face of the wearer.
- Note: The helmet is accurate in detail and proportion to official references.
  - Many commercially available helmets or those considered disproportionate in size or shape are ineligible.

## Illustration 4.1 Excerpt from 501<sup>st</sup>'s Costume Reference Book

### COMPETITIONS

Cosplayers can build for Competitions. Competitions are often held in connection to a Con except for smaller events by bookstores or comic shops and the World Cosplay Summit which was mentioned in Chapter 1 and is the Olympics of Cosplay. Competitions rules and format vary from Con to Con. This thesis will discuss three contests from Anime St. Louis, C2E2 Chicago, and Anime Expo. The winner of Anime Expo is invited to the World Cosplay Summit. Most contests are broken down into different categories from skills to skill level and are either presented as a walk on or a skit.

First is the difference in walk-on and skits. Walk-On is defined as a Cosplayer(s) walking on to the stage to show their cosplays to a crowd, posing and walking off stage to music the Cosplayer or the convention provided ("Cosplay Contest"). Skits, also called Masquerade, are performed by a group of Cosplayers. Skits can range from recreating a scene from the property, dances, a spoof, or costume changes. Anime Expo has a 2-minute limit for the performance. There are many other rules about height and weight of props or set pieces, audio that can be used, and using visual effects like confetti (Anime Expo).

Skill levels are divided based on experience in competing. Anime St. Louis has four levels: Junior, Novice, Journeyman, and Master. Juniors are Cosplayers under 13 who made their own Cosplay. Not all Cons have this as a competition level. Cons will have a parade for those

under 13 to show off their Cosplays. Novice is for those that have never competed or have won less than three awards. Awards counted can be from the Con attended or other Cons. Journeymen are required to have won three to eight awards. The Master category is for Cosplayers who have won more than 9 awards, are Professional Cosplayers, or are professional costume makers (“Cosplay Contest”). This allows a fair chance for those in the lower categories.

When judging created Cosplays, Cons set a percentage amount for what the Cosplayer had to create themselves. This prevents Cosplayers from fully commissioning a Cosplay or purchasing a premade costume. Anime St Louis states 80% while C2E2 uses 60% as a marker for how much must be made. Before going on stage, the Cosplayer meets with the Judges ahead of the Walk on to take a closer look and ask questions about the creation process. Cons may also require supplemental documentation like process shots or photo references.

C2E2 breaks down the skills into three levels: Needle work, Armor, and FX. Needle work is “Cosplay constructed primarily through sewing, stitching, embroidery, etc.” Armor is “Cosplay constructed primarily by molding and shaping its outer layers using acrylic, EVA foam, Worbla, Wonderflex, cardboard, etc.” FX is “Cosplay that primarily features animatronics, optical effects, mechanical effects, special effects makeup, prosthetics, etc.” (“Rules”). Mentioned back in Chapter 2, PaisleyandGlue and BioCosplay have competed and won at C2E2 in Armor and FX, respectively. PaislyandGlue competed with her Maleficent that could have spanned any of the categories based on the work she put into the project. BioCosplay primarily works in FX categories. Looking at his work, BioCosplay prefers creating prosthetics and makeup effects. Below are some process shots from his portfolio (Illustrations 4.2 and 4.3).



Illustration 4.2 Body suit for Treasure Goblin



Illustration 4.3 Sculpting for prosthetics for a Zandalari Troll from *World of Warcraft*.

Not all Cons break down the skill judging into specialties. Some choose to call it only Craftmanship. Cons also have safety measures to keep one Cosplayer from competing into too many competitions with one Cosplay. Some require it to be an unawarded piece. At Anime St. Louis they do not allow Cosplays that have won at larger Cons to compete even in the Master level. The prizes for the Con can range from cash prizes to future event passes or invitations for be judges in the future. Overall competition is for Cosplayers to share and gain recognition for their work.

## COMMERCIAL

Cosplay has become a part time or full-time job for those who have marked themselves or gained notoriety for their work. Cosplayers like Yaya Han and Kamui Cosplay are common names brought up in discussions of professional Cosplayers. These Cosplayers have found fame through their Cosplay creation skills. Professional Cosplayers make the rounds at Cons as an

invited judge for competitions or guest artist for a panel discussion. They have a table at the conventions where they sell their own products like books, photo cards, autographs, or accessories. Professional Cosplayers share a lot of their work across social media platforms. They also receive sponsorships or partnerships with companies to promote products. Yaya Han now has a deal with Joann Fabrics selling a special line of fabric and craft supplies for Cosplayers. Kamui Cosplay has been commissioned to create character for commercials and media. No matter where they are now professional Cosplayers all started at the same place, creating something they love.

## Chapter 5

### BUILDING A PERSONAL COSPLAY

For this thesis I chose to build a Cosplay to understand what goes into the creation of one. Through this experience I developed new skills, employed techniques I already knew, and explored the community of Cosplay building. Previously I have personally built three Cosplays, but they were entirely fabric base. For this project I wanted to include Eva foam and Worbla as I had little experience with them.

As with all Cosplay, my first step was picking a character. I chose Lux, the Lady of Lumosity, from *League of Legends* by Riot Games (Illustrations 5.1 and 5.2). Originally the plan was to present this character at an event related to its property, but due to Covid-19 the event was changed. I have a fondness for this character as I play her in the game *League of Legends* when I can. After choosing her I looked at different versions of her design. My issue with her design is her breastplate and shoulder armor. Her design included a breastplate and shoulder pieces that looked uncomfortable to wear. The breastplate, also, was aesthetically unappealing to me with the boob emphasis. Within *League of Legends*, characters have alternate designs, but I wanted to do as close her original look as I could. In January of 2020, Riot Games released a cinematic video promoting *League of Legends*. Lux received a design change for the video that was more appealing to my design aesthetic (Illustration 5.3). I found an alternate design for the video where she had more armor parts seen in her original look (Illustration 5.4). With this choice made, I moved into breaking down what needed to be built. I broke down the look into the following parts: the blue bodysuit, the armor, drapes (cape and skirt), and accessories.



Illustration 5.1 Lux Splash Art



Illustration 5.2 Lux Character  
Model Front



Illustration 5.3 Design by Jason Chen Senior Concept Artist at Riot Games



Illustration 5.4 Alternate Design

## BODY SUIT

The body suit was my first challenge. I wanted to set it apart from typical Cosplays of Lux. I decided to have a surface texture on the bodysuit similar to the 3D texture on the movie super suits like Superman, Black Panther, and Shazam. I reached out to other Cosplayers and Costumers through social media to find out how the designs were added to the fabric and what kind of fabric was most often used. I was put in contact with By Design Screen Printing in California, United States, who makes the actual fabric for the Marvel superhero suits, and Parallel Life Studios in the United Kingdom, who has created textured fabrics for movie and commercials. Both informed me that their methods are trade secrets and that they couldn't help. Not giving up I reached out again on social media and was put in contact with Professional



Cosplay out of California. This was a Cosplayer who screen prints designs onto fabric for Cosplayers. Jose Arias, the screen printer and owner of Professional Cosplay, recommended four way stretch of 82 % Nylon and 18 % Spandex from Jo-Ann Fabrics. I found the perfect shade Navy fabric in the right Nylon/Spandex ratio for the project. For the design, I wanted a repeat of the winged design that is from *League of Legends*. The winged shape represents the country in the game Lux is from, Demacia (Illustration 5.5). The design is an older version of the country's symbol from when the game first came out. The wings would be printed in a repeating motif on the fabric. After confirming the size of the final printed design, I bought three yards of the Nylon/Spandex fabric to ship to California. The three yards would be cut into smaller 20" x 30" blocks to fit onto Jose's printing frame. I bought an additional three yards from the same bolt of fabric for any sections I did not want the motif to be on.



Illustration 5.5 Demacian Wing



Illustration 5.6 Printed Fabric

I used an existing pattern, Simplicity 8670, which is a body suit made for Simplicity's Cosplay line of patterns (Illustration 5.7). Alterations were made to create a two-part sleeve. I had to do 2 fittings to check that the fit was perfect and tight (Illustration 5.8). With the understanding of the screen-printed fabric's size (more or less 20"x30"), I decided that only the body and top of the sleeves would be cut from the printed fabric. The legs and under arms would be the unprinted fabric I bought. For the closure I decided I wanted to do an invisible zipper. My past experiences with some store-bought invisible zippers informed me that they would not be



strong enough for a very tight-fitting body suit. I researched heavy duty invisible zippers like those used in formal dresses and body suits. A search of the internet yielded the Zipper Lady who sold heavy duty invisible zippers by the yard with pull tabs. All I needed to do was cut it down to the length I needed and add the stopping hardware. I bought two yards from her in case of any problems putting it in.



Illustration 5.7 Simplicity Pattern



Illustration 5.8 Second Fitting

Once the fabric returned from California, I began cutting out the altered paper pattern. Because it was a four way stretch fabric, I did not have to consider a grain to cut the pattern on, but I did have to look at the direction of the screen-printed motif (Figure below). I laid the fabric

pattern side up on a sheet of tracing paper. This way I could position the direction of the motif with the grain of my pattern (Illustration 5.9).



Illustration 5.9 Tracing pattern on fabric

Stretch fabric like Nylon/Spandex must be sewn with a special needle and thread. I used a Schmetz 70/11 Jersey Needle. The needles are made to push through the fibers of the stretch material. Regular sewing machine needles would bounce off the stretch fabric. The thread I used is called Wooly Nylon. This loosely woven thread made for stretch fabrics lengthens and shrinks with the stretching of the fabric. I did several tests of with the Wooly Nylon and found my best seam results when using the Wooly Nylon was in the bobbin and regular thread was used as the upper thread. In the test I also found that using a Walking Foot kept my fabrics from bunching as I sewed. With the combination of Jersey needle, thread, and walking foot I used a domestic

sewing machine, an Elna, to make the mockups. On the machine I used the built-in stretch stitch, instead of a zig zag, on a longer stitch length. This made taking the piece apart easier. Once all seams and lines were set would I used the wooly nylon on a domestic serging machine to minimize the seam allowance seen from the outside. (Illustration 5.10) When going through the serger I had to pull on the fabric as it was fed through the machine to keep the tension even on both sides. Elastic straps were added to the bottom as stirups to hold the legs into the shoes.



Illustration 5.10 Serging Fabric

## **ARMOR**

To build the armor, I consulted the Cosplay community. A professional Cosplayer known as KamuiCosplay has a series of videos and books on creating armor out of EVA foam and Worbla. I was a fan of her work already so I knew she would be a good reference using these products. I decided what parts of the armor I wanted made in Worbla and what parts out of the EVA Foam. EVA foam is a great light weight option, so I chose to do the chest, belt, tassets, and



boots. Worbla is more expensive and can add extra weight so I chose to make only the gauntlets out of it. I ordered my EVA foam from TNT Cosplay, a supplier out of Dallas Texas USA. For the base of all the armor I used the 6 mm thickness. Decorations were made from 2 mm-8mm thicknesses. For the Worbla, Black Art, I purchased that locally from Dragon's Lair Comics in Austin Texas USA.

Below is an Illustration 5.11 showing how I broke down the parts of armor and what they are called:

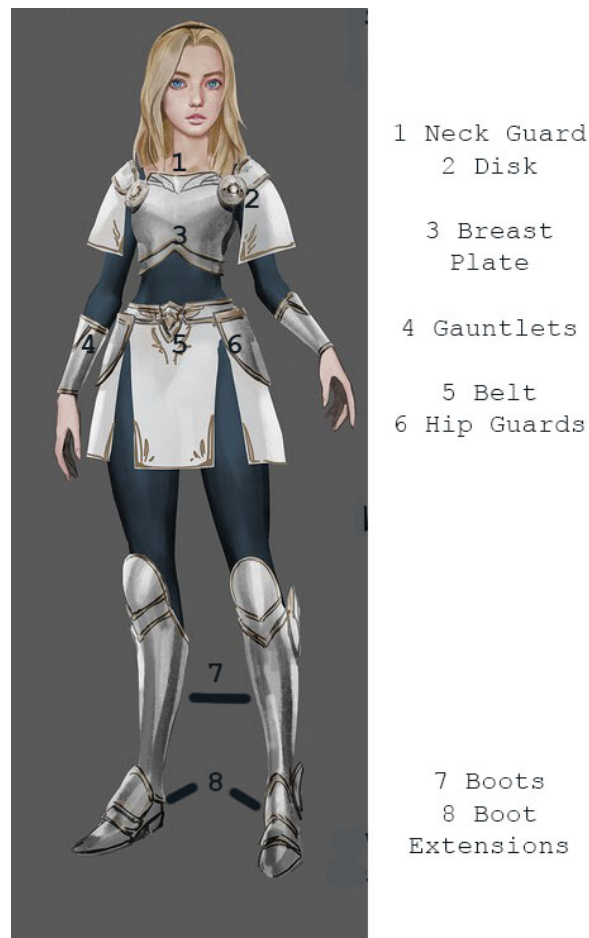


Illustration 5.11 Armor Breakdown

I started fabricating the gauntlets. I measured the circumference of my wrist, desired length, and the circumference of my forearm where it ends. I created a flat paper pattern and checked it on my arm before cutting it out of 2 mm foam. The foam piece was then laid onto Worbla and cut one inch bigger than the foam (Figure). I heated both side of one piece of Worbla

and pressed it over the foam to create the outside. Then I headed a second piece, front and back, to be the inside. This was a hard step because I had to press the hot piece and the covered foam piece over my forearm. I sprayed my arm with lots of water so not to burn myself. I had to repeatedly heat and press both pieces of Worbla to go around smoothly. The edges were then heated and pressed together. While still warm I cut as close to the edge as possible and pressed them together as a way to seal them off (Illustration 5.12) To make the gauntlets easy to take on and off, I left them with an opening up the back with no closures.



Illustration 5.12 Foam inside Worbla



Illustration 5.13 Rounded Gauntlet

For the details, I put tape over the finished gauntlets and traced out the shapes. I transferred them to paper. I cut the details out of 2 mm foam and sealed them onto the outside of the gauntlet. The challenge was figuring out how to do the rounded decorations. I ended up using a 1/4" cording. I was immensely proud of these at first. It was the first completed part of my armor. As the build went on however, I realized it wasn't as clean as I would like. I remade the gauntlets with all the details being in foam then covered in Worbla. This allowed me to use foam clay, which was mentioned in chapter 3, for the rounded details. The clay dried as lightweight as the rest of the foam. These gauntlets turned out much better.



Illustration 5.14 First Gauntlet



Illustration 5.15 Close up of updated gauntlet

During the first fitting of the body suit I used the cling wrap and Duct tape method to create my pattern pieces for the foam body armor. This involved wrapping two to three layers of the cling wrap around the area of the body that would have armor. Duct tape is then applied over the cling wrap. The tape is overlapped and layered to allow support once cut from the body. I had



several references of the armor pulled up on my computer and a mirror to draw what I could. My partner helped me with areas where I could not reach. Using my knowledge of patterning, I considered where seams in the armor needed to be. The boot was broken up into five pieces so that it could snugly wrap around the leg. The chest front was broken up into seven pieces per side, two for the back and five for the front. (Illustration 5.17).



Illustration 5.16 Side of Boot



Illustration 5.17 First Front of Breast Plate Pattern

The boots were cut out of 6 mm foam with an opening in the back. Once fitted I realized that I needed more to go over the knee, so I patterned on top of the boot the extension. This extension was glued on. For the two pieces over the boot, one had already figured during the tapping phase. I had to split it and make it a bit wider. This piece would be attached with elastic around the bottom of the boot. The second piece was cut in paper then out of a scrap piece of foam to find the final shape. For this second piece I had to figure out how it would connect with the other pieces. I ended up repeating the same idea of putting elastic to wrap around the bottom of the boot. For the details I used foam clay rolled into  $\frac{1}{4}$ " rods and applied just like in the design (Illustration 5.18). Unfortunately, I learned that before sealing, foam clay is not as flexible and

very brittle. Many of the pieces broke off when I tried the boots on after drying. To remedy this, I found 10 mm foam half rods from Cosplayer Yaya Han at Jo-Ann Fabric store and glued them on. The wings on the boots were from 8 mm foam then 2 mm foam to create the raised areas. The edges were sanded with a rotary tool to round out the edges. These were glued on before sealing.



Illustration 5.18 Foam Clay applied to Boot Extensions

For closures on the boots, most Cosplayers apply Velcro up the back or a zipper somewhere. I decided instead to put leather buckles up the back to make them look more like real armor. This left a bigger gap in the back than I wanted but visually it was still pleasing. I created the strapping for the buckles myself with what I learned in a leather working. The challenge was hiding the ends of the straps. I end up gluing the straps on with contact cement and then coving it with foam clay. I covered the leather straps with painter's tape.





Illustration 5.19 Buckles in process

For the breast piece I cut out one side front and back out of 2 mm foam and taped it together as a mockup and to double check how it fit. The fit was too small considering the final would be out of 6 mm foam and I did not like the look of the style lines of the pieces. I did another round of wrapping/taping to change the front lines and allow more room all around. I also extended the back up more for stability (Illustration 5.20). The breast plate pieces were then cut out of 6 mm foam. The raised pieces on the bottom and armscyes of the breast plate were made with 2 mm foam. I used the pattern pieces to copy the curves and add an inch to each end. The extra length allowed for its piece to be smoothly curved over the breast plate. The under pieces of the breast plate were made copying the bottom line of the breast plate patterns then adding 2" to the bottom .5" above. The .5" above allowed for an underlap that glued into the body of the breast plate. These extensions also received the 2 mm raised detail.



Illustration 5.20 New front Breastplate Pattern

Closures for the pieces were a challenge. Typically, Cosplayers rely on Velcro and zippers everywhere. I didn't want to use Velcro too much because the sound is terrible. I only used Velcro on the closures of the chest. I decided to mimic the cross riveting on the sides from the design. These were cut from 2 mm foam. To keep tension from being all in one direction I alternated the anchor point of the pieces from front to back. This kept the pieces from pulling apart easily as I moved. Two-inch cloth webbed straps were added later to help support and keep the breast plate in place. The Velcro closures and straps were not attached until after the breast plate was painted.

The neck guard, located at the top of the breast plate, was created first by measuring how long it needed to be in proportion to its location. I made several paper mockups and attached

them temporarily with tape to the breast plate to compare heights. The piece was ultimately cut from 6 mm foam. I beveled the bottom at an angle to attach to the breast plate (Illustration 5.21). To allow the neck guard to bend like the reference, I cut a “V” ditch in the center back. The disks, located on either side the neck guard, were cut from 8 mm foam. These also went through a paper pattern phase to compare diameter proportion to the neck guard. For adding the center raised details to the disk I used foam clay rolled into two 1” balls and into ¼” rods. A rod was wrapped around each ball then both flattened on the bottom. Foam clay can be added when the foam is wetted and allowed to dry overnight (Illustration 5.22). The edges received 2 mm circles on the edge. The edge was then rounded using a rotary tool.

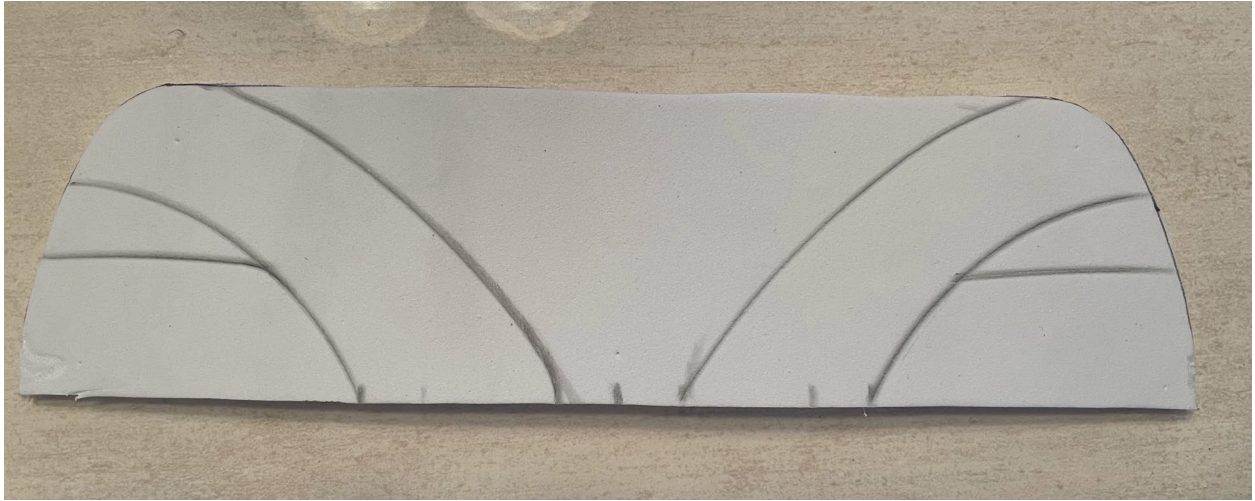


Illustration 5.21 Neck Guard



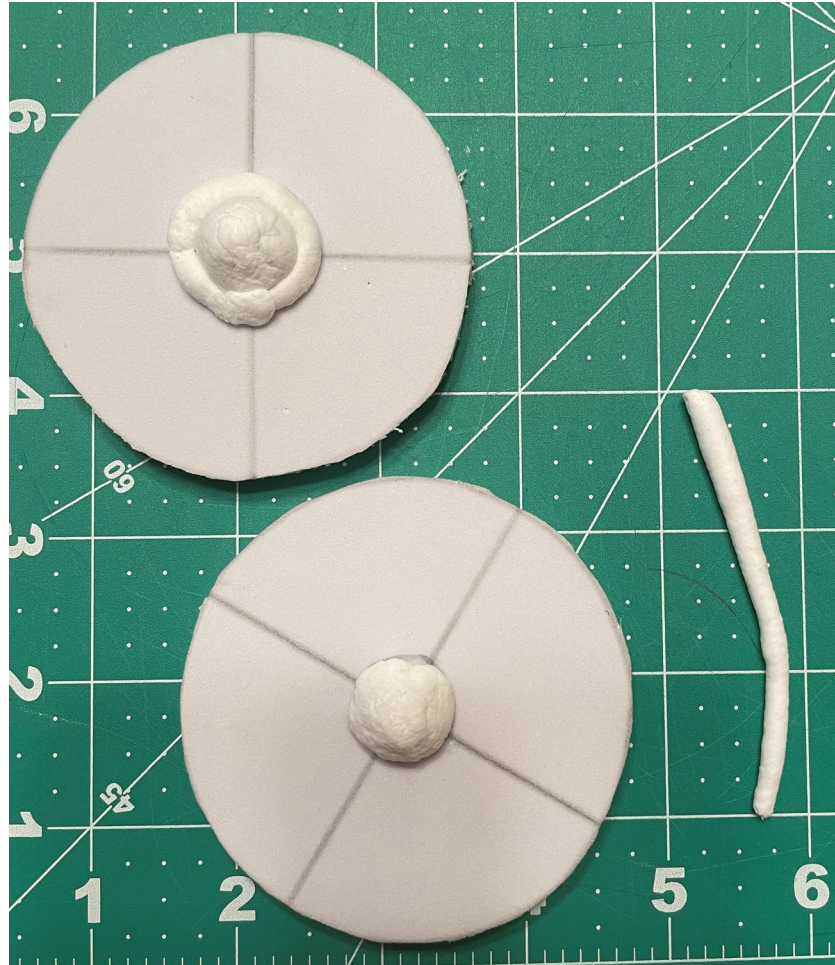


Illustration 5.22 Disk in process

The belt was created measuring around my body at where I wanted it to sit, about my high hip. I made a paper pattern of this to check the circumference and height on my body. I decided on a two-inch height and adjusted the circumference to angle as it went up my body. At this step I also figured out the size of “buckle” diamond at center front and what its size would be. This came out to around three inches by four inches. The belt overlapped the buckle by 1/2” leaving two inches of the buckle visible. The buckle was cut of 6 mm foam and foam clay was used to apply the central detail. The belt’s designed aspects were created with 2 mm foam and a little foam clay. For closing, one side of the belt was glued to the buckle, a quick release buckle was glued to the center back of the buckle and the other half of the buckle was glued to the free part of the belt.

The hip guards were made first out of paper to check proportion to my body. The length had to be around a third of my thighs and curve around my hips. This took several paper patterns to find the right ratio. They were then cut out of the 6 mm foam with a raised edge cut out of 2 mm like the breast plates edge. For the top edge I found on TNT Cosplays website 14 mm foam triangular dowels. I used the foam clay to create the curving shape in the center. The rivets were created using the tops of brads. I cut a small slit in my foam and inserted the brads with some contact cement. Attaching the hip guards to the belt proved to be a challenge. I wanted to be able to sit in the costume, so the hip guards needed to be flexible (Illustration 5.23). Consulting online armor website, I saw how they attached their hip guards and tassets with strips of fabric down the back. I temporarily taped webbing to the back of the hip guard and the belt to find the right location on the belt. Then I pinned through the foam pieces to mimic how the glue would hold and sat in various positions chairs. This got me to the right combination of length and placement of the webbing to allow the hip guards raise or shift as I was sitting. The webbing was glued to the back of the guard. The glued end was covered with a scrap piece of 2 mm for protect the webbings ends. The hip guards were then attached after the painting process.

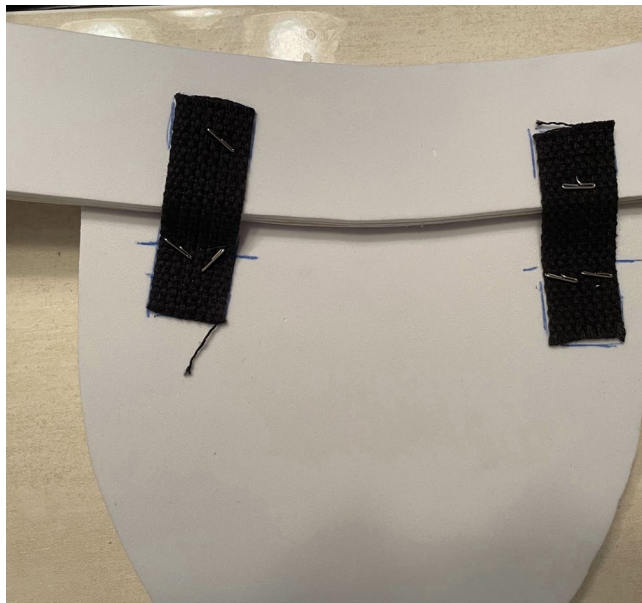


Illustration 5.23 Hip Guard attachment



Illustration 5.24 Hip Guard before brads

The seams of the foam had to be covered or filled in. This helps protect the glue and create a smooth transition on the foam when painting happens. For this I used a product called

Kwik Seal. This was recommended in KamuiCosplay's book and YouTube tutorials by other Cosplayers. This product is used in plumbing for water tightness. The product can be applied with a gloved hand (though I did do it some without a glove in this picture) and water (picture). It is piped on like cake icing then smoothed with water. Looking back, I would have worked harder to put my seams tighter then sanded them before putting the seal on. Kwik seal will shrink some as it dries so I put on two layers of it.

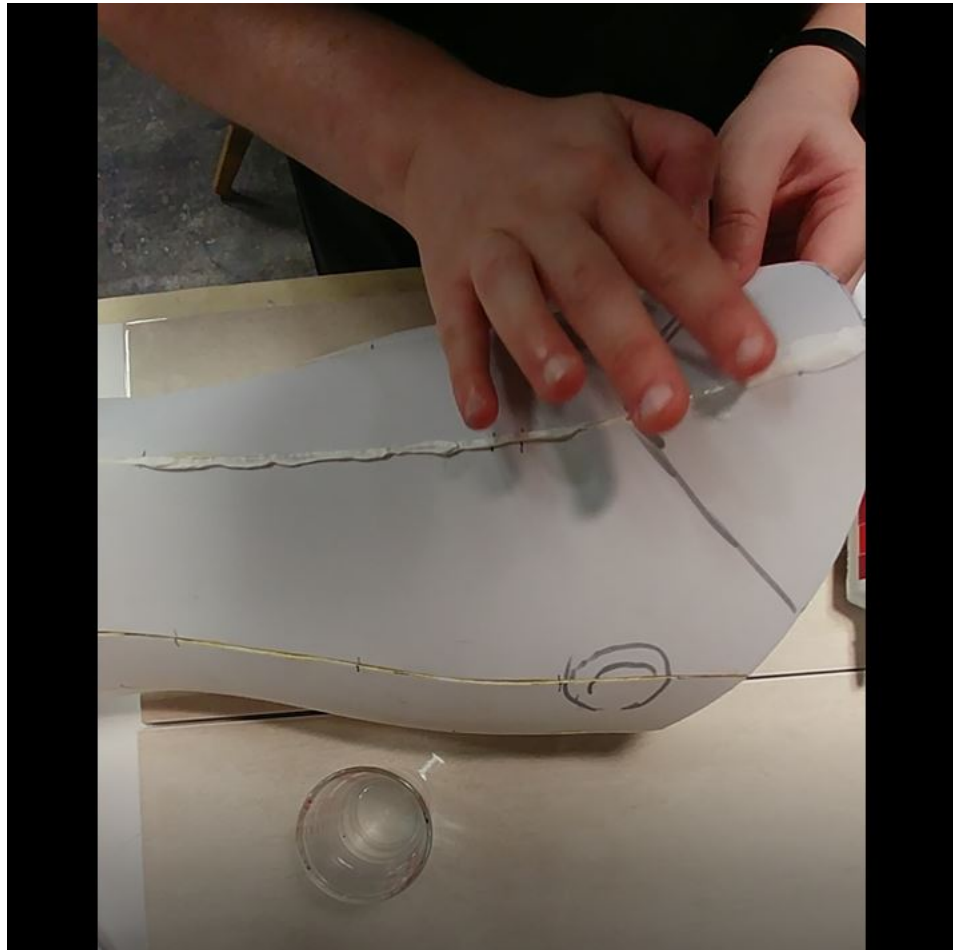


Illustration 5.25 Using Kwik Seal over seams. Wear Gloves.

Before sealing all the pieces had to be sanded in the rough spots and over seams. This step took longer than expected. This was also where I learned cutting and gluing more precisely would have saved me time. I also realized Kwik Seal should have been applied after this step. The sanding would have helped smooth the seams and made them more even so that all the Kwik

Seal would have closed up the gaps. I went over all the foam piece with a heat gun on a low setting to close the foam's cells more and to melt off any foam fuzz from sanding.

To prep the EVA foam for painting I used a spray on rubber coating called Plasti Dip. In hindsight I should have bought black instead of white to make it easier to check coverage. The Plasti Dip had to be applied in three coats front and back. All aerosol spraying happened outside on the balcony of my apartment on a drop cloth. For my protection I wore a respirator, gloves, and goggles. The sprayed pieces were left outside over night to off gas the fumes. Before painting I did a test on small pieces of foam and the old gauntlets with the black base paint followed by the three different silver paints I had purchased (Illustration 5.26). First was a brush on paint by Plaid paint called FX. They advertise that it is a flexible acrylic paint for Cosplayers. The other two were spray paints, Rustoleum Mirror Finish and Rustoleum Metallic Finish Silver. Comparing the two aerosols I notice was no comparable difference no matter the number of layers (Illustration 5.27). I did end up going with the Rustoleum Metallic Finish because it only took two coats to get a nice even coverage. All pieces were placed on the drop cloth and two layers of black spray paint were applied. Once dried overnight or eight to nine hours, the layers of silver were applied. I did not tape off the areas that would eventually be gold. I felt that having a shiny base would enhance the gold paint which is also of the FX brand (Illustration 5.28).





Illustration 5.26 Base coat in black

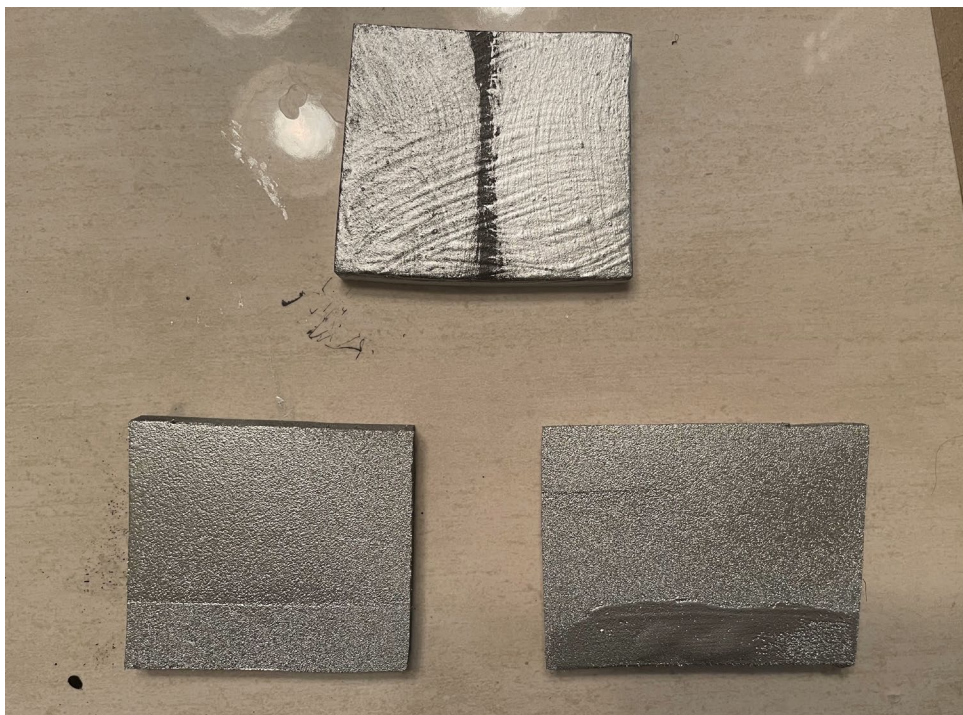


Illustration 5.27 Results of Silver test





Illustration 5.28 Gold Paint applied over silver

Once all the paint was applied, I sealed it all with an aerosol spray varnish. This served two functions. First was to create a protective layer over all the spray paint. The silver spray paint would rub off while I was handling the pieces before sealing. The varnish I chose was a high gloss that added an extra layer of shine to the finished pieces. The varnish had to be applied in 3 layers and had to have at least an hour between coats. This was where I ran into my environment getting into the paint. There were places that bugs had gotten stuck, and I had to sand then reapply the varnish.

## **SKIRT AND HOOD**

The last part to consider was the white skirt and hood/capelet. These I saved for the end because I need information for the chest piece and the belt. I used my draping knowledge from school and some instruction of patterning books. With the design I had to consider where seams would be. The illustrations and music video did not show seam lines. It is not something the

designers had to consider when rendering. I was able to create the skirt and capelet with minimum seams. Once fitted in a mockup fabric I went into my real fabric, a lightweight white with no texture. All the seams are French seamed, this encloses all the raw edges, and I would not have to worry about creating a lining. The gold details were applied with a shimmery gold fabric paint. I took the paper patterns of the pieces and sketched the shapes of the designs. These were transferred to a board and cut out. I covered the stencils with 2 layers Mod Podge, a water base sealer, front and back. The stencils were placed on the fabric and paint sponged brushed on (Illustration 5.29). The lines connecting the designs were created with painter's tape placed along the edges. This ensured the lines were clean and even around the edges (Illustration 5.30).



Illustration 5.29 Stencil for painting on Skirt and Hood

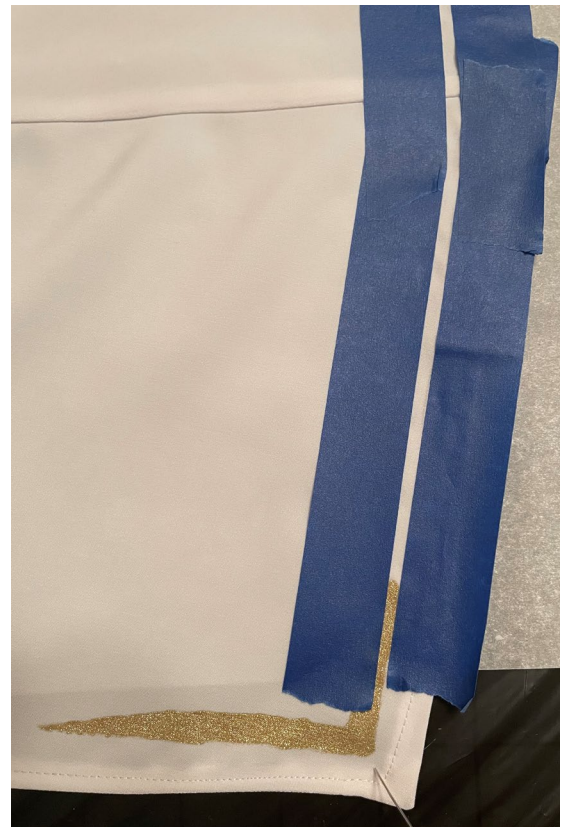


Illustration 5.30 Taping straight edge to paint

The skirt is on its own waistband. To keep it in line with the belt, I glued and sewed snapes to the belt and skirt. This also ensured that the center design on the skirt was

always centered under the belt's center. The hood and capelet is snapped onto the straps of the chest piece behind the disk.

## **ACCESSORIES**

The last thing to share is the accessories needed to bring the character to life. It shoes that the boots go over were originally black. I used the flexible Plaid FX paint to paint the body and edge of the soles silver. It took about three layers of the silver paint to get the streaking of the paint to blend out. After drying two layers of Mod Podge was applied to seal and protect the paint.

The wig was ordered from Epic Cosplay Wigs, an online Cosplay wig seller. Their products are great because the wig can be straightened with a straightening iron on low. They also had a wide range of color options. For the blonde there were several choices. The website included examples of what other Cosplayers had used that wig style and color for. With that information I chose my wig in the Theia style Blonde mix. The wig came with some curve to the bottom due to the bag storage. I straightened the wig in sections. I trimmed off frayed ends and shaped the bangs a bit more. To keep the bangs out of my face I applied strong holding hairspray, held/pinned in place, then dried with a hair drier on low. The head band was made from a head band I already owned covered with left over of the nonprinted navy fabric.

I wanted to add extra depth to my Cosplay, so I decided to get blue contacts as my eyes are naturally hazel. This is where I did a Cosplay by community moment and reached out onto an online form about what others have done for colored contacts. There were several websites given but the consensus was to go through my optometrist first. I made an appointment explaining what I needed. I learned they my kind of contacts are not made in color. My optometrist suggested going with a different kind of prescription so I could see but I wouldn't be able to drive or see too far. They worked great and the company had a great shade of blue that showed up against my eyes.

## **RESULTS**

Overall, I am very satisfied with how my first armored Cosplay came out. I am proud of being able to look back and know what I can improve on next time. In this process I was able to combine my knowledge as a costume technician with the open sourcing of the Cosplay community. All photos taken by Keep Photos Weird. (Illustrations 5.31- 5.38)





Illustration 5.31 Front Full Body



Illustration 5.32 Back Shot



Illustration 5.33 Close up of Belt and Hip Guards



Illustration 5.34 Bracers and Neck Guard





Illustration 5.35 Finished Boots





Illustration 5.36 Hood Shot



Illustration 5.37  $\frac{3}{4}$  view



Illustration 5.38 Shot with contacts

## Chapter 6

### Reflection

Through this thesis I have learned a great deal more about Cosplay than I knew existed. Cosplay has been around in its different forms since the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Over time Cosplayers have used their creativity and emerging technologies to bring their favorite characters to life. The sources of Cosplay have evolved over the years and now not only includes comics and tv shows; but internet jokes, music videos, even newsworthy moments can be found on convention floors. The skills of Cosplayers have exploded into professional quality creations.

My journey through creating my Cosplay challenged my design and technical ability. I had to make choices that normally as a costume technician relegate to the costume designer. This Cosplay also offered me a chance to work materials that I had not worked with very often. EVA foam was a straightforward process but the Worbla was a new beast to work with. As a first-time user of these products, the final product is something to be proud of.

One of my inspirations for this thesis was a TED talk by Adam Savage of MythBusters fame. Adam had shared a story of being on Con floor in character and interacting with other Con goers. He remarks on the interactions he has and how it is unique to Cosplay. He goes on to describe Cosplay.

These aren't just people who find a costume and put it on- They mash them up. They bend them to their will. They change them to be the characters they want to be in that production. They're super clever and genius. They let their freak flag fly and it's beautiful. This isn't a performer-audience relationship; this is Cosplay. We are all of us on that floor injecting ourselves into a narrative that meant something to us. And we're making it our own. We're connecting with something important inside of us. And the costume are how we reveal ourselves to each other (Savage).

Cosplay should no longer be looked at "just a hobby." Cosplay is a community of creators who love to share their passion and creations with the world. Cosplay has grown out of a small, disjointed groups to a global phenomenon for any age or race. Cosplay is only going to grow in the coming years, and I hope to still be learning from this amazing, talented, and innovative group.

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