

Interviewer: Le'Evelyn Hammett

Interviewee: Fred Holt

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Project: Alchemy Archives Oral History Project: Blerd culture - African Americans in Nerd Culture

LH

0:00:00

Hello, my name is Le'Evelyn Hammett and today is Thursday, December 5th, 2024. This is the Blerd Oral History Project and today I'm speaking with Mr. Fred Holt. We're conducting this interview on Zoom. Thank you so much for joining me, Fred, and sharing about your experiences, your culture, and your life.

FH

Thank you for having me.

LH

Do I have your permission to record and archive this interview?

FH

Yes you do.

LH

Fantastic. So tell me what, around and about how old you are and where did you grow up?

FH

Well I'm 67 years old. I was born and raised in Albany, New York.

LH

0:00:52

Yes. Thank you. Okay. And tell me a little bit about the schools that you went to. Did you go to public, private, religious?

FH

0:01:04

I graduated from Albany High School in 1975. In December of 1976, I for the Air Force doing the same job I had been doing. And I did that for 12 years. So basically you could say I served 36 years.

LH

Wow. Thank you. So, fantastic. I'm gonna come back to your military experience and your career in a bit. But before we get there, I want to hear a little bit more about your school years. So what were some of your favorite subjects?

FH

0:02:47

While I was in high school and junior high school, was English, art, science, and home economics. economics, I still practice today. So, but if my, my favorite subject in school was art. I was a kid, and my older brother gave me my first comic book back in 1966, that was when I started drawing comic books. And so, any form of art instruction that I got after I loved it.

LH

0:03:53

Thank you. So, did you have any educators or mentors during those school years that supported or really fostered your love of these things?

FH

When I was in seventh grade my English teacher, Ms. Delaney, I still remember her last name, I guess during one of our classes, I mentioned that I made my own comic books. And her, I still remember her eyes perking up and her asking me, can I read one of your comic books? And I said, sure.

FH

0:05:09

And after that, she read every comic book that I made, that my friend and I made. She had a, like, she was into it. And she loved it. And she, I remember her just being fascinated that someone my age had an imagination enough to capture it in a comic book form or comic book medium. And that was very, and mind you, I wasn't aware of the whole racial thing. Back then, I was just a kid, inner city kid growing up and going to school and who loved to draw. And when she showed her interest in that, that was special to me.

LH

0:06:29

Yeah, absolutely. Thank you. So, tell me a little bit about, so you mentioned race. Tell me a little bit about the demographics of your school in terms of race, your K through 12 schools, race and gender, what did that look like for you?

FH

Best I can recall, it was 65 to 70 percent inner-city Black kids, maybe 20 percent Caucasian, and the rest is just mixed with Hispanic and people with European heritage.

LH

Okay. Thank you.

FH

But it was mostly people like us.

LH

0:07:45

Okay. Thank you. So what did your friend groups look like in terms of demographics and did they share your love of comics?

FH

0:08:07

Okay so my grade school years although I was considered a nerd before the word nerd was cool. It was very much a derogatory term. And you are either a popular person or you were a non-entity. I was a non-entity. I was bullied growing up. I was harassed. I was ostracized for not knowing my place amongst my peers because, I mean, until I learned, don't talk to those people or don't try to be nice to those people, you know, if I approached them because, again, I didn't understand the pecking order or that I you know, encounters. Yeah. But those who I share my love of comic books and superheroes with, they were, they, you know, that was my family outside of my family.

LH

0:10:29

Yes. Do you remember the names of any of those people that you did share your comic book love with?

FH

0:10:40

Oh, my, and you'll hear this name over and over again because when I look back on my life, as far as cosplay, me cosplaying today, and where I can honestly say it all started. James Childress, a.k.a. Pinky, my friend Pinky, he was the first person create his own costume and wear it and got me into that whole thing way back in 1968. And as far as was even coined or, you know, it was a thing then. I met Pinky through his cousin who was a friend of mine. And Pinky lived on Alexander Street in Albany, New York. And his place became where that was the hub of my existence, or until Pinky That was the hub of art where we would meet to draw, to make

costumes, to put on the costumes and become the Avengers way back then in 1968. American, but he would dress up as Captain America. I would dress up as the character known as Goliath. And again, because I was the tallest so I was Goliath.

LH

0:14:11

That's so cool thank you so much Fred for sharing that. I have a few follow-ups so and you mentioned you said your brother gave you your first comic book in 1966?

FH

Yes. Yes.

LH

I want to ask a little bit about your family. Like, so was your brother also into comics? And did your family, were they into nerdy things? And that could be like anything, you know, like I've come across some people saying, My dad really enjoyed model automobiles, or my mom was really into, incredibly into finding very specific Christmas decor, or an artist themselves, or a photographer, all kinds of things.

LH

0:15:06

So I don't want to, you know, we can, being a nerd can be a lot of different things, right, as we know. So were your family, your older brother also into that as well? Into anything in particular?

FH

My older brother, he read comics, and once he read them, he got rid of them. I, on the other hand, Once I got a comic book, that was an addition to my collection. I did not let my books go. I didn't let my comic books go. I didn't let my magazines go. If I paid for it or it was given to me, that was another thing that I started, when did I, let me get my dates right.

LH

0:16:09

That's okay. Scrapbooking.

FH

0:16:11

I am a huge scrapbooker, if that's, if there is such a thing.

LH

0:16:19

Yes.

FH

0:16:20

...book back in, I want to say it was either 73 or 74, and the influence for that was the martial arts movie explosion that hit the States in 1973. And my love for, and Jim Kelly, the late great martial artist. I don't know if But if you remember the opening scenes when he steps off of that plane, when he stepped off that plane, my jaw hit the floor. I was 16 at the time. My jaw hit the floor and he immediately became like my inspiration, my reason for who I was and why I was put on this earth was because I needed to emulate that man. Growing up, folks in the hood, they admired Muhammad Ali, Joe Frazier, and Walt Frazier from the New York Knicks, and Willis Reed, and Lew Alcindor, went on to change his name to Kareem Abdul-Jabbar. I did not have an idol until I saw Jim Kelly in Enter the Dragon and my life changed forever after that. Wow. your question, like I said, my older brother, he read comics, but he didn't collect them. But by him giving me my first comic book, that started me into collecting. That led to me drawing comic books. Drawing comic books led me to then dress up like the characters in the comic books. Now back in 1968, as far as I know for a fact that's when I first did it. And I enjoyed it because it was simply us inner city kids, minding our own business, living out our fantasies through the heroes that we worshiped in the comic books.

LH

0:20:10

Wow. Thank you so much. All right. So I'm going to follow up on a few things. So tell me about the composition of your family. Who did you live with?

FH

0:20:29

Well, my mother and father and two sisters and what is five brothers. Five brothers, okay. Yeah, so my brother Louis was the oldest, he's the one who gave me the comics. Then there was me, then Russell, Michael, Janine, my sister, my late sister, my brother Al, my brother Lee, and then my baby sister, she's the baby, Stacy. And, you know, back then I was also into sports. When I say basketball, I was into basketball. I used to play football. And then I saw one of the kids from the projects that I lived in get his collarbone broke. And I said, okay, that's it for me. I'm not playing football anymore. But yeah, basketball, by what was the eighth grade was when my, I must have grown a couple of inches or something. Something happened because I tried out for the basketball team in the seventh grade didn't make it Eighth grade I made the team so And then from there what eighth ninth and tenth grade I played high school basketball for those three years then the schools in Albany, the high schools merged. And once that happened, you had you had

phenomenal players from both sides of town, all going to one school. So the 10th was the furthest I got as far as playing high school sports or I should say high school basketball.

LH

0:23:24

Okay. Did you do any other extracurricular activities outside of basketball? Martial arts. Martial arts. Jim Kelly, right?

FH

Yes, yes, yes.

LH

So your parents supported you purchasing comic books and doing martial arts? Or was this something that you had to earn money on your own to do?

FH

0:23:50

I went to work summer jobs, and they even started a program. It was an after school program. Oh my gosh, this, you're invoking some fond memories, but an after school program where a school kids could work for two hours basically cleaning the streets and the playgrounds of the south end of Albany and at the end of the week you would get and with that \$19 I Would Friday night would come and I would go me and my friends We would go to the movies and The back then that they only cost \$1 to get in To see two to three movies. So we would be there, we would get there like around 6, 630 in the evening and we wouldn't leave until about 10:30 - 11 o'clock that night.

FH

0:25:30

But it was to see you know your martial art movies and your what they call Black exploitation movies. You know with Fred Williamson, Jim Brown, Pam Greer, you know.

LH

0:25:51

Great. And so you used that \$19 a week, your money that you made to indulge in your hobbies, right? So movies, sounds like you really enjoy martial arts, and Black exploitation films, and to purchase your comics, and to pay for your martial arts lessons as well?

FH

0:26:24

Yes. Now, the one time that I paid for lessons, that was financed by my summer job that I 1975

and 1976. But in 75 I would catch a bus from Albany to Schenectady, New York in order to study Shotokan karate with my sensei Joseph Gordon. And get off the bus, I still had to walk about a mile to the dojo because there was no connecting bus route that took you there. Class would start, oh, I'd say something like 6.30 in the evening and would go on to about 8.30. I'd make my way back to the bus stop, get on the bus, take that 20-mile ride back to Albany I would sleep on the bus I'm so exhausted from the training it was yeah that was that was something.

LH

Wow and your parents were okay with you being out kind of late to go here?

FH

Yeah yeah because my father he worked the night shift at General Electric in Schenectady. Okay. And my mother, because she would start the day so early, you know, by the time I got home she was in bed. So we were kind of left to our own devices, you know. I mean, now we knew better than to be roaming the streets, okay? Because my grandmother would say, ain't nothing out there at night but the horny-headed devil. So you need to be where you're supposed to be. That whole thing about when those lights come on, those street lights come on, you need to have your butt at home. But of course, if you're at karate practice or you're out playing basketball or you're doing something constructive, that was okay, that was acceptable.

LH

0:29:38

Wow. Thank you. Thank you so much for sharing that. Now, did your family allow you to dress up for holidays like Halloween or any other kind of holidays?

FH

0:29:53

Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Definitely. My mother was... supported kids being kids and we celebrated Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas, all of that and we by no means were...

FH

0:30:22

didn't have a lot of, and it took me to grow up to realize that you come from a poor family, you know, but every Christmas, every Easter, it was fun being a kid growing up where I Where I grew up and who I grew up with, I did not feel like I wanted for anything. Especially at Christmas.

LH

0:31:01

Oh, my gosh. Thank you so much. Now, I want to go back to something you mentioned, you

know your love of comics. Can you tell me what some of your favorite comics were? during your childhood?

FH

0:31:20

Okay, I'll give you titles in some cases but For the most part I part, the person that drew the comic, that's what made it important for me. So the title could be The Avengers. It could be X-Men. It could be The Flash. If the artist, if the artwork appealed to me, I liked it. So, like I said, the Avengers, because of course, that's what our superhero group was. There was a comic book called Strange Tales. It was by Marvel. There was a comic book called Strange Tales. It was by Marvel, Marvel Comics. And in it, they had, they offered you two storylines. One was Nick Fury, Agent of S.H.I.E.L.D. And I'm not talking the Samuel L. Jackson version. I'm talking the white Caucasian Nick Fury and the other story was Dr. Strange and what was Jim Steranko and his artwork was...he took the comic book medium to a whole nother level with his artwork because he visual art techniques, you know, back in the day. He would blend his artwork with those, you know, whatever it was in the background. And it made for just, I guess, hippies reading a comic that were getting high, they probably had a more exhilarating experience. Me just looking at it, I was like, wow, look at this. This is incredible. And so, I mean, since then, I've learned to love a lot of other artists' work.

FH

0:35:03

But Jim Starenko's work back then, like I said, no matter what book it was, if he drew it, I bought it.

LH

0:35:16

Thank you so much. Now, shifting on to, you know, after you become an adult, 18, you said you go on to the Air Force. Yes. And that you served for 24 years. So during this time, were you able to still enjoy your love of comics or your love of exploitation films or martial art films or or even draw? Were you able to engage engage in some of those nerdy things that you liked.

FH

0:36:05

Yes but what happened was when I joined the Air Force collecting comic books for a minute and I started getting into fitness and by fitness I mean bodybuilding. building. I joined the Air Force in December of 1976 and that was kind of a rough period because I was away from home for the first time. I was experiencing homesick, well, being homesick, and I'll put it this way. path that in hindsight I shouldn't have. But it wasn't any, it wasn't so detrimental that it put the skids on my maturation into an adult. But it was a rough spot.

FH

0:37:56

And now I was fully invested in bodybuilding. So instead of collecting comic books, I was collecting bodybuilding magazines. Still drawing, still doing everything but collecting comics.

LH

0:39:01

Thank you. Now, you mentioned something there. Do you believe that you were able to use any of the methods or tactics that you learned in martial arts from your youth to support your development in bodybuilding? Are they connected in any kind of way?

FH

0:39:28

The trajectory that I would say my physical development took. It went from basketball to martial arts. And the thing is, and this is crazy, because remember when I was growing up, I was considered a nerd, undesirable. If I spoke to the wrong person, it was like, you're not supposed to speak to me. You're not cool. Well, when I started, seeing Jim Kelly and practicing martial arts and doing calisthenics and whatnot, after a couple of summers, now, if you can imagine this, and I didn't have any scruples about summertime, I would, my idea of dress was I would wear khaki pants with tennis shoes, no shirt, because my body had, from, you know And I would walk down the street with no shirt on I had this I had a 50-pound afro people would I would get whistles.

FH

0:41:27

Some people would call me Jim Kelly and the I'll share this story with you. The girl I was dating at the time, one afternoon she came over to the house and she was upset and I'm like, what's wrong was was and she said You know Loretta, oh, excuse me, I'm I won't say anything, you know, so-and-so said If she had a chance she would throw you on the ground and ride you And I'm like, what? And the person she mentioned was one of those people who, if I dare look at her back in the day, what you looking at, nerd? Four eyes? Because I wore glasses and I had the, you know, when your glasses break and you got to put the tape up in there to hold them together. And the person didn't say it to me, she said it to my girlfriend. I guess she didn't know that it was my girlfriend. And my girlfriend was very upset about it. But for me, that was like affirmation that things have changed. Now, by this time, what? I was either a senior in high school or I had graduated by that time. There was no do-over, but that it did a lot for my self-esteem.

FH

0:43:45

So again the trajectory from basketball to martial arts to bodybuilding to cosplay, but to me that they're all part of the big picture.

LH

Thank you so much for sharing those stories. So you said the first time that you dressed up was 1968.

LH

0:44:05

So cool. So, and you also said, my apologies. So I have two, I'm thinking of two questions. So first, first time you dressed up was 1968. What was the first time that you heard of a convention of gatherings of people that were interested in nerd culture? What was the first time you even heard rumblings about that?

FH

In 2003, my family and I, my wife, my, what, Jordan was maybe, he may have been Six or seven years old and I we lived in Las Vegas, Nevada. And my wife says...

FH

0:45:29

Honey, I want the family to dress up for Halloween. And I was like, oh my Lord. Okay, what do you want us to do? And what she had in mind was like she would, like the Munsters, I would be Herman Monster, she would be what, Lily or whatever her name was, and Jordan would be what, the little werewolf kid or something. And I was like, oh my Lord, I wanted no part of that. I just don't. But I'm like, okay, what can we dress up I still want to have my dignity intact. And at the time 2002 - 2003 was when the Matrix with loaded Had been released. It was released back in, I think, April or May of 2003. And then the sequel, or the movie was released after, I think, Halloween. But we were waiting for that third installment of The Matrix. And I was like, hey, I'm going to dress up like Morpheus. Because I kind of look like him. So, yeah, yeah, honey, I prefer to dress up like Morpheus, not like Herman Monster. And my wife was like, you know, but then what sealed the deal was we were at the Galleria Mall in Las Vegas. I walked into Hot Topic. And what did they have hanging on the wall of Hot Topic for all the world to see was a Black trench coat. And when I looked at it, it was like the angels started singing. And I was like, I'm gonna get that. I'm getting that coat. And my wife was like, you better not get that coat. That was like telling me, go ahead, get the coat, please. So I got the coat. And at the time, my hair had receded to the point that it made, it was like, why? Why are you holding on to these sprigs of hair on your head? Shave your head bald, which I did. I shaved my head bald. Put on some shades. Put on the And they were having a, well, let me step back. So my wife finally agreed.

FH

0:50:11

She said, you look really good. You look like Morpheus. So the Galleria Mall, they were having what their safe Halloween thing where you go trick-or-treating in the mall. So what my wife did was she made a trench coat for my son. He and I went to the mall for their Safe and Sound Halloween and the reaction from the people in the mall, I wasn't prepared for it. They were losing their minds. And I was like, and I'm trying to be in character like Lawrence Fishburne, but when people are openly gasping at your appearance in a good way, you can't help but, you know, say thank you. And yes, we could take a picture together. And when we got home, I was on fire. I couldn't even sleep that night. I couldn't sleep. And to top it off, the next, the very next week, they were having a comic book convention at the Mandalay Bay Resort on the Las Vegas Strip. So I said, okay, honey, me and Jordan, Jordan, that's my youngest son, we're going to the comic book convention. Now, this was my first time ever going to a comic book convention. But I knew I had to be dressed up as Morpheus and my son as Neo. And again, I was not prepared for the reaction that I got. At one point, and this is outside of the Mandalay Bay, my son, a friend of mine that was at the con who we decided to hang out together for that day, we're like, okay, let's go get, let's go get us something to eat. So I'm walking on the Las Vegas strip as Morpheus. People were honking their horns, yelling out their car, Morpheus, I love you. I can't describe the, it just, it was like my head exploded. Because I expected that in the cons somewhat, because of what had happened at the mall. Bye...I can Yeah, it it just I was on fire and again, I got home and I couldn't sleep cuz I was like Wow because I had I had said to myself, okay, I guess this is going to be the totality of my life.

FH

0:55:23

Me being a dad, a husband, and me making a living for my family, and seeing them happy will make me happy. And, okay. But, those two experiences, the mall experience and then the Comic Con experience, that just, oh my gosh. And that happened 21 years ago. And now, you know, it's now I'm here talking to you about my Blerd slash cosplay experience.

LH

0:56:14

Wow, that is amazing. That's such a wonderful, just kind of turning point. Like what a good feeling right um so you've told me like that you enjoy so you're not in a horror you said but you do like comics cosplay martial arts both film and practice and Black exploitation films as you have developed your or as you have lived more years what has been or have you come to enjoy any other new things or have you become a part of any other new fandoms.

FH

Not really, not really. I sent you my, I call it my cosplay resume. Yeah. And I can tell you this, when I first started cosplaying back in 2003, Okay, all I have to do is dress up as Morpheus and go out and have a good time. Well, in 2006, Spike TV debuted their Blade the Series with Kirk Stickfingers Jones. And the thing is, is back in 1998, when Wesley Snipes first portrayed Blade on the big screen, I was all in, even though, again, I don't like the horror genre, but because this was a superhero fighting evil, if you will, I loved it. I wanted to be Blade, but I was like, I don't look anything like him. I don't have a clue as to where to get a costume like that. So it was always a fantasy. But then when Spike TV came out with Blade the series and I the first time I saw a picture of Kirk Jones as Blade, again, my jaw hit the floor because he looked just like me. And I was like, okay, I have to do this character. And it took a few years for me, for my cosplay to mature to the point that people was just going gaga over it, but yes. So I went from Morpheus to blade Based on the spike TV series Then the next thing that happened was Iron Man 2 came out.

FH

1:00:02

No, excuse me, Iron Man. The first Iron Man came out. That was, I wanna say 2008. And one of the bonus scenes featured Samuel L. Jackson as Nick Fury. And I it was like, okay, okay and Nick Fury had a trench coat and all this stuff in 2010 a friend of mine Who is up in Philadelphia said hey, we're making a fan film About the Avengers and I want you to play Nick Fury. I Had never I had never cosplayed Nick Fury until that moment. And so it went from Morpheus to Blade to Nick Fury. Even though I did it just for that film. What? When the Avengers came out in 2012, I'm known for that character, for, you know, cosplaying that character.

LH

1:01:44

Thank you. I have a follow-up question about that one. I'm gonna hold it. So, tell me, tell me about your process for creating characters, and you touched on it just then, but I just want to hear, how do you decide which characters to bring to life?

FH

1:02:08

That's easy. And I have to preface what I'm going to say with this. You have before COVID and after COVID because my, my cosplaying has changed because the world has changed. And I'll explain. But originally, I would cosplay characters that I bared some resemblance to. Morpheus, Kurt Jones as Blade, Samuel L. Jackson as Nick Fury. All of them are bald, all of them are Black, and all of them are men of action. Okay, I even added a couple of Dwayne Johnson,

FH

1:03:18

The Rock, couple of his characters, Roblox and Lou Cobbs. And I used, there was a time where when these movies were premiering at the movie theaters, I would go there in character and just add to the movie goers experience because the hero is right there in the flesh for you to touch, take pictures with, whatever. whatever But and people Loved it because they felt that they were seeing the character. Yeah in the flesh so that was my thing was I will only cosplay characters that I bear resemblance with and And I would say from 2003 up to 2019, Nick Fury was the one character, Nick Fury and Blade. Those were the two characters that I mostly cosplayed as. Part of my transition from, well it wasn't a transition, I was getting you know Fan adulation and all that but I was alone Nick Fury he had agents of shield Black Widow.

FH

1:05:27

All the I loved Cosplaying with other people. Yeah in a team like format in a team-like format. So I chose, I would choose to cosplay as Nick Fury because I knew that even if I didn't arrange a meetup at the convention, I knew I would run into someone that was dressed as Black Widow or dressed as a generic agent of S.H.I.E.L.D. And to this day, people still refer to me as the boss, because I was Nick Fury. Nick Fury was over S.H.I.E.L.D. and they were like Black Widow or or whoever. So when I correspond with them on Facebook, they're like, how you doing, boss? Good to see you again. You know, and I'm this, this is all carry over from our....so, like I said, from 2003 up to 2019, I was doing characters that looked like me. COVID hit. In 2021, I was hospitalized and underwent a heart and kidney transplant. Oh, wow. Okay. During the height of COVID. When I went into the hospital, I weighed about 160 because one of the things that happened I lost my sense of taste for a whole year and I had to you know regain my strength I had to learn how to balance myself when I walk because I was so weak experience, it was hard to, you know, walk and not be wobbly. I had tremors all the time, the first year. And my wife said, you ain't going to no more Comic Cons. And I said try and stop me She said okay, if you go you have to wear a mask and I'm like, okay, I Agree with you there But in my mind How do you be in character Because Because none of those characters that I was portraying wore, you know, face masks. So I had to change my paradigm. And prior to 2019, I had, I would tell people you'll never catch me wearing a helmet or a Mask or body paint No, that's that's not my brand of cosplay Well After being hospitalized and now that COVID is running rampant in the world, I said, okay...

FH

1:10:02

I do need to protect myself, but I'm still going to comic book conventions, I'm still going to cosplay, but I need to change. Okay. I'll become a ninja because they were masked. And I would dress up as a ninja in my basement when I was regaining my strength and my balance and all of that, learning how to eat food that had no taste or the food had taste but I couldn't taste it. So I would cosplay in my basement as a ninja. Now when I say I would cosplay, I would take the

photos and draw pictures and stuff like that but that was the extent of my cosplay until what my first convention after I was released from the hospital. I was hospitalized from February to May, the end of May of 2021. My first con after being released from the hospital was in November of 2021. And I was so thin that none of my gear fit me anymore. So I would have to wear thick clothing, you know, like sweats and then put the costume on over the sweats, just to fill them out. But then I would wear underneath that, an actual protective mask first comeback and eventually and it was the next year that it happened because a friend who knows how he has a 3d printer and he could make those helmets those those cosplay helmets, no matter what it is, because he himself had built himself an entire Iron Man costume. I mean, it looks real. He wins contest after contest with it. made me a snake eyes helmet. And that was one of the pictures that I sent you. And now Because underneath that helmet, I have a protective mask, underneath a ninja mask, and then the helmet. And I have yet, I've never experienced that. But when I have that on, I feel totally protected. And I feel that I can interact with, you know, the con goes without being, oh, you gotta be six feet away from me and you know, all that. But I am immunosuppressed because I take anti-rejection medication. So, but I have not allowed that to curtail my love for cosplay and going to conventions.

FH

1:15:01

I refuse to let it define me.

LH

Thank you so much for sharing that. I had a question about COVID so I'm glad that you, well thank you for sharing. I wanted to ask how did you learn any skills required for cosplay? Did you pick up any sewing, crafting, building skills in any way?

FH

1:15:40

No, I have no skills. I... I seek out people that know how to sew and know how to build armor. The one thing I've been credited for is I will go into a secondhand sports store and I will look at the protective gear they have and because my thing and when I say my no matter what character I'm dressed as, I like it to look like he is tactically ready for action. So my motif, if you will, is a tactical action hero slash ninja, however way you wanna phrase that but that is the foundation of all of my cosplays basically. Well that is definitely a skill being able to go into those different stores and like to be able to pick out those materials and I would suspect that your experience in the Air Force and understanding not just not armor in terms of like your fandoms but like thinking about what would you wear if you're at act out like said like so all of these things are meshing together really well for you and your characters like it all fits together like a perfect puzzle piece yes, because Nick Fury for example he He was a colonel in the army who? Threw his military career went on to become the director of Shield. So, the whole fact that he was a

military man, well, that was easy because I did, you know, 20 some years, 24, 25, at that point, well, no, no, no, I take that back. By that time, it was about 30 years of military, you know, being in the military. military so I could comport myself with not only was I dressed that way but when I spoke to somebody or if we were role playing, which I rarely did, it's just, you know, it would come natural and people would say, you could tell you were in the military and this is through cosplay. The way you carry yourself and everything. But, yeah, so what I experienced in the military transferred to certain cosplays like Nick Fury, Luke Hobbs, the GI Joe character Roblox. So yeah.

LH

1:19:24

Thank you. So you were talking about, speaking of Nick Fury, Iron Man, the Blade series. Tell me a little bit about how you feel about the representation of diverse characters in your favorite fandoms. Do you think it's, how do you feel about it? I'll just start there.

FH

1:19:53

The representation of diverse characters in some of your favorite fandoms. You know, it's hard for me to, you know, put my finger on anything specific because, again, I was a happy, clappy person as a child. I'm still that same way. It doesn't matter who is portraying a character, whether they're Black, white, Asian, brown, I don't see that. I don't deal in that. So, it's almost, I guess you could say it's not for me, for me personally. Same thing with body types. There's this whole thing about body shaming and why are you dressed in those clothes when you don't, that's not me. I'm aware that it happens in cosplay. Now, what I am fits the, they look like the character, I'm quick to say great, super, you know, I'm guilty of that. But I don't, and I never have, and I don't, I don't, um, associate with people that do it. Elitism and cosplay, body shaming, homophobia, transphobia, any of that crap, I don't... because the cosplay community that I deal We all that. I have male friends that dress up as female characters all the time. Some are... and the whole pronoun thing, what I do, I approach them, I say, okay, what are your preferred pronouns? Because I don't want to make a mistake. I try to meet them where they're at because I want us to have a good time. And I don't want to be that guy that is not respectful of who they are. But now what I don't like, what I don't like is when in some of the, I books where a character starts out either as a white character, now they're a Black character, or they're something different than what they were originally introduced introduced us, I say if you're Black and you're portraying Superman, more power to you. train blade right on because it's all make-believe to begin with. There ain't nothing... people getting upset over, what are you doing cosplaying him?

FH

1:25:49

He's not Black, you know? Or why are you dressed like Wonder Woman? She's not as big as you.

I don't get that. I don't understand that. Again, this is all make believe. This is all escape-ism. So all that gatekeeping and elitism and body shaming and all that stuff, I have no time for it. Absolutely. Now would you like to see more, do you feel as though stories or like even television series, television series with characters that you enjoy or stories that you enjoy, the same type of tactile action, ninja, hero.

LH

Would you like to see more characters that are diverse and more different? Do you think that these studios should do a better job of that? Or do you think we're heading in the right direction and we should keep it slow and steady. What are you thinking about that?

FH

1:27:16

Okay, before I answer that, can I take a bathroom break?

LH

1:27:21

Sure, absolutely.

FH

1:27:29

Yeah, if you don't mind, if you could restate your question.

LH

1:27:34

Sure, yes. Do you believe that the studios are doing a good job of making sure that there's diversity in the characters and the type of stories that you like? Like, for example, tactile action ninja or hero heroes. Do you think that there needs to be more diversity or do you think we're kind of steadily heading in the right direction?

FH

1:28:02

Well, as far as what I like, like you said, tactical action, hero, ninja type stuff, I don't see any of that on, if you will, on mainstream TV. That's fine.

FH

1:28:18

But, But when I'm a captive audience of my wife for her Thursday night Shondra Rimes series I see a diverse set of characters coming from all, you know, walks of life and belief systems and whatnot, and I think that's good. Do they need to change up anything? There's a certain segment

of our society who have attributed the word woke to everything that they don't like that deals with diversity. And they're always grumbling. and now with this recent election I guess we're going to even hear more so but putting them aside I think if Hollywood continues on the path they're We'll be fine. But if I see us going back to 70s and 60s type, you know, programming or where the, how should I say this white the majority of the characters are white straight basically one or two-dimensional no no I that would upset me thank you so much.

LH

1:30:52

Now tell me, I know you go to conventions. What conventions or events are staples in your annual lineup? I cannot miss these.

FH

1:31:07

Baltimore Comic Con. I try not to miss BlerdrCon, to which I have to ask, have you ever been to BlerdCon?

LH

1:31:28

Absolutely.

FH

1:31:29

Okay. Every year. Almost every year. Since COVID, I've only gone on Saturdays. This year I didn't go at all because we were planning, we were going on a family cruise and my wife said, if you get sick before this, I'll kill you. So I didn't go to Blerd Con at all this year. Definitely going next year. It's going to be held in March. What are they calling it, Thrilla?

LH

1:32:13

Yes.

FH

1:32:15

It's a horror theme. And the thing is, I don't know if you got a chance to look at that YouTube clip I sent you that featured me and I call him my twin, Raymond Ramos. But I'm hoping to host a panel at next year's BlerdCon, but we'll see.

LH

1:32:39

Okay.

FH

1:32:41

What is your- I'm so sorry. Yeah. So Baltimore Comic Con and Outside of Baltimore Comic Con That's my only Can't miss won't miss and Now another one that is coming up soon what actually next week is the Ocean City Comic Con. And that Comic Con, I've been going to it ever since 2019. In 2020, they did not have one because of COVID. And they resumed it in 2021. And so basically I haven't missed one, you know, one of those since I started going in 2019. I think 2019 was the first time that they had it. So I haven't missed So that's kind of a must do. Plus, I'm a part of a G.I. Joe, what is it? A G.I. Joe charity group, and we get in free to that one. Well, we get in free to anyone that one that they petitioned to have a booth at. So yeah, you know, so other than that, now it's easier probably for me to tell you the events I won't go or don't go to. Comic Con. The last one, last time I went to that was in 2012. San Diego Comic Con is too far, and it's too big, and I just have no desire to have that, like, first of all, go have a hotel, transportation, get into the con, do the con, and come back home. Now, a lot of people in the cosplay community, they swear by that one and Dragon Con in Atlanta.

FH

1:35:13

I am not going to Dragon Con. Too big. And my wife said try it die. I dare you try it They I'm good we're going to small local cons around the area I'll travel as far as rich. I live in Frederick, Maryland I'll travel as far as Richmond, Virginia or up to Philadelphia, PA. Beyond that, no, no.

LH

1:36:10

Thank you. So you mentioned a panel. So what is this panel that you are hoping to do and tell me about panels that you've done in past at cons.

FH

1:36:29

Well, the panel that I'm looking to do at Blerd con next year is The Blade brotherhood now you probably asked what is the Blade Brotherhood? We are a Facebook group that is a place for anybody that cosplays as the character Blade or any of the supporting characters within the Blade universe to be a part of our group, to inform people of different cons, meetups, photo shoots, exchange ideas for costumes and what have you. That's what we're about. But there's a story behind the Blade Brotherhood as far as its early beginnings to when the term the Blade Brotherhood was coined, you would have random meetups of brothers dressed as Blade who

ended up at the same con at the same time. I was one of them for a while and by me posting my exploits on Facebook and eventually me meeting Raymond Ramos for the first time at New York Comic Con that experience Ray took that and said hey I'm gonna make a Facebook page or a group called the Blade Brotherhood and that happened in 2012. Now along with explaining the history and who we are and all that we hope to also have one of our Blade Brothers his name is the Vaughn Thomas Devon Thomas, and he does actual weapons demonstrations at conventions and other settings. So, you the PAC 45 to 50 minutes of knowledge and entertainment. That is, again, if BlerdrCon accepts our – or accepts my concept for it, for a panel.

LH

1:40:14

Thank you.

FH

1:40:17

The most recent was how to build a better cosplay. And that happened at this year's Baltimore Comic-Con. I was a panelist for that. See, I've only been a panelist, well I take that back. Back in I believe it was either 2018 or 2019 BlerdrCon, I was hosting a panel called Dynamic Cosplay. And what I planned to talk about was how to make your cosplay, well, how to express yourself while cosplaying. And what ended up happening was when I showed up for the panel, I showed up, I was on time, my photographer was on time, but there were other panels going on that were people, you know, went to. So my panel ended up becoming a, basically, a, one of the writers for the show, A Man Called Hawk. Are you familiar with that? One of the writers for that show showed up at what was to be What would have been my panel had Anybody else showed up, but it ended up with it was about seven or eight of us because once people realized this guy actually worked out in Hollywood writing, you know, stories and scripts and whatnot, people kind of, he became the panel, if you will. Wow. So, started out like I said it was gonna be Fred Holt talking about dynamic cosplay and it ended up being Joe, whoever his name was, movie script writer or whatever.

LH

That's so cool. Yeah, it was a wonderful experience. Now you mentioned this GI Joe charity group. Can you tell me a little bit about that?

FH

1:43:42

What they do is we sell, and I have never been part of the actual transaction of selling stuff to people because my character, Snake Eyes, he doesn't talk. So all I do is just stand there and look awesome and the other Joes who can talk do the selling but all excuse me, whatever it is we sell,

be it buttons or different kind of GI Joe related paraphernalia. K9, it's a K9 program for veterans. And I believe the dogs, after they're released from, I'll say, active duty.

FH

1:45:01

They become companions for vets that live alone. Oh. So, any money we make, that's what it goes to. K-9s for vets. Are there any other groups that you're a part of or charity work that you do around your cosplay or character interest? I'm a part of Hope for Henry. And Hope for Henry is a cadre of cosplayers that go into a hospital setting to visit children who are hospitalized and to make their day a little bit brighter. We participate in parties at the hospital. We go room to room to visit certain kids. We give them gifts. I was, and we were as a group, very active prior to COVID. When COVID hit and the hospitals started limiting visitation because of it, the last time I did anything was probably in 2019. They recently started... They reached out to me and I told them, I only do... I don't do Nick Fury anymore. Not without, you know going into the hospital setting so I'll have to wait and see or I will have because if I'm not mistaken they did something it was either towards the end of October or sometime last month but I never got I never heard from them once I said I'm not no longer doing Nick Fury is Snake Eyes an acceptable character for you know what you want to present to the kids.

LH

1:48:35

Thank you. Yep. Do you have any memorable stories from that? From your time going into the hospital visiting the children?

FH

1:48:52

Oh, just that, you know, the kids would, they would light up. Just seeing their faces and them seeing their favorite superheroes, because most of the people who participated in that pretty much looked like the actual hero so you know, making the children, the patients, stay better than, you know, any normal or any other day in the hospital. So, and I miss doing that because I feel that I'm getting so much out of dressing up as a fictitious character. I'm getting so much out of it that I want to give something back. And that was my way of giving back. So yeah, I'll be tucking on their coats and saying, okay, what's the criteria? And if I have to, Nick Fury has to wear a mask, so be it.

LH

1:50:35

Right, that's right. Thank you. So I wanna shift a little bit and ask you, I have just two more questions for you. I want to discuss cultural shifts that you may have witnessed during your time in the community. I think the first thing that comes to my mind is Black Panther and how big that

was and how big that influenced the Black nerd community and just people even outside of the Black nerd community, just the Black community in general, have you, have there been any pop culture moments that you believe have also influenced a Black nerd or the Black community that have been pivotal?

FH

And yes, the movie Black Panther. Yes, to be clear, the movie Black Panther. That, I, I, I'm not gonna lie, I welled up in tears because of the Gorilla Tribe. I remember as a kid purchasing, I think it was Avengers number 62 maybe, when M'Baku, he was a villain to the core. He was... He... Now, and his name... The character name was M'Baku the Manic. Ooh. Now, for obvious reasons in 2018 you ain't gonna be calling up no big Black man the man ape Okay So but seeing him on screen in a in a menacing villainous manner initially for him to transition into a good guy, okay? And me remembering how, even though it was in a comic book form, me looking at him like, oh my gosh, this guy is scary. And then seeing him on the film the way that, I forget the director's name, but the way The way he portrayed us as a people in comparison to the comic book. And the comic book being the focal point for that issue. Me seeing it on the big screen and the transition from villain to likable hero type guy, that just did my spirit so much good. I actually liked him better than I liked T'Challa, the Black Panther.

LH

1:54:56

Yeah.

FH

1:54:56

He was, M'Baku was my favorite character in that.

FH

1:55:01

Um, I saw the impact or I could feel it throughout the nerd community, throughout the Blerd community, throughout the cosplay community, the impact of that movie. And it was so needed at that time because what that was year two of the Trump administration. Or just... So that was a big pick-me-up. There was already Black pride in Black pride prevalent in the cosplay community. But I see that and I recognize it and I'm for it. But I also see the gay pride. I also see, I just see different people using the safety of the Comic-Con as a way of being who they are on the inside. I don't know if I'm answering your question directly or not, but I see it for the different subsets of, you know, people out there. Be yourself no matter what.

LH

1:57:12

Thank you. So, yes, what advice would you give to someone just starting out in cosplay?

FH

1:57:24

The advice I would give them is pick a hero or a villain or a certain style or motif that you want to portray and pursue it. Now when I say pursue it, you have to be realistic because if you want to look like a Transformer, you're going to have to either have the skills on building armor and possibly stilts or something, walking on stilts and stuff. But whatever it is you decide, this is how I want to look in costume, plan out how you're going to go about it and make it happen. Be realistic because the more intricate, the more elaborate the cosplay or costume is, if you don't know how to do it yourself, sew it yourself, build it yourself, make it yourself, it's gonna probably cost some money. And you have to have a plan for, okay, for this event that's happening next month, I want to cosplay as So-and-so or as this character, whatever it is, do you have enough time to put that costume together? You have to be realistic but then when all is said and done, once you achieve or get that costume together.

FH

2:00:08

Once you go out, just go with a bang, be the character. I myself, I don't try to be the character that's in that comic book. I don't do that. Because that will come over, that will come across as trying to act, you know. I, I'm more of myself in costume and people go nuts over it. So just know when to turn it on and to turn it off. There's a time and place for everything. Some people, they go into the Comic-Con like this and they stay this way and it's cool, I don't judge, but sometimes it can be a little creepy. Just saying. But the main thing is just enjoy yourself. Just enjoy yourself and spread kindness. Any chance you have to spread kindness. One of the things I do, and I've done this a couple of times, whenever I see it, if I see somebody off by themselves or just meandering through the con, and they're dressed up, and it's like, you know, I'll grab them. I won't physically grab them, but I'll say, hey, can we take a picture together? Hey, you want to hang out with us? Hey, can we, you know, whatever. A story that comes to mind, I was at the East Coast Comic Con in Secaucus, New Jersey back in 2017. And there was about four of us. We had our G.I. Joe group there. And there was this one guy or person. I noticed he was kind of in the background by himself and I said, are you here with anybody? He's like, no, I'm just, it's just me. I said, come on over here. And I, you know, brought him in. And he later thanked me for making him feel part of what was going on. Yeah. He was there in cosplay, but he was by himself, and he was just, he was by himself. And I didn't like to see that. Yeah. Hmm.

LH

2:03:30

Thank you so much. Now these are all of my questions that I have for you. Was there anything else that I didn't touch on that you wanted to mention?

FH

No I think I've bent your ear the last couple of hours with everything that relates to me. I pretty life story, but my life story has led me to this point. And right at this point, I mean, you know, yeah, me and my wife, we travel together, we do stuff, but cosplay is at the top of my list for entertainment and the things I like to do. Now, having come close to losing my life a few years ago, you know, it has made me more determined to attend as many shows as I can, minus the ones I told you I don't want to go to but yes this is my number one form of entertainment where I spend most of my time and yeah this is who I am.

LH

2:05:09

Well thank you so much Fred it was such a pleasure to talk to you and to listen to your journey and to hear all the intricacies of your Interests and fandoms and it's truly been a pleasure. Thank you for your time Interests and fandoms and it's truly been a pleasure. Thank you for your time

FH

Thank you for having me.

LH

So I'm going to stop the recording here.