

# Virtual Soapbox



## Crossplay in the "Wild Wild West" Katrina Lynn

*A veteran costumer explains how her love for crossplay lead her to become "James West" from "The Wild Wild West" TV show.*

Having only watched the first season of the *Wild Wild West*, my husband Mikhail and I were nervous about popping in the first disc of the second season. The first season's black and white cinematography was so beautiful – rich, ominous, more than a little film noir. Our fears were alleviated immediately when a wash of Technicolor filled the screen with shades of blue and red and the expansive green landscapes of California. We knew then that Jim and Artie's costumes waited in our future.

I don't even question anymore when I want to dress as a male character. I think my first attempt at "crossplay" was when I was twelve and insisted on being "Prince Caspian" from the *Chronicles of Narnia* for



Halloween. I'd always played at being boys in dress-up with friends, but finally dressing as a man for Halloween opened up an entire world of characters I could be. After that, I played "Luke Skywalker," "Severus Snape," and even "Jesus" in a church production of the Passion. I learned binding (to flatten my chest) and shading makeup through college and rarely cosplayed female anime characters.

Today, I wear more drag than not at conventions, and it's freeing. I can watch any show, read any book, and say, "I'm going to be that character," with no regard for gender because I know how to pull it off. Jim West seemed a perfect fit for me – talkative, flirtatious, a little feminine in shape. I didn't think twice about choosing him as my character.



Left: Robert Conrad as "James T. West." Photo: CBS., Above: "James West" Screen-worn costume. Photo [screenused.com](http://screenused.com). Far left: Katrina Lynn's crossplay recreation. Photo: Richard Man / [Costume-Con](http://Costume-Con).

A year later, watching the series through for a second time, we sewed into the night to the beat of the quintessentially '60s theme song. My costume was a straight screen-to-sewing-machine re-creation.

I watched and read interviews with Robert Conrad about his costume and found that it was elasticized to allow for his stunts (though, as a careful viewer will note, he was not immune to ripping his pants on occasion). The fiber read as polyester, that darling of '60s fashion, so I found a perfect green suiting with just the right amount of stretch. I thought the lamé for his vest would prove harder, but a trip to Hancock revealed the ultimate paisley that was surprisingly close to screen-accurate.

The cravats were challenging to design because their structure seemed a mystery until we noticed a brief instance where Jim gets dressed and fastens the entire structure around his neck with an elastic band. That's how we discovered the "cravat tie", an obscure



*Right:* Ross Martin as "Artemus Gordon." Photo: CBS. *Far right:* Mikhail Lynn's recreation in red. Photo: Richard Man / [Costume-Con](#).



Screen-worn "James West" hat auctioned by [Profiles in History](#), January 2010

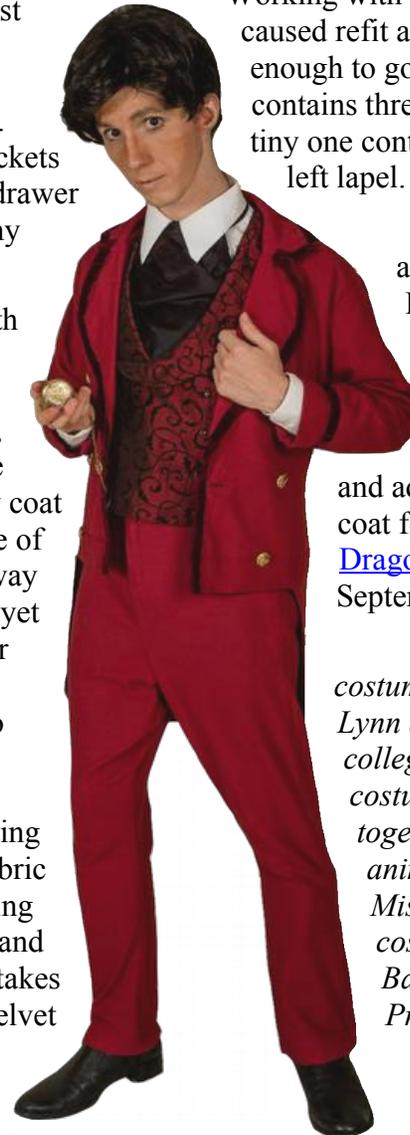


bit of pre-tied '60s formalwear that had ample documentation for re-creating its construction.

The hat was another challenge to track down, but I checked daily on ebay and eventually found a vintage one that just needed a band change under the title "western hat".

With four hidden pockets and a derringer on a drawer slide up my sleeve, my costume was complete.

Mikhail's costume started with his wish that Artie had worn a burgundy version of his blue tailcoat on screen. He decided that, for his costume, he would combine the color of Artie's short burgundy coat with the shape of his blue cutaway coat. I hadn't yet learned proper tailoring techniques, so the final coat, made of a burgundy suiting we got in a fabric swap, is missing pad-stitching and has some mistakes in the fussy velvet trim.



Still, with a lot of documentation due to Artie's blue jacket going to auction, we were able to get our construction close to screen-accurate. Artie's vest was a bit different than Jim's – he rarely wore lamé, and his vests were mainly double-breasted. Working with Mikhail's narrow shoulders caused refit after refit until it was good enough to go on stage. His costume contains three hidden pockets including a tiny one containing a lock pick behind his left lapel.

After a few initial times out at Costume-Con, Archon, and Dragon Con, the costumes have been in our closet a few years. Recently, for the 50th anniversary of the show, I have fixed the trim and added padding to Mikhail's coat for another outing at [DragonCon](#) this year in early September.

*Katrina Lynn started costuming together with Mikhail Lynn almost as soon as they met in college, perhaps because costuming is what brought them together. They run Kawa Kon, an anime convention in St. Louis, Missouri with a focus on costuming. Katrina holds a Bachelor of Arts in Film Production.*