

Feature



I Stole a Time Lord and Ran Away

J. M. Frey

A sci-fi/fantasy writer wondered what the TARDIS would say about her Time Lord, and decided to costume the part to find out.

The Story

As a writer, I have said in many an interview that I prefer to come at narratives a little bit sideways. When I write, I love to tell stories from the perspective of the outsider, the over-looked, and the ignored. I love to give voices not to the people you would expect to be the heroes and protagonists, but the ones surrounding them that we don't often hear from.

To that end, I always wondered what The TARDIS would have to say about her Time Lord.

In 2008 or so, after I had returned from presenting at an academic conference in Cardiff on *Doctor Who* - a paper that eventually became my chapter, "Whose Doctor?" in *Doctor Who in Time and Space* (McFardland Press, 2013) - I decided that it was high time I had a *Doctor Who* cosplay. This seemed like the ideal opportunity to try to think of something unique and different,

something coming at it from the side. Something not like what I usually saw when people cosplayed *Doctor Who*.

I decided I would be a living incarnation of the TARDIS. Not a lady in a box, but a box as a lady.

I must have tapped into an unseen zeitgeist, because by the time the costume was complete, not only were there several other TARDIS Dresses on the cosplay scene (within weeks of my debut of the gown at FutureCon I in December 2011), but Neil Gaiman had jumped on the idea as well.

I came up with this concept, and began sketching it nearly two years before it was announced that Neil Gaiman had been

tapped to write the episode "The Doctor's Wife". The episode aired May 14 2011, and that December more than few people told me I'd done Idris 'wrong'.

That was the most negative feedback I received for the concept - that or I was told I was copying Gaiman - but the rest of the comments from folks has been excellent! People love the tailoring, the style, the idea, and of course, the lighty-uppy skirt!

It's still my favorite costume to wear, and I especially love watching everyone look over the costume and find all the Easter eggs buried in the bits and pieces of it. (For example, the embroidery on the rear of the skirt is Gallifreyan text that reads "I Stole A Time Lord And Ran Away.")



Photos by Amanda Irwin / Elemental Photography



One of my early sketches.

It's great to see their eyes light up when they realize exactly what they're seeing - the glowing Yale key, the yellow contacts that glow slightly in the dark to mimic the Bad Wolf moment, the ginger hair that the Doctor still hasn't gotten, the way the lights travel up and down my legs as I walk, like the central console dipping and bobbing as the TARDIS is in motion, the chatelaine filled with bits and bobs and the sorts of things the Doctor fiddles with and pulls from his own pockets whenever they're needed, or the wood-grain style markings in

the blue silk. There's even a blue sapphire heart-shaped pin on the costume - the heart of the TARDIS made physical.

Of course, the biggest challenge wasn't figuring out the bits and bobs, or what part of the costume would represent what part of the TARDIS, nor even figuring out the photoshoots or explaining to people that I was cosplaying as the TARDIS, not as Idris.

The big issue was that while I've taken sewing classes, and wiring classes, and jewelry making and wig-making classes, this costume was really, unbelievably, totally and completely unmakeable. For me.

My skills are decent, but they're not this good.

Instead of reaching out to my cosplaying friends to beg for more free lessons from them, I decided that as I was really attached to this design, and I wanted it to be the best that it could be, especially since I intended on wearing it often, I would commission someone to make the basic gown for me. Embellishments and trim I could do alone. Corset making and pattern drafting? Not so much.

Luckily, I went to theatre school with an extremely talented young man named [Kenneth Shelley](#), who at the time was working as a costume maker at the Shaw Theatre Festival. We had a sit down to discuss prices and design, and he brought on [Ashley Regimbal-Kung](#) for help on elements that he wasn't able to complete.

This dress was a team affair, and I am so proud that I get to walk around in something made by so many talented folks.

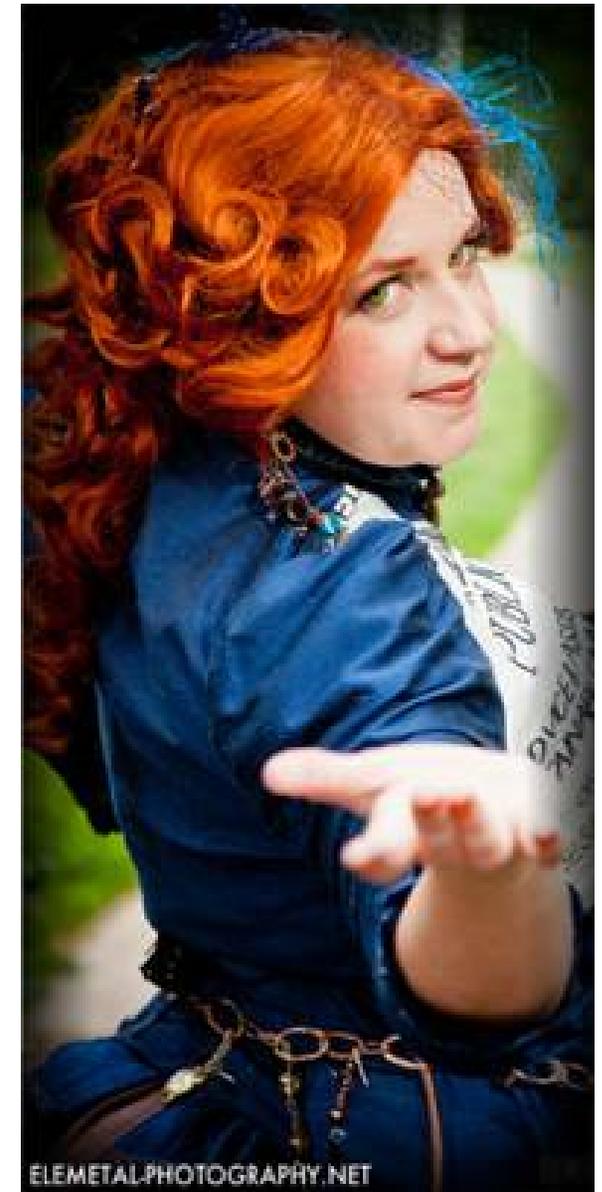


Photo by Amanda Irwin / Elemental Photography.

The Concept

As The Doctor seems to have an eternal dandyish Victorian/Edwardian look to him – sometimes more pared down like #12, sometimes more flamboyant like #6, sometimes more sober like #1 and #9. I wanted a steampunky, Victorian-esque gown version of the TARDIS to match. And of course, the TARDIS *has* to be a ginger.

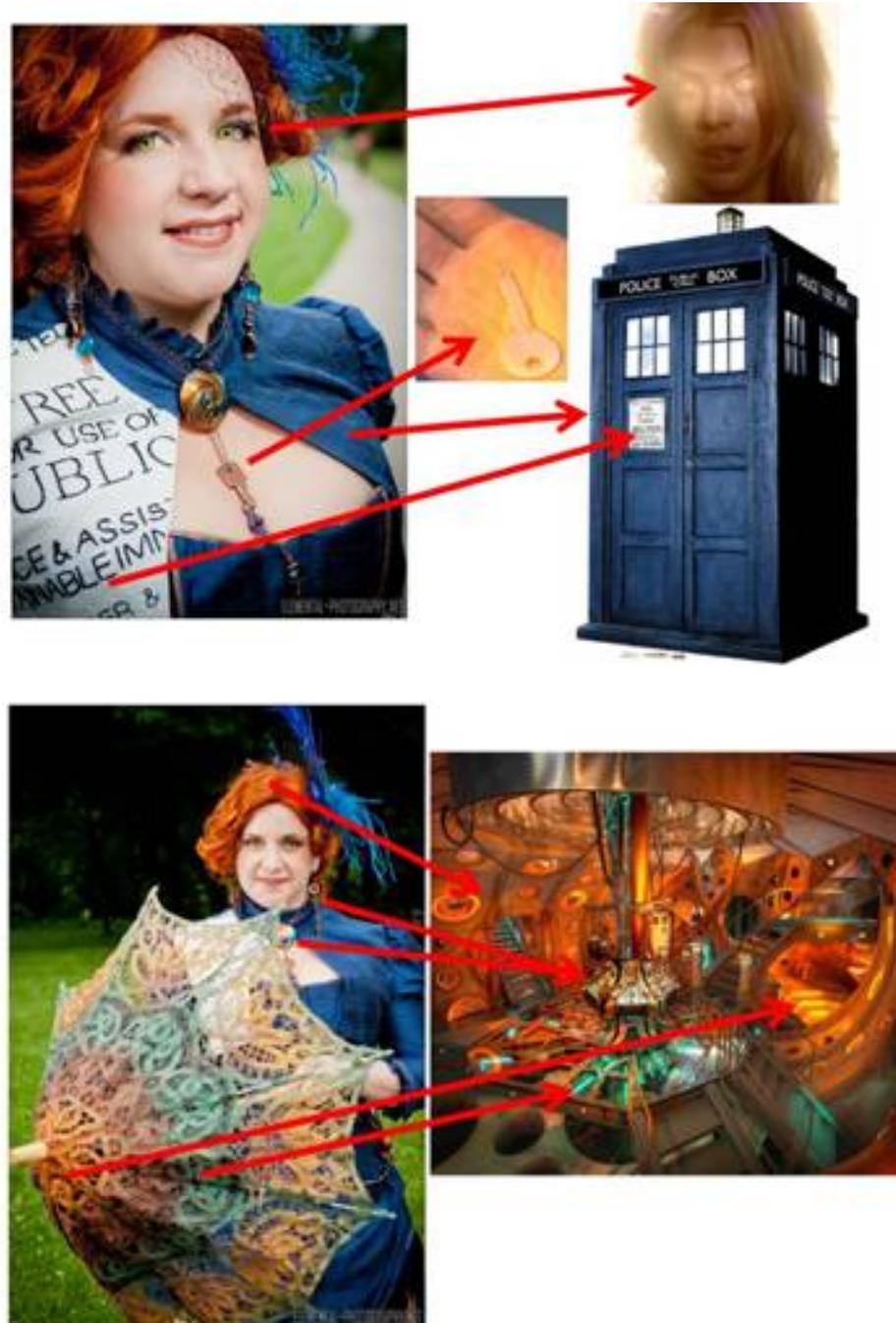


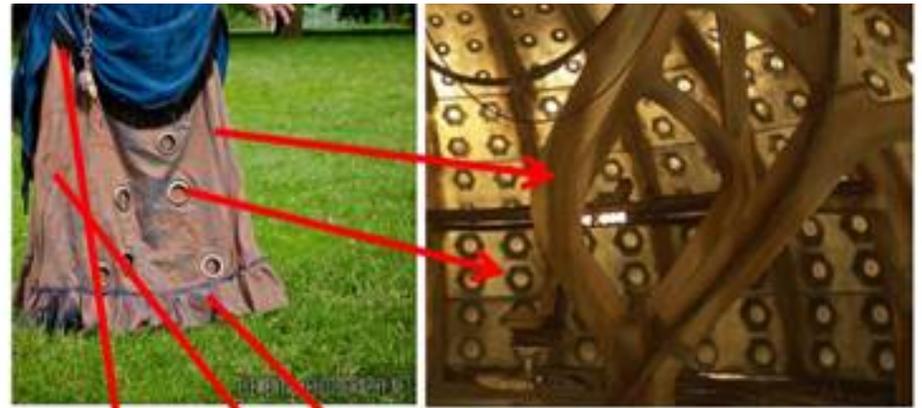
Photos by Vlade Shestakov on an antique glass-plate camera.



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The Inspiration

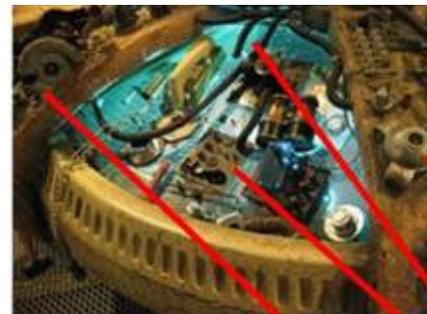




Photos of author by Amanda Irwin / Elemental Photography
 Photos of TARDIS and Rose Tyler © The BBC.



The Doctor: I always read the instructions.
Idris: There's a sign on my front door. You have been walking past it for seven hundred years. What does it say?
The Doctor: That's not instructions!
Idris: There's an instruction at the bottom. What does it say?
The Doctor: "Pull to open."
Idris: Yes, and what do you do?
The Doctor: I push!
Idris: Every single time. Seven hundred years. Police box doors open out the way.
 --Neil Gaiman, *The Doctor's Wife*



The Materials

- Wig - "Ginger Rockabilly" from Viv Costumes
- Contacts - I bought them in Harajuku at Baby The Stars Shine Bright.
- Parasol - cotton, Hand Dyed to match the costume by Bedford Falls Headware
- Makeup - J.M. Frey
- Base Gown - wood-grain look dupioni silk for the blue and white segments, a shimmering dupioni silk for the copper-teal.
- Embroidery - standard floss
- Trim - polyester-elastic blend from local trimmings shop.
- Corset - sprung-steel boning
- Chatelaine - copper chain and a bunch of bits and bobs from a surplus store, along with some of my old broken watches, clocks, and jewelry
- Jewelry and Fascinator - key bracelet made by Red Moon Glassworks; the rest made by me from materials from the local bead shop.
- Lights - motion-activated lights meant for bike spokes, from Canadian Tire
- Leg Protection - industrial grade plastic sheeting behind front panel of skirt to protect my legs from the lights.
- Shoes - gold slippers from Ardenes
- Bustle - Pillow bustle made from leftover skirting materials and cotton

stuffing

- Petticoats - draw-string ruffled petticoat made from heavy cotton, tea-dyed.
- Roudels in copper/teal skirt - plastic curtaining grommets

The Timeline

- From concept to commission - about two years
- From commission to first fitting - about six months
- First fitting to second fitting - a few weeks
- Debut - December 31st 2011

The Cost

All told, with the skirt-lighting upgrades, letting out the corset, and buying a new wig as the old one is getting ratty, this costume has cost me around \$4,000, which includes materials, labor, and the photoshoot with Elemental Photography.

The Team

- Wig styling - J.M. Frey
- Makeup - J.M. Frey
- Fascinator - J.M. Frey and Kenneth Shelley
- Jewelry - J.M. Frey and Stephanie Lalonde of Red Moon Glassworks
- Parasol - Bedford Falls Headware
- Dress
 - Pattern Drafting – Ashley Regimbal-

Kung

- Underskirts and bustle - Kenneth Shelley
- Sewing and Tailoring - Kenneth Shelley
- Roundels - Kenneth Shelley
- Embroidery - Ashley Regimbal-Kung
- Finishings (trim, etc.) - J.M. Frey
- Corset - Kenneth Shelley and Ashley Regimbal-Kung
- Electronics - J.M. Frey

You can find more photographs of the TARDIS Gown on my [website](#)

Jessica Marie (JM) Frey is a Canadian science fiction and fantasy author, actor, and professional geek. Her work encompasses poetry, academic and magazine articles, screenplays, and short stories. Frey's academic and creative writing focuses primarily on Japanese mythology, the Classics, and traditional Japanese theatre. She earned a Bachelor of Arts, Dramatic Literature (honors) in 2005 and attended Ryerson and York Universities for a Masters of Arts. You can find all her publications by visiting her [website](#).

