

WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?!?

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Ethos talks to Katey Way, dressed as Princess Mononoke from the movie Princess Mononoke, about the incredibly popular culture that is cosplay; from becoming and portraying genuine characters to congregating together to collectively form a great appreciation and passion for the art.

Ethos: For those of us who aren't quite sure what it is, what exactly is cosplay?

Katey Way: Cosplay is an appreciation of Japanese culture such as video games, anime, film and now pop culture TV shows and American TV shows. What people do is take that love of these things and characters in them and convey it into their own art form, like dressing up as them—it's like Halloween but taking it more seriously.

E: When did you start becoming interested in cosplay?

KW: About six years ago, when I was a freshman here at Iowa State. My roommate ran into my room and said, "Hey I need you to come to this convention with me this weekend." She was modeling for a costume agency at the time in Detroit and they needed a blonde last minute to fit into a costume that was made because someone dropped out. I was whisked away! I had no idea what anime was at the time. I had no idea what the show Sailor Moon was and now I do.

E: We understand that you make and have made many costumes—how many?

KW: For myself, I've made about ten. That includes everything: the wigs, shoes, props, accessories clothing, you name it. Cosplay is extremely detail oriented. In this kind of industry, people are very critical of the kind of stuff you use and the final product. It's such a huge fanbase that someone will notice it, they'll call you out on it and that's happened to me—it was embarrassing. There was a prop I made once for a particular show and on the show one of the characters had a bow and arrow, and the bow was made out of tree branches. I just thought, 'How am I going to do this?' So I carved out a piece of wood for the handle, then I raided my neighbors yard with hedge trimmers for big branches, glued them together, then covered them with war blood, mounted a lighting system to it and it turned out to be insane. It was pretty awesome.

E: What is your favorite costume so far?

KW: It's hard to choose one but my personal one is Aisha Clanclan from the show Outlaw Star that was on Toonami awhile back. It was

always my goal and I said to myself, 'One day I'll be good enough to do this costume.' Just this past year, I finally did it. It's one of my big personal accomplishments.

E: How long does it typically take to get your costume and then to get dressed in it?

KW: From start to finish, typically, it takes about two weeks. Plus or minus the time it takes to gather props and accessories. That's for general costumes. For an event as big as Youmacon, which is my biggest convention all year, everyone goes all out. This is a serious one and people plan for the entire year just to have a great costume for it. The problem is these anime characters are designed to be visually appealing but not really functional. You have to sit down and think of how you'll make it work so you can maneuver.

E: Where and how often do fans and participants gather?

KW: Usually each state here, almost every state, in the U.S. has about two to three bigger conventions. For Iowa, it's Anime Iowa. There's usually one or two big conventions every weekend that you can go to.

E: How is cosplay growing in popularity and why?

KW: Well it's mostly word of mouth. Friends telling friends all about it because cosplay didn't exist here at all and now you see many people, you have big names and you have the emergence of paid cosplayers that create their own or have someone create costumes for them. So the exposure has a lot to do with it.

E: Are there specific characters that you prefer to portray?

KW: I wouldn't say that I have much of a preference, rather I latch onto the characters I see on shows or games, the ones I can relate to and portray myself. A lot of people see a character and wonder how they can make them more attractive or spice it up with their own little twist. Almost every cosplayer has a list because you can't latch on to all of the characters due to time or money and such. So I kind of put it in the back of my mind when I see a character and decide later out of the many I've thought about.

E: What is crossplay?

KW: Well basically it's when you portray a character of the opposite gender as your own. A lot of girls will portray dudes and some can do it, they pull it off pretty well. Guys do the opposite too, of course. Some people do identify with another gender but aren't comfortable doing it everyday so it can be something like an outlet or a way of being comfortable too—but sometimes it's

like, "I wonder what it would be like to be a dude today."

E: Are there just as many girls involved as there are guys?

KW: Simply put, yes. It does depend on the type of convention though and there are plenty of them. For example, the one I just went to was called Magfest in Washington D.C. and it's a video game convention. It was maybe 80 percent guys to 20 percent girls whereas an anime one it's more 50/50. You have to look at what's advertised and the target audience or demographic of the specific conventions.

E: Has cosplay become competitive in certain respects and how does one go about making the costumes?

KW: Yes, very much so. I am heavily involved in the competitive aspect of it. After the first time I modeled, the time I went to fill in for someone, I said to myself, "I could do that more often." So I started learning and teaching myself how to sew, then how to make props, then armor and I slowly progressed. In the beginning, I started watching a lot of tutorials because I had no idea what I was doing. That was for the first couple years. These last few years, I stopped looking at tutorials and I was figuring out how I could do it and what I could do better to be accurate and functional. It takes a while to progress in the competitions.

E: What do you love the most about cosplay?

KW: It's a combination of a few different things for me. A lot of it has to do with comradery. For the most part, most people are eager to talk to you because you already have common ground. So you can just walk up to somebody and say, "Hey that costume is awesome! How'd you do it?" You start to meet and talk to people. It becomes a closer group of people that can relate to each other. Some conventions will have different things, like one convention had an 'anti-bullying' campaign that it advocated, and we can come together because of it too. Another thing is the art. To work hard on what you've done and have people come up to you and tell you how great it is or want pictures, to me that's unreal.

E: Are there any plans for your next big costume?



KW: There are some. At the next Youmacon, which falls on Halloween weekend every year, I'm going as a Pokemon—but not just any Pokemon. I'm going to be armored Pokemon and a group of us will all be in battle armor. I still really love doing this.



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