

COSPLAY ~~JOY~~ MAYHEM

(THE JOY OF DRESSING UP WHERE NO ONE WILL THINK YOU ARE A FREAK)



AN OTAKU SURVIVAL GUIDE

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- Print out your own checklists to use.
- Talk with others about conventions and plan carpools.
- Submit your own questions and find answers.
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Otaku Survival Guide Titles:

- Attending Your First Convention
- Cosplay Joy Mayhem
- State of the Publishing Industry
- Self Publishing for Sane People
- A Parent's Guide to the Cultural Divide

Check out the website for a more up-to-date list.

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Cassie Richoux

Main writer for the books, and occasionally bad artist. She lives in Portland Oregon and has dreams of starting her own publishing company for young adult fantasy books with a manga twist. The Otaku Survival Guide project is her baby, and she just happened to rope some unsuspecting friends into it.



First Convention:
Anime Iowa 2001



First Convention:
Anime Iowa 2002

Heather Imig

Unsuspecting friend, roommate, and general minion, she has aspirations of quitting her day job and playing video games all day. Now if only she could win the lottery.

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First Convention:
KumoriCon 2006

THE HISTORY OF MAKING EXCUSES TO WEAR COSTUMES WHEN IT'S NOT HALLOWEEN

As anime cons made their way into America back in the 80s, cosplay was immediately a popular event. Cosplay is the name used by otakus to distinguish the event from that of a Masquerade, which is the typical term for the costume events at a science-fiction or comic con.

Masquerades often served as the only event where people were in costume and the rest of the weekend would be filled with “normal” clothing. Nowadays, there also tends to be a higher standard of acting in character for cosplayers, a trait that was brought over from Japanese counterparts.

So in other words, the term cosplay only refers to costumes related to Japanese medias, or at least that's how the most serious cosplayers will define it. I've seen long debates break out on message boards about what exactly was allowed as part of cosplay. Some people will go so far as to say that video games, even when based on games from Japan like Zelda or Super Mario Brothers, are not permitted in the cosplay events.

Most actual cosplay events do place standards on the costumes; meaning they have to have something to do with anime. While it might be fun to wear your Harry Potter costume around the con (and I saw a wonderful Harry Potter cosplay group at Anime Expo once), those costumes would not be acceptable entries in the actual cosplay events.

PLANNING TIME

Well, now that you know a bit about the glorious traditions you are upholding, let's start with some planning.

First, why do you want to cosplay? Do you just want to do something fun with your friends? Do you like showing off? Or do you want a chance at winning the cosplay events?

Each of these goals is going to take a different strategy, so let's start with the simplest.

All of my cosplaying has been a result of me and friends just wanting to have some fun at a convention. None of my costumes took more than two weeks to make, and many were sewn in hotel rooms and cars. Of course, none of these costumes have been winners, but it was still fun to walk around and be recognized by others and to do group photos.

Before you get started, let's make a plan for the costume. Find some good color pictures that show as many angles of the character as possible, and then start to dissect it. Look at all the elements of the costume and think which pieces you might be able to find at a thrift store (such as a white button-down shirt) and what you might need to sew and craft by hand.

Also, keep in mind what the character looks like. Do you need contacts/wigs/special make-up for this costume? If you are on a budget (or have little time), it's good to take a look at the whole costume right now.

Sketch out each element of the clothing. Figure out what layer might connect to another. Now is a good time to think about how you are going to make details like armor or jewelry.

Make a list of each piece that you need to buy, from clothing to

jewelry, including accessories. Know when you make out this list how much time and money you have.

Now you're ready to begin buying supplies and putting together the costume. You're probably going to be working on multiple elements at once, but we'll start with the basic clothing.

THRIFT STORE SCAVENGING

If you're planning to cosplay, the first thing you should do is become familiar with your local thrift stores. Typically, you have two types:

Goodwill/Salvation Army/Donation Stores – These are purely subject to the whims of the donating public. They have the cheapest items and an interesting selection, but you may need to visit quite a few to find everything you want.

DO HAVE A PLAN FOR
MAKING YOUR COSTUME



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DON'T DO IT ALL IN
ONE NIGHT



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Consignment Shops – These are slightly more expensive, and the owners get part of the sale money. Often these stores cater to a certain audience, like vintage, formal wear, or military, and you can sometimes find some great designer clothing and formal wear.

Find out the location of all of the stores that might have what you need. Sometimes even your local megastore (Wal-Mart, K-Mart, Target, etc.) might have clothing items you can get for cheap that are the style you need. One nice thing about going to stores like that is you will get a better size and color selection.

Most of my costumes came from thrift stores. I trimmed shirts, hemmed pants, and even cut open a robe to make Miyaka's priestess outfit. With some ingenuity and creative talents (and a fear of sewing a whole costume), a lot of pieces can be created out of already designed clothes. The nice part about that is you don't have to do all the work, especially when the item you need is something ordinary, like a blue button-down shirt. Trying to sew a shirt is much more difficult than finding one.

Still, these costumes can sometimes seem less professional, so take your time and make sure you are still putting in your best effort, even if you are mostly reassembling pieces.

SEWING

Do you fancy yourself good with a needle and thread? Or at least feel confident enough not to end up with too many new holes in your fingers?

Good, let's get started with our sewing.

Hopefully you have an idea of what exactly needs to be sewn. Depending on if you are making the full costume or just adding

details to a thrift store base, you'll want to take different strategies to costume creation.

If you want to make your costume from scratch, well, good luck. I've only made one costume entirely from scratch, and that was my set of Vampire Princess Miyu robes. My mother helped me, but essentially we took a night robe pattern that was the right length and created two robes. The interior robe was her red robe and the exterior the white, though we didn't put any sleeves on the interior one since that would be more cumbersome and they would not have shown. I then sewed a long sash with pointed ends for around my waist.



Don't forget about visibility and safety issues with your costume.

This would be the con where I learned that a sash is not really enough to keep a robe like that closed, no matter how Miyu might fare on TV. Keep that in mind--you might need to make alterations to make the costume feasible for an actual human to wear.

The nice thing about simply adding details to an existing piece is that you can do it anywhere. For my first convention, a good part of my Lina Inverse costume was made in the back seat of the car on the way to the con. Of course, we also had only decided a week ago that we wanted to cosplay, and one of the members of our group had already gone crazy with trying to sew four cloaks in five days.

Finishing an existing piece mostly requires figuring out what needs to be added and then hand or machine sewing it. In fact, glue will work for some details, but it might fall off over repeated use.

Any time you are using fabrics, especially more difficult ones, make sure you know what the washing and ironing needs are. Most fabrics should be washed before you start sewing or before you wear them, but that isn't always true or necessary. Ironing can also be a tricky thing, because it might need low heat. If you don't have a lot of experience sewing, ask someone at the craft store. They are usually full of information and very friendly.

ARMOR & WEAPONS

Tricky, tricky--armor and weapons pose a problem for any cosplayers who don't have the money to buy these items. Not that it isn't a challenge that many people enjoy.

Now, I'm not really comfortable with a blowtorch or metal working tools, so I tend to make my armor out of more harmless things, like flexi-foam. If there are any local historical reenactment

TIPS AND TRICKS

Pre-record your onstage performance and lip synch; this way, the people in the back can actually hear you.

Camera flashes will wash out your face in a photo, so at least wear some foundation and subtle make-up, even if the character doesn't wear make-up. This way, your photos will still look like a living person.

Think about the underwear for your costume – do you need petticoats, corsets, or other pieces that can make a big difference? These can be hard to make, so don't wait until the last minute. Some costumes just won't look good without them.

Use the convention website forums to find other cosplayers so that you can have meet-ups for the cast of the anime/manga/game you are playing from.

Check multiple reference pictures so that you can get a full scope of the costume and accessories. Don't try to make a costume from memory.



You too can make a non-working rocket launcher from your local hardware store.

WHAT TO DO WHEN IT ALL GOES WRONG...

A MAJOR RIP

Right before the masquerade, you discover a rip down the side of your costume. What to do:

1. Evaluate the severity of the rip.
2. You should always have an emergency kit with thread that matches your costumes and a few needles. If you do not, ask other cosplayers if they have the supplies that you need.
 - Sometimes the staff member in charge of the masquerade will have an emergency kit or there might even be an emergency repair station.
3. If a friend is handy and the tear is in a place that they can reach, have them repair the rip while you are wearing the costume, so that you don't have to waste valuable time changing out of it.
 - Otherwise, go to the nearest bathroom and remove the outfit, though notify the staff member in charge that you will be leaving, and make sure they won't penalize you for it.
4. In the case of a time crunch, you can use tape on the inside of the material to make a quick fix.
5. For rips that aren't visible, safety pins can be used for emergency repair and keeping things held up.

SEWING MACHINE FIRE

Any time you are trying to get something done in a limited amount of time, mayhem and destruction are sure to follow. While your machine can routinely snag and damage fabric, every once in a while it will make a last stand.

1. Do not throw water on the fire, as water conducts electricity.
2. Turn off the power to the house.
3. Use a chemical fire extinguisher, if it can be used safely.
4. If the fire can't be put out safely, get everyone out of the house.
5. Call 911 or your local emergency number and tell them it's an electrical fire.



*And Misty never let Teri forget that *she* had been the first one to actually set the machine on fire. (Since of course all the bets were on Misty.)*

REAL OTAKU STORIES

HyperrrMouse

How long have you been cosplaying?

I think I first cosplayed in 1999, without knowing I was cosplaying. I made a Sailor Moon costume for Halloween. My first official con cosplay was Irvine Kinneas from Final Fantasy 8, and that was in May of 2000. I was pretty soundly hooked after that.

Why did you get started?

I'd always made or modified my Halloween costumes with my mom's help (at the beginning it was all her with my ideas of what I wanted to be). I dressed as everything from a fairy princess to a fox, that was a funny one. I really like the idea of making fun outfits and getting to dress-up more often than just on Halloween.

Why do you keep cosplaying?

It's a good time. I like working on something and seeing the completed piece. When I work with a friend it's even more fun. I love going to cons and being able to share my work with other cosplayers, and discussing costumes in general. It's a strange addiction. Also it's fun when you are recognized, or when anyone, cosplayer or not, tells you how much they like your costume. After all, who doesn't feel wonderful when they get compliments?

Dokudel

Why do you keep cosplaying?

I want to make as many costumes for all the animes I've seen. So that means I am not even a quarter of the way there yet. I have watched over 400 animes. I have made myself about 50 costumes.

What's your embarrassing cosplay story?

I was on a cosplay bash site for my Felicia costume. They made a caption saying 'glomped all day', which I wasn't. And that they thought I was 13 when I was 17. And my Eternal Mercury costume (it was just bad and I knew that).

This is just a sample of the Real Otaku responses I got from a survey at Cosplay.com. Website will contain full responses. All of this is brought to you with limited editing interruptions.

What's your embarrassing cosplay story?

Hmm, I'm not sure... I have a costume I don't share on the internet 'cause it sucks so badly. I know it's still out there somewhere, but I haven't posted it. Oh, and for a bit I was a little too "Rar cosplay and cons and all that goes on there is SERIOUS STUFF!"

What's the shortest time you made a costume in?

I made my first Hyakurin, Blade of the Immortal, in about three days. I'm glad I did since two of my other friends wore their BOTI costumes.

What would you like other cosplayers to know?

Always have fun. I fed way too much into cosplay drama for awhile, and it takes a lot of the fun and respect for other cosplayers out of the hobby. Chill, and have a great time. It is a hobby after all, not the end of all human existence.

What was your best cosplay moment?

There are far too many awesome ones. Usually they consist of me getting to meet a cosplayer whose work I've seen at Cosplay.com or Cosplaylab.com, and I get to talk with them about how they made their costume. I love learning techniques, and meeting others with a passion for cosplay.

What would you like other cosplayers to know?

If there is a costume you don't like, don't make fun of it. Just accept it for what it is - being a ghetto cosplay, someone's first time, person too skinny, too fat. Those things don't matter. Why? Cosplay is a hobby and everyone who is in this hobby should have fun. Well it IS a fun hobby.

What was your best cosplay moment?

When I wore my Terra sprite costume for I-CON 06. After we went off stage the whole crowd chanted "Old school" for a long time, and that made me so happy, 'cause those costumes were a team effort and my group did not make me do all the work.

CrimsonGOJYO

Why did you get started?

I went to my first convention when I was 10 years old, and I was so excited seeing all the different characters and stuff, and I knew I wanted to do that. I started on my first costume when I was 13, Sha Gojyo from Saiyuki, and I worked really hard on it, so when I wore it to the con and people started taking my picture, I knew it was something I would love.

Have you ever won/gotten anything for your costumes?

A girl told me once when I was cosplaying Rhode Camelot from D.Gray-Man that "I pwned" and I was like, ";;=; OMG!!" and hugged her REALLY tight. XD Then another girl told me she loved all my costumes and I was like, "i love you. ;=;"

Why do you keep cosplaying?

I keep cosplaying because I love being characters I love. [...] I get VERY attached to certain characters and just embodying them and becoming them is a very special thing to me.

What's your embarrassing cosplay story?

Hmm... I don't really have one. XD I have never flashed anything because I'm very open with myself and if I do flash it's like, "what anime doesn't have a boob flash now and then?" That happened when I was Rangiku Matsumoto from Bleach, I turned to the side and you could see my boob. Some guy told me and I was like, "So what? What anime doesn't have a boob?" XD

What would you like other cosplayers to know?

It's a side job you don't get paid for. Do your best and put all your effort into it.

Natalie

Have you ever won/gotten anything for your costumes?

Do lots of hugs count? My first cosplay earned me a small fan club who would rush up and hug me whenever they saw me...

Why do you keep cosplaying?

'Cause it's fun, as well as a challenge to take a 2d design, then translate it into 3dimensional space. That, and I'm an attention whore, lol.

What would you like other cosplayers to know?

I made my armor out of beer cans!! BEAT THAT!!

Tom Tonthat

How long have you been cosplaying?

I've been cosplaying since 2001. My first costume was a simple City Hunter but I managed to get the entire costume wrong. Several years later after some practice and connections with veteran cosplayers I think I have a better feel of the hobby.

Why did you get started?

I got started because of a coin toss. After my first convention, I had memories of cosplayers and fan artists and wanted to participate in one of those venues. I flipped a coin to decide where to concentrate: Heads for drawing; tails for cosplaying. The coin landed tails. This was probably a good call since I haven't drawn anything since kindergarten.

Why do you keep cosplaying?

It's a fun thing to do with my cosplay partner and girlfriend. It's also an easier way to mingle at a convention.

What's your embarrassing cosplay story?

Rumors of me cosplaying as a schoolgirl have been duly noted, and undisputed evidence has been duly deleted.

What's the shortest amount of time you made a costume in?

Ten minutes. I was cutting and altering the clothes while waiting in line to pay.

What would you like other cosplayers to know?

Cosplay drama is best seen on the stage. Keep the pettiness, jealousy, backstabbing, name calling, eye-gouging, and death threats AWAY from the actual act of cosplay.

What was your best cosplay moment?

I make each opportunity to cosplay my best cosplay moment.

Manic Macabre

What's your embarrassing cosplay story?

Well, one time while I was at a cosplay photoshoot, a girl kicked me quite hard in the hindquarters, and at the same time a guy was talking about the anagram for "Xemnas," which everyone knows is "Mansex," and one girl yelled out, "Mansex!" then I said while I was completely oblivious to the comment, "my butt hurts..."

What would you like other cosplayers to know?

That Mana IS a guy. XD

Kanira

Have you ever won/gotten anything for your costumes?

A doughnut at Anime Expo 2005; there were a set of three or four girls shuffling about the convention center, awarding them to anyone dressed as Wash.

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An artist I use for a lot of work, including the original character designs for the Otakus.



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