

Interviewer: Le'Evelyn Hammett

Interviewee: Nyx

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

Le'Evelyn Hammett

0:00:00

Hello, today is November 16th, 2024. My name is Le'Evelyn Hammett and I'm speaking with Nyx for the Blerd Oral History Project. We are conducting this interview on Zoom. Thank you so much, Nyx, for joining me today and sharing about your experiences, culture, and life.

Nyx

0:00:24

No problem, I'm happy to share and I'm a big believer of like telling our stories is so important. Thank you.

LH

And do I have your permission to record and archive this interview?

Nyx

0:00:38

Yes.

LH

0:00:39

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

Nyx

I am about my mid-30s. I grew up in Maryland, in mostly the Maryland, Prince George's County area. I was born in Miami though, so we kind of migrated up here.

LH

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

Nyx

I mostly went to public school, most of my upbringing. And then around high school, I ended up going to therapeutic schools until I graduated. And then college was a mix.

LH

And tell me a little bit about some of those subjects that you enjoyed in school. And you can go from, you can just tell me anything, any subjects that you enjoyed or that changed over your educational timeline.

Nyx

0:01:49

English and reading, like that was my big thing since like I was young. I was always reading a book before I could actually read fully. So English and reading were my big things. Then as like biology and earth science were like my science classes. And then I just I'm not a math person. I didn't get that gene of math.

LH

0:02:17

Okay. Thank you. And did you participate in any extracurricular activities or sports inside or outside of these institutions?

Nyx

I did ballet, tap and jazz. And then I did theater from like 14, like middle school to high school, I was a theater kid. And then I also didn't do sports in high school, but I did flags. So I was part of the color guard. And then I was also part of the ROTC, for Air Force JROTC.

LH

0:03:22

Thank you. Now, did you have, during this time, so let's say K through 12, did you have any interest in any Blerdy things? Like, did you like art? Did you, well, did you draw? Or did you watch anime? Or have a particular interest in anything under this Blerd umbrella?

Nyx

0:03:48

I would think, because I did, but at that time I didn't know what it was. Like I didn't know it was a nerdy thing. In elementary school, like towards the end of elementary school and into middle school, me and my best friend at the time had discovered Sailor Moon because it was on Toonami so we would run home after school because I would stay at her house until my mom picked me up. So we'd run home after school and watch Toonami and watch Sailor Moon especially and I didn't know that that was like a nerdy thing to do. And then from onwards like even before that my mom was a big like nerd like she's a theater nerd she was like a sci-fi, she got me into Star Wars like and stuff like that so that was like my first introduction was my mom just like Star Wars and stuff like that, like Star Trek as well so it's like she had like a big love of

the space nerddom and like final frontier and technology type stuff and I think by middle school and high school I got into like Cleopatra 2525 and like real niche things like I was watching Firefly before I knew what Firefly fully was as a series because it was just on Fox so yeah it just basically I didn't know it was a nerdy Blerdy thing it was just on television and I liked it mm-hmm so yeah that makes sense okay did you have were there any other fandoms that she wanted to mention that you were really into during this time or did you do any gaming or anything else Like for gaming, I had started, like my, um, my dad wasn't a real big girls and gaming person, but so my grandfather was like, went behind his back and got me my first PS one and then he, like my dad's like, well, I guess you could play Tetris on it as your game. And I'm like, I don't want to just play Tetris. So my grandfather got me Tomb Raider and like Spyro and some other games so like that was my first gaming experience like I was playing Tomb Raider and like my dad would only want me to play like Tetris and like the Spice Girls game which I did love the Spice Girls game but Tomb Raider and like Spyro because I don't know what the I didn't realize what the point of Spyro was but I enjoyed just running around being him. So it was a good game.

LH

Oh, wow, excellent. So you said a moment ago, you said that you had, did you say a cousin or a friend that used to run home with you to watch?

Nyx

0:06:39

It was a friend. Like we would leave school around like three and she lived closer to the school since I had to wait at her house. Tsunami was it. Mm-hmm.

LH

Around what age was that?

Nyx

Like seven or eight I would like to say.

LH

Okay, so thank you. Now, so this this friend was this one of your friends that clearly enjoyed nerdy Blerdy things with you.

LH

0:07:15

Did you have any other people in your community or close group of friends that enjoyed these same activities as you?

Nyx

Growing up, it was a mix, because in middle school, I think we had not so much nerdy, but different type of fandom. So that's when I got a little bit into wrestling um because Smackdown and stuff and so it wasn't like full-blown like maybe comic-con-esque nerds but like we got into our fandoms and we had like our lockers decorated in like ways that are like oh we have our music fandoms and then we have the wrestling fandom and then I think we only really in middle school talked about like comics and stuff at book fairs. Like that was the only time it kind of like came up.

LH

0:08:12

Okay, I'm going to have some more questions for you around wrestling and comics. I'm going to come back to that. And thank you so much for sharing about your family also. So I've kind of come up with this term legacy nerds, right?

Nyx

Yeah, it's interesting to see other people's legacies too, like fandom and nerd wise. But my mom is definitely one.

LH

0:08:51

So did you have any mentors or adults in your life, whether any of your coaches or ballet instructors or ROTC teacher.

Nyx

Well, before my English teacher in third grade, I had a third grade teacher, Miss Manos. She helped my mom and my family through my mom and my dad separating, so she took a special interest and then she gave me, like, introduced me to more, like, nerdy things and like collectibles and stuff like that. So that was very like formative in my formative years like one the caring but also learning like oh there are some toys you can play with and there's some toys you can keep and then it'll and how like how to take care of your things. She taught me that like because she had a lot of like sports collectibles and then she would try to find me collectibles and things that I liked like dolls or like books and she would teach me how to like make sure that I'm keeping the pages well and things like that so that helped me I guess long run yeah collecting my things and making sure that the things I want to keep in pristine condition I know how and then from her we go to like my ninth grade year and I had an English teacher and she helped me with like I loved reading I've always loved reading um she helped me expand from reading to like I would write short stories but I didn't take it seriously so she helped me go from like just an avid reader to avid writer as well and then also introduced me to like, different forms of media, because like I knew about comics, but then like manga, and like, there's more graphic novels that

are more in depth, and they're just like, you know, an Archie comic, or like, what we first start out with.

Nyx

0:11:07

So those two would probably be the most mentor wise that taught me like oh there's like different parts of like having your joys and then how to take care of them basically and then also that adults are literally out there doing the thing and so you don't have to like give things up because you're an adult now so that was a good.

LH

Thank you so much for sharing that. So I wanted to ask you, so when you got to your senior year, junior and senior year, later on in high school, what were you wanting to do with your life after you graduated high school?

Nyx

An early childhood educator or doing art therapy as a major. So those were my two main things. Like I thankfully had very supportive adults in my life and so it was between art therapy and being like an elementary school teacher.

LH

And what did you, where did you first, where did you end up going to college and what did you decide to study?

Nyx

0:12:37

I went through community college and then I ended up at Trinity University in DC. I actually ended up studying, my major was mass communications and my minor was women's studies and art. So, um, kind of far from where I start. Well, I did art because I was hoping to eventually find a closer program for art therapy. And it's good to have that as like part of your curriculum for, before you transfer. So I thought I would kill two birds with one stone, but I also really liked writing and reporting. Like the news and like journalism is really my main focus on like mass communications. And then I wanted to focus on like women's issues and stuff. And my dad used to joke I was going to be one of those people that put their foot in the wrong side of the border and then get arrested and the president would have to get me out and I'm like I mean if it if it frees some people isn't that the point but Yeah, so I know those are my majors.

LH

0:13:46

Fantastic and did you do anything during your college years? Or did you continue being a practitioner or a consumer of Blerd culture I or a consumer of Blerdy culture?

Nyx

I think for me, cause like in high school we had like a Japanese club. Oh. As, but it was like, cause we also had it as a language. So it wasn't really more of the culture. It was like the language and like history. So when I went to college and saw like anime clubs and stuff like that, that was where I kind of like got me into like, Oh, realizing one Sailor Moon is like, not just a cartoon, it's an anime. And then finding out the end of the actual series happened like high school, first year of college is when I like deep dive into the end of it. And then it broadened my horizons, I guess, because I was very much growing up on most of my time growing up was a magical girl, girly. And then I think around high school I got into, high school that freshman year I got into Inuyasha, um, and like a little bit of Madoka, and like, just realizing there are other genres out there. That's when that happened, that awakening happening like, oh, well, look, there's so much more that I had no idea. And then the storylines were so intense.

Nyx

0:15:28

And I'm like, okay, well, and then when I found out Sailor Moon was actually pretty dark. That blew my mind. I was like, oh, well, here we are so yeah how did you feel about that when you found out that it was pretty dark like were you were you more more so intrigued or like i was intrigued but i'm also like because even like as an adult now I didn't realize I guess spoilers but for anyone who's not caught up but like I didn't realize like when I read the manga of the end the last season with the stars I didn't realize he had died.

LH

0:16:05

Mm-hmm.

Nyx

0:16:06

Like, it didn't relate to me in my brain that Tuxedo Mask is just dead. Yeah. And then seeing it actually, well I think that's why I wish we had been able to see it as kids on screen. It might have been better for us to connect it, but when I finally watched it as an adult because it was on Netflix now, seeing it and then realizing, I'm like, oh wow, he's dead? I really thought he went to America because like reading it, it's just, it didn't convey death. Yeah. So I'm just like, oh that makes so much more sense. But I get it because you saw me going through it. Like I just,

because she, it makes, because I always loved Sailor Moon as a kid growing up because it made me feel like that's the type of friendship I wanted.

LH

0:16:56

Yeah.

Nyx

0:16:57

Um, and that's what I hoped for in friends and friendship. And then seeing like, everyone's like, oh, she's a crybaby and whatever, but like when you think about it as an adult now looking back, all the stuff that she went through, she deserved every tear she had to cry she was actually really really strong so I'm just like yeah so it was just like oh and then I'm like cuz people were like oh Sailor Moon's a soft magical girl anime and I'm like it's not soft it's not Madoka Magica dark but it's dark.

LH

Yeah. Absolutely, thank you. So um tell me so So, thinking about, so you matriculated through college, how are you balancing at this time, in this time, at this point in your life, or early career, how did you begin to balance this love of the things that you do or are interested in that aren't considered mainstream culture and your life, working and going about your daily adult duties.

Nyx

0:18:13

So when I first started as an adult and then like working and stuff and making my own adult money, like for me as a teen, I've always wanted to go to a con. I was here friends going to Otakon and I never went. So I didn't really go into like mid-college for the first time. So because I had my money now and I was technically an adult and so I thought that's something I want to experience just want to see what it's like. And that kind of got me into the gateway of experiencing conventions Just to connect with other nerds and then I didn't even start cosplaying until like a couple like maybe two or three years in and then it's just like a balance of like kind of gives like the Clark Kent Batman type vibe like Pretty much normal like especially earlier on I was very normal like on the outside and then just didn't people wouldn't really know I was a nerd and then even like my family knew like my mom knew but she didn't really think of it as like something serious until I started going to con and then I like tried to start making my first costumes and then she was like not to be frank but like she's like this is some white people stuff. What are you doing? And I'm like, well, it's really fun. And I like costuming and stuff and lets me be creative. And I think the, it lets me be creative part is what helped her just like take a step back and be like, well, fine, not hurting nobody. And you're having fun and it's letting you at least have an outlet.

LH

0:19:59

Yeah.

Nyx

0:20:00

That was what let her like calm down a little bit because even if you're an adult your parents will still be like, um, what are you doing with your money? Um, Like I see you go to work but like where where is the where is it going? So it was like a good point to like Ellie slowly That was like the gateway. So it would basically be like Monday through Friday normal adult stuff basically like your normal business casual looks and then on weekends nerdy and like maybe like fiddling around with a hot glue gun trying to make something thank you so so you talked about a lot of different interests that you've had since childhood.

LH

So wrestling, comics, gaming, anime, but I know that there are other things that you're interested in. How would you identify your interests under this massive, what I like to call this Blerd umbrella? Like how would you, where would you find your interest under there what are some of those things.

Nyx

Um like I feel like cuz as a Blerd like you kind of have like your niche interest and like yeah you like it's like an intersection of like yeah you have your mainstream nerd stuff but there are also some things that like, that are genuinely like, I don't want to say it's just for us, but it starts out just for us. And like, you just kind of have to support it. Like it's even like with I think of like musicals and stuff, because that's another one of my fandoms, like the Wiz and the Wiz being revitalized and stuff and being back on tour. Like that's an us thing first and that like culturally just has like so much intricacies and stuff like yes it's still the Wizard of Oz but it's it's it's different and then like even like as someone who did ballet and stuff growing up like my mom in theater my mom made sure I saw Alvin Ailey and like the Dance Theater of Harlem like so I knew where our dances were coming from and how our bodies move and look on stage before, you know, you just focus on other things, like, and then she also made sure, like, for me as a Black nerd kid that loved theater, that I was introduced to theater, like, so that it doesn't feel like, so when I finally, as an adult or by myself, don't feel like I'm in a space and I don't belong there So I've never questioned like whether I belong at like the Kennedy Center Because I've always been going to the Kennedy Center. So even if someone tried to make me feel like oh Your skin color doesn't you're in the wrong spot. I've never felt that as an adult because it was instilled in me as a kid so I appreciate like like things like that. So then for, I'm not just, I'm a Blerd and I belong places, but also like my mom's like, you know how they scandal and everything, like you

have to be twice as good as everyone else. Like even in our nerd spaces, we have to try to be like double prove that we are interested in things. And my mom also made me feel like I didn't have to like you don't have to explain yourself to anyone, so.

LH

0:23:41

Yeah, yeah. It's so true Thank you so you told me about your very first con you said you went to Otakon our first time mid college and that you cosplayed two to three years later. First, I'd like to hear about your, you told me about how you enjoyed the connections at Otakon and connecting with the community. Tell me, how did you feel, how did you feel when making those connections with people at Otakon first?

Nyx

0:24:24

Um, because like for me, I, like you have your small like college campus community and then seeing people that have traveled like states over to just come to a con, it's kind of like surreal and that's like I guess like it's also like the beginning of social media at that time so like we are just getting into like Facebook and stuff and Twitter and it's like oh this internet friend is right in front of me now and we're like hanging out at con like I went to Otakon that last year they had yaoi paddles.

Nyx

0:25:00

I didn't know what a yaoi paddle was I bought one just because I'm like oh my god that's so cool this is going to be my first purchase yeah and I didn't know even about the history of them being banned afterwards I just bought it and then they just never had them at Otakon again after that year that I went. And I'm just like, oh. And then like glomping and stuff like, even historically as a nerd looking back, like kids don't use the word glomp anymore. And like everything that was cringe back then, if you look at the photos, like they were made with the really early digital cameras and it's just like those memories like we would like crowd into like Burger King back then and like all in our little homemade cosplays or like our nerd shirts and stuff in our cat ears and it didn't feel weird kind of because it was like everyone else looks the same and that was kind of like the good vibe and then the only thing I think that would be missing back then is like Seeing more nerds like me But it it gets progressively better as the years go on and as I learned more of other conventions and other spaces that people were meeting like there's the DC anime club there's a Few like even trying other cons helped me see more people and make more connections like Katakon was pretty big for me meeting more plus-size nerds and like um like Lolita that got me into more J fashion so that was helpful.

LH

Yeah, thank you. And so two or three years later when you did do your first cosplay from your first con, what was that cosplay and how did you feel when showing up for the first time fully dressed up?

Nyx

0:27:02

So my first cosplay was Esmeralda. And it was very much closet cosplay. Definitely was trying to like hot glue some stuff the night before and like just make it look good. I mean, I was nervous because I didn't feel like it was good enough, but it was also my first, I was very self-critical. But I put it on and I went out, it was at Katsu, so I'm just like out there. And then a few people did recognize me and I appreciated that. There were some, you know, miss- some hits and misses on the guesses, but overall I had a good time and in spite- like, it felt good kind of like ripping off the band-aid of actually finally doing it. And then like talking to other people and seeing like maybe what I can do better because it was like a Disney meetup and that's why I wanted to do that cosplay specifically. So I got to see like how other people did the character, how other people did other Disney characters. And so it was good. That's why I kind of like the community. It teaches you how to be better.

LH

0:28:16

Thank you. And so how do you decide or how have you decided over your time of cosplaying? How do you decide which characters to bring to life?

Nyx

That is a good question. I usually, I pick characters that I either feel really close with like either from the source of media that I'm absorbing them from or if I really really love the character design because there's been some characters that I have cosplayed that I am NOT a part of that fandom I just like the outfit.

LH

0:28:55

Yeah.

Nyx

0:28:56

So there's that like um but for the most part it for me it's I definitely cosplay characters I love my anti-heroes. And then, like, there's just some characters that I just love in general, like their character design, because fashion design was one of my almost career paths. So if the design looks really good and I feel like I can replicate it on a budget I might try it.

LH

Thank you. And you also said that you do Lolita. Can you tell me, I know there are like a ton of sub-genres of lolita, like it's almost like I couldn't even begin to start trying to put together the list. What are some, so I'll ask it this way. What are some particular fashion choices that are unique to your way, the way in which you put together a Co-ord?

Nyx

0:30:10

For me I So when I started I had very small community. I just started going to meetups and I was still learning. But for me now as an adult, cos like doing Lolita, I am very much like I love the rules. And I think the rules are a good base. But also as you grow, and even as a Lolita with a disability, I'm like, I need to be comfortable too. Like for me, I love using Crocs and sneakers like comfortable shoes that I can make Lolita-esque to go with a cord. I also try to stick for my own closet stick in a color palette so it's either black red or purple. There are some bits of pink but I mostly try to stick in that color scheme so that I can get more use because Lolita is very expensive and I want to like make sure I can maximize my closet and like make sure everything kind of like can be either mixed with another brand and stuff. I just got into the whole bloomers are very important and I learned that from working in maid cafes, but also like sometimes in Lolita I wouldn't wear them too much because I'm like that's just an extra layer of warmth. But after seeing people try to do upskirt shots of other Lolitas, I'm fully on board. Like you should always have some type of safety short. Because some people at conventions are not safe and I just like to keep the shape like I want to like if I'm in Melita my goal is to look like a cupcake I want to look I want the shape I want the frills I want to look as an extravagant like my friend joked I'm like I look like a Black doll that like you would put on a shelf and that is just always now my goal to look like the most adorable porcelain black doll that like makes little girls happy. Yeah. Which makes me happy. So that's my goal. I've had girls ask me like, are you a princess? And I'm like, sure, sure, sure, baby. I'm a Let's do that.

LH

Thank you. And I want to talk a little bit about fandom that you mentioned earlier. So you said wrestling. Do you still watch wrestling today?

Nyx

I pop in and out. I'm not as consistent as I was as a young adult. I would watch every Friday night SmackDown, no matter what. But I guess also because life makes you not be able to sit down sometimes. But I do pop in, I do follow some of the storylines of wrestlers that I am definitely cheering on. Because like when growing up like The Rock and like Booker T were about as melanated as you kind of get. Yeah. And then now you have like Trinity and like even Rhea Ripley like it's more I'm definitely cheering for the girls and I'm definitely cheering for like Bianca and like just I'm cheering for I'm rooting for everybody black definitely everyone a little

melanin but I'm also definitely like even the Bella twins like I'm cheering for them like I want more women in wrestling being able to just you know shine yeah like so I follow their storylines I pop into their social medias and see what how they're what they're doing kind of like less on the male wrestler side though now cuz I mean but he's that I still I I love him I loved him as a teenager I'm rooting for him as an adult and as an actor like he's still my fave.

LH

0:34:42

Thank you and how about comics are you still dabble in comics or graphic novels to this day?

Nyx

I do and I actually appreciate like how it's grown. Um, like I of course, like I started with Archie and Betty and Veronica and I like recently like got into some like new renditions of like um like I got into Lonely City, the Catwoman run, and like seeing your favorites, because I'm a Catwoman fan, like seeing her as an adult, like aged after prison and stuff and still trying to save what she can, like was a good storyline. And then seeing Ivy that way too, so. And then getting into like indie comic brands like Image, got heavily into Image post-college like with Sunstone and like Saga was my gateway into Image like I did not know anything about the company and I read started reading Saga by a suggestion and I haven't like left their their brand at all. There's some that I'm not that fond of but I mostly like a lot of image comics now too. And then Dark Horse too.

LH

0:36:18

And this might be a little silly question but do you still watch any Disney or do you go to the Disney parks tell me a little bit about how you're interacting with that fandom.

Nyx

I am trying to like I love Disney I love Disney so Um, but like, I, like, I still have Disney plus, um, and I, like, I do really want to go to the parks, but I don't think I want to go to Disney world. I think I want to go to Disneyland. I've never been, and they also have the Avengers park. So I feel like it's, and Tiana's Bayou Adventure, which is like, I love Tiana so much. So I want that would be like two birds and one, one visit. So and then I also feel like I want to go to the parks that are international. Because I feel like it would be like an international trip to see other things, but also experience their parks. I can't say Disney definitely was probably before anime my first fandom But like like I still have like on my wish list of like as a cosplayer and as a Content creator to be invited to a Disney thing Like that's my hope one day But yeah, I will always love Disney like and then now that they own Marvel I can't separate it so it's just it's like especially like after like Agatha all along like I'm a big Scarlet Witch fan and everything so I'm just I'm locked in unfortunately for life.

LH

Yeah thank you and I also want to ask you about theater so you mentioned the revival of The Wiz and it going back on tours as you're a theater kid are there any other oh well tell me about some of your most memorable theater performances that you've gone to or either some of your favorites some that you were like these are like I cannot get to enough.

Nyx

0:38:46

Um, for me, okay, I, as a kid, I was really, really into Aida. Like with Heather Headley, like I saw her when she performed it. And then for some reason, it's just like, I couldn't get away from the musical. Cause my school then performed Aida in middle school and in high school. So I'm just like, I was like, I was a stage hand the first time around and then I was background the second time and I'm like I really can't get away from the musical so that musical like my family was very much like it's being played all the time in our house and then my next big musical obsession would be Wicked. My mom took me to see it for the first time when it came to Baltimore and I immediately bought the soundtrack and I played it the entire time on the way home and then the entire week after every time we were in the car. Like I, I'm not happy about it being a movie now, but I am because it'll let more people get to the theater see it but it's a two-hour musical and for it to be split into two parts I don't know but I love the resurgence of merch and more people...

Nyx

0:40:13

getting to fall in love with the songs and so Wicked would be a good a big musical for me. Six I got into by accident like that was like one of those I fell into it because of social media and then when I realized what it was about I used to be obsessed with history especially like Tudor history so I was like okay I'm in and like I have loved um like of course the Disney musicals, like the Lion King is a big one in our family. And unfortunately to a lot of my friends, I love Cats. Like, like, it's just, it's just, it was Cats was my first musical, like my first time going to the theater. So I can't not, you know, pay homage to my roots and then like the Phantom of the Opera and Les Mis were the next ones. And like, I, I love musicals. I'm, I'm not a great singer, but I, because I even went to theater camp. That's how bad it is. I was like, I went to theater camp, like the one time my mom accidentally registered me for the wrong camp and I went to sports camp by accident. I tried. I'm like, Mom, they want me to go outside. Come get me. And they fixed that in 24, less than 24 hours. I was back at theater camp. I'm like, I don't, I don't know what you mean. I got to run outside all day. Yeah, there's no music class. What are you? Somebody else to do it. I was the I've never had like a lead role at our camp but I knew for one thing for sure I was not doing sports camp. I am.

LH

Wow, thank you so much for sharing details about all of your fandoms and thank you for talking about The Wiz, which is current, excuse me, Wicked, which is, I think, opening weekend for the films this weekend, right?

Nyx

0:42:48

Next Friday. Next Friday, okay, yeah.

LH

So yeah, that's also really good. Thank you so much. So how did you learn the skills required for, I would say, like, cosplaying and alternative fashion, Lolita? I know you said with Lolita you went to groups and you met up with people. crafting, makeup, prop, creation, or editing, digital editing or anything that you've been involved in?

Nyx

0:43:18

For me, it's been like, first it was trial and error. I had friends that I've met through groups or cons and they would give me guidance and then I would try to take their guidance and follow it as like a guide. I'm not really big on like, oh, we're going to do this to the T, but I also want it to fit me. Yeah. So I would do that. Sewing I'm I can hand sew like hand sewing I like because it gives me more control versus a machine sewing. So and then And then drawing I've always done, crafting I've always done between like school and art therapy and stuff like that was where I got my learning more materials, learning what like foam and like how to bend things and looking at like a picture of something and then trying to see how to recreate it or like texture and stuff um was from art and then every like it's honestly just a trial and error process like my first pro like my first big build i would say was making my sailor moon wig um i did go to beauty school but like actually crafting her hair. Because I really wanted to make her hair my hair color, like more my hair color. So like making, there were some tutorials online, but then like, it was also trial and error because when you're actually actively doing it, you have to like pivot and stuff. I think the other big build I had was like doing um Nightmare Moon and like making a whole tutu by myself because I wanted like volume but I wanted it to be like black and different shades of purple...

Nyx

0:45:21

...and then I used a glitter tool and I didn't know glitter tool sheds glitter everywhere. and my cat looked like a baby, like, like she was covered in it. And she's like a dark colored cat, so it just looked like she rolled around in the galaxy because she wouldn't leave my side and I was still doing it. And I look over and she's just covered. And then even trial and error, like with prop

making, like, I had to learn about glues that you need ventilation for and stuff because I would just be doing stuff. And then my mom's like, you're going to air out the room a little bit cuz are you trying to know i'm just i'm just i'm just a young person just you know learning as i go along so it's trial and error.

LH

Thank you wow and you also went to beauty school that's fantastic that's a big help with cosplay stuff for sure.

Nyx

Well because I went because I was really interested like it was like when Face-Off started and I really wanted to do like more makeup things like that um but they really were like oh you shouldn't just do aesthetician and makeup artistry you should do everything because that's what cosmetology is. And so I really wasn't into doing hair, but they were like, just do it all and then you could be like multifaceted. And I'm like, I guess, and that's how I ended up doing the whole thing. But like, it was very helpful. I hate doing nails though.

LH

0:47:03

Wow, you can do nails too. Wow, that's so cool. Um, so tell me, so I want to shift into talking about identity. I want to explore your opinions and thoughts around any challenges or positives as well. I don't want to just be reductive and think that all the experiences are bad, but challenges or positive experiences that you have faced as a cosplayer or Lolita fashionista particularly regarding your identity or identity in general, gender, race, age, ability, body image. Yeah, what are your thoughts around those things?

Nyx

Um, like it's complicated. I will always say because I mean like your identity is complicated. Um, my biggest thing is like, it's been... when I started out doing cosplay in like, Lolita and Jfashion, like, I was very self, um, conscious and I wanted to be liked by everyone. Um, and then I just, I grew out of it pretty much. Like I, I kind of, it came to the point where I didn't want other people's opinions or actions or words to harden me. Um, so I had to grow out. I just had to like come to terms with like, everyone's not going to like you. And that we have to do this the best way that's good for me. And then I also, I, in my journey, I started doing panels and I started hearing other people's perspectives because I would try to do body positivity panels and beginning cosplay panels and hearing people's genuine concerns about why they haven't started yet. I'm just like, it kind of makes me think back to the Age of Ultron Avengers movie where like Hawkeye is like talking to Scarlet Witch and she he's like well when you walk out that door you're an Avenger and I'm like if you put the costume on and you put the outfit on and you walk out your hotel door you're a cosplayer that that's it don't let nobody else tell you you're not like

yeah and I've I've actually always opened, like when I do panels, I open my DMs. I'm like, if he's someone is bullying you and you need to tag someone in, I will gladly be that person because I feel like sometimes our communities, we get focused on being number one or being super perfect and we forget the whole point of the community is to build a community and like, instead of being like nerds in costume, having fun together, we become the bullies. And I just realized early on, like, I don't like the way other people were making me feel and I didn't want to be that person making other people wonder like what's wrong with them. So I try to... I keep my circle smaller but I also don't close it off to like meeting new people or like helping new people.

Nyx

0:50:29

Like I'm grateful for some of the cosplayers I've met along the way that have been like, I've been like, oh my god, I love your cosplay. And they'd be like, oh, I got it from so and so. I'm usually really shocked when that happens because most people will not tell you. And like it's a state secret or something. And I'm like, bless. Bless and then like the one cosplayer that did this it was a black crystal cosplay Like she had told me where she got her in a yasha cosplay and I'm like she laughed. I'm like no, I'm so serious like you people don't tell you where they get their stuff. She sent me the link and everything and I'm like Bless even uh, I think her name is jar Jade. She did all the Sailor Moons. She even like her kindness of sending me like cuz I was in a crisis because the person Who I normally would if I wanted a new Sailor Moon cosplay from yeah didn't do plus they stopped doing plus sizes and I needed and she was nice enough to let me know where she got hers and I'm like plus because people don't do that and Even as a plus-size cosplayer, even if I think that's why some plus size cosplayers we like we have to make our stuff because even the ready-made places will just be like oh we're not doing plus size or you don't go above an extra large and so you have to be more resourceful and also sometimes have a thicker skin because I've had some brands um be very not great in the emails when I ask like hey, does this come in a bigger size and it's just like it's trial and error and then keeping it moving, basically. Yeah.

LH

Thank you and how about I want to ask about so you talked a little bit about like a body image. What are you seeing in terms of or your observations around? And I touched on race a little bit there too, what about gender and ability?

Nyx

0:52:32

I feel because I've I've heard mixed things like I've heard a lot of guy cosplayers don't feel like they get enough attention if they're not like super like fit and stuff or if they're not like model worthy and I'm like then there's a whole like cosplay contesting between armor and ball gown and since a lot of guys lean on armor they get really mad losing to ball gowns and I'm like there I

feel skill level wise they are both very intricate, just intricate in very different ways. I also feel sometimes that some of our cosplay contests need to be restructured. In a way that like, it gives more people a chance because they're completely different skill levels and armor cosplays have really evolved with, we're not just using Warbilla anymore, it's like a whole bunch of other different types of phones and contraptions and now people are adding LEDs like and then same thing with ballgowns. It's not just fabric. And like, people have like committed like work hours to whole build and dresses and some of them like are convertible or light up like so I just feel like I get their frustrations but I also feel like as a community or as like conventions and cosplay contests need to like restructure how they make things because like I feel like armor should be its own category, dress and seamstress thing should be their own category and then I know we have masquerade for like those of us that fire cosplays or like do a mix of bot and so it's just like I think more levels would be helpful for people so then everyone could feel recognized because Seeing a lot of guys get really sad and I'm like then even like with Ssome of my Black male cosplay friends they get mad because like not mad but they're sad because like they do really good cosplays or they have like their interesting concepts and don't get looked over because they're not I don't know six foot or something. Yeah.

LH

That's right Thank you so much. So I wanted to ask as well what are your annual events that you must attend? They are required. And this can be cons or other meetups or activities that you must do every year.

Nyx

0:55:20

do every year. For my own mental health, I really like going to MAGFest because it's like, just the vibes are really great. There's something for everybody. And like, even as someone who's like, as a disabled con goer, as an adult now, I appreciate them having a quiet room.

LH

0:55:42

Yeah.

Nyx

0:55:43

And I also just like, it's one of the cons that I will usually sometimes I can't sometimes that cons I burn out. And I don't go back outside. MAGFest is one of those cons, I just need a quick nap and I'm back. I'm just always down to enjoy MAGFest for everything it is. It's even a good people watching con and it's weird because it's the same place as Katsu and Katsu gives me so much anxiety. Probably because I also work it. But so Katsu is on my list of I have to go to but mostly because I work it. But also I like seeing my friends that I work it with and also the JFashion track

that they have now really makes me want to stay as a staff member. So I started off as Made Cafe and then I great since then and Otakon because it was my first I try to go to Otakon now I'm staffed but like I Otakon was my first and you never forget your first so and then if I am Blerd is on my I go if my friends. Like, I've never had a bad experience with them there.

LH

0:57:19

Yeah.

Nyx

0:57:20

And it's just, it's actually, I will say the beautiful thing about Blerd is the people, like, like, seeing so many of, because it's also the, it's also the first that I experienced in this area of its kind, where you can see so many of us nerds in a space and I honestly can't can't I can't say anything bad about like I've seen amazing cosplays done by like people that look like me. It's it's just gives a good feeling So I will always try to go and see my friends and just catch the vibes for that one and New York if the funds allow it is oh it's I love New York I have family in New York and it's fun to take my family because we have little nerds now so and so like I'll go up there and meet them and take my little cousins to my panels and they're like they think it's the one time in life I am the cool cousin because look my cousin is speaking and I'm like being the cool cousin because I am speaking at comic-con is like all I could ask for so that's that's always great

LH

0:58:49

Thank you.

Nyx

0:58:50

Like that's the clout that I want. I don't want clout, like I want clout in my family. Like I want my little cousins and children to think I'm cool. Yes. That's all that matters.

LH

That's right. Thank you. And you also, you do Renaissance fairs as well, correct?

Nyx

I do. I try to go to the Maryland Renaissance Fair. I also want to try to branch out to the other ones, but going at least once a season is apparently now a hard thing, but definitely a blessing because it's good vibes, good food.

LH

0:59:32

Thank you. So in thinking about the conventions and these events that you go to and that you love, how do you see inclusion in these spaces, like body types, gender, ability, race, or age?

Nyx

Sometimes I feel that some of our event planning and cons and stuff need to have more of a accessibility board or a department or at least someone to guide that mindset to make the events better because I feel like a lot of events...

Nyx

1:00:12

accessibility sometimes is an afterthought disabilities are an afterthought for them and then also like I feel like it contributes to like the competitiveness in cosplay and like stuff like that because Everyone there's like it's only could be one plus-size cosplayer or like one dark-skinned cosplayer and I think events forget that there are multiple of us and we all offer different things and it's okay to like swap around or like remix your lineups and stuff but some cons and events will have the same people every year and they never like think to have like maybe a novice track or like you know even on based off of skill levels or something like and then even i feel like a lot of cons do disabled cosplayers as guests, as speakers, or even just to have them on staff to help guide accessibility. Unfortunately, like, there are a few cons that I love, but their accessibility track sucks. And it's New York Comic Con. It's New York Comic Con. It's really hard. hard sometimes as a disabled person navigating such a big space and there are needs that are not met and are overlooked and then even if you try to tell them about it you get crickets or you get another email to email that email and then a dead end so it's just like seating is an option and you know, maybe quiet spaces or like even just having like the places sometimes don't even have an email for you to at least contact and ask and I'm like that's just step one.

LH

Yeah, absolutely. I noticed this past year at BlerdCon, there was an issue with the escalator coming from bottom floor up and I just was down there just sitting down there watching people watching and there were some people that had been waiting at something I don't know if something was on the elevator or something but there were people that were down there for, I know, at least 45 minutes, because I was trying to wait until the line from the cosplay competition had died down. And there were some people that were saying, well, you know, there were some people in wheelchairs and there were some people had different health, differing health needs, and they were just stuck down there waiting and waiting and waiting. And then people with strollers with a bunch of strollers with their kids and stuff and um so it was um I I yeah I was like really um not shocked but I was just um I definitely wish that there had been a plan for in the event of an emergency because

LH

1:03:34

in the event of an emergency people have to get out of this space and what's that gonna look like do we have 45 minutes or not like you know yeah and so it's like wild especially with Blerd because especially with the heat factor yeah like there are people with heat intolerances or like their meds will make them like literally pass out and that's not something like they think about.

Nyx

And then I mean I'm grateful because like sometimes I've worked that staff can use the back stairwells and if we see someone that's disabled that's been waiting for too long, we can take them that way.

LH

1:04:11

Yeah.

Nyx

1:04:12

But like, it's not a lot of people plan for that.

LH

1:04:17

Right. Yes, I definitely agree that that is a gap. Are there any other issues or gaps that you see in convention spaces that you would love to see closed?

Nyx

I just feel like I would like to see like more guests. I would like to hear more people's stories. Like I feel like sometimes, I don't know if it's just areas like I see smaller cons have more like openness to their panels suggestions and stuff so therefore then you have more conversations like I like seeing cons that have like mental health talks um I feel like also having different types of guests, like, both body types, skin tones, nationalities and stuff also would help. Um, cause, and then also like, cause we have game, like, Gamergate and everything that's going down there. Like, maybe have some more things about women in gaming, minorities in gaming, and actually have minorities on the panel or maybe more than just one woman on the panel and I feel like it's doable but like also I feel like some of...

Nyx

1:05:48

...our cons are stuck in they're gonna stick to this formula and nothing's gonna shake it like cuz I feel like even like a mere comic-con disabled people spend their money to go there but have little

accessibility. But they're feeling they probably have that mindset like well people are either going to come or they're not and I feel like that's not the right mentality to have because yeah you'll still get your money but also like I think I was talking with an interviewer for a job about customer service and it's just like Nobody kind of wants to try to do a little more to make things a little better for everyone as a whole It's individualism of it. I guess that's just like We're done. We're good. We got our money Too bad you you three people had a bad experience and I'm like that's kind of sucks.

LH

Yeah, right Yeah, you're definitely missing a whole, you know, community of people that would be more inclined to come. I'm just thinking and and there are people that aren't, there are people that have varying levels of ability and they may not, they may not consider themselves to not have the, to not have a disability but they need the support as well. So I'm just thinking about elderly people, right, that come to these cons. After you've done so many things, you may get tired. Like I have an elderly relative that comes with me sometimes and at first, you know, the first couple of hours, it's like, okay, I'm good to go. But, you know, after time, it's like, I'm not going to be able to walk up those two flights of stairs. Like, I need to wait here for the, for example, at the elevator, I need to wait here for the elevator.

Nyx

1:07:51

So, yes, it's like you're missing people and you're not providing that for people that might. But it would just help in general, like it being there, like some seats or couches.

LH

Yep. And can I, give me one second. Okay, so I have just a few more questions for you. I want to talk now about cultural shifts and impact. So what impact did you see COVID playing in the Blerd community? Positive, negative, or indifferent?

Nyx

1:08:29

Um, I think I'd say a bit positive because I think it allowed us to get some nice virtual clones out there that were more centered on us and then that also helped accessibility wise, because then more people cross country could speak. And it taught us to make different ways of connecting. Like some of the virtual cons I was able to experience during COVID were kind of cool. Yeah, tell me about one of your favorite ones. Virtuous Con was a good one. I think I found that one from the Blerd girl and It was nice it was a nice experience they had a lot of Black and POC Content and writers and stuff so it was it was nice to me and I think I also won like a Black cancer thing from them so that was great too because I would have probably not even had a chance to win something that like niche and special if it wasn't for them so that was a plus and

then I like the content that's been cut like has come out of it so. Thank you yeah and that even opens it up for people that like you said you mentioned something earlier about like finances and just, you know, it can get going to these places, traveling to these places can get expensive. So yeah, that's really cool.

LH

1:10:11

So you touched on Black Panther just now, which is perfect segue to my next question. So when you're thinking about cultural shifts that you may have witnessed during your time in the community, have, thinking about like, for example, like Black Panther, have there been any cultural moments that you feel have influenced the Blerd community that have been pivotal?

Nyx

I feel, well Black Panther definitely has been one of the most like because even though the character's been around for a while like having him in Civil War and introduced and then his own We saw people showing up and out at the movie theaters. Like, even my mom was going to the premiere too. Like, when I tell you the first movie, I'm not a see, pay to see a movie more than once type of person. But me and my mom paid to see that movie a couple times. And we just like all talk about the number, but we saw it a lot and I think it also helped us get like- because like I knew of Moon Girl like pre that time frame but then like seeing that she was getting a show and everything and then the Littles can have her and then Ironheart like I'm hoping it gives us more heroes, villains, because even like before then, Agents of Shield had like Ghost Rider be Latino or Latinx and that was great but then they kind of scrapped that storyline and so it's like I'm Black, but I'm also Afro-Latina and Afro-Caribbean. So just seeing Blue Beetle's family interaction and how like kind of embarrassing and cringey they were, but like it's all from a place of love. Like, same thing with Black Panther, like him and Shuri, brother and sister, just poking at each other but still like respectful like those are things we deserve to see on screen and even Ironheart like I'm so excited and I'm immensely excited.

LH

1:12:43

And thinking about your Jfashion and Lolita or alternative fashion, have there been any fandoms or have there been any fandom trends or any kind of fashion trends that have shifted that community while you've been a part of it?

Nyx

1:13:04

I feel like post-COVID, menorrhage has been really big. It's more medical fashion, but also dives into mental health. because Japan does have like high suicide rates, it's kind of taboo so they use

fashion to talk about that and since COVID had people being more isolated and then still dealing with like anxiety and mental health, that fashion has technically I've seen take off a little more in the Jfashion community and some of the designers that I follow, they try to do like prints with it for awareness. Seeing a couple of really cozy looks that are made to make you feel comfortable and secure, but still fashionable if you're anxious and stuff. And so it's been nice to see the Jfashion movement resurgence of that, especially post-COVID, like with the face mask and everything. So that came to be more for safety but also become a fashionable accessory like people bedazzling theirs or like adding the chains and stuff. It's made your health both mental and physical be important and also try to make it look stylish and I've enjoyed that. I also discovered like alt-fashion mobility aids and that's been like my new joy. Like really nice compression stuff that are cute and stylish and like bedazzling like your cane and stuff so that it can go with whatever outfit you need it to go. So it's been a nice trend.

LH

1:15:05

Thank you. Thank you so much. So just three more questions. So what are your thoughts on the growing popularity of Blerd culture? For example, Megan Thee Stallion's not most recent album, but the one before, I believe. The Chi, there was an episode where Kevin, one of the main characters, his girl, a girl that he was dating was really into cosplay. They went to a like convention like party and alternative fashion, like Fae aesthetics of like SZA and Jhene Aiko. What are your thoughts about this growing popularity?

Nyx

Personally, I love it. Like I, because some people are like, oh no, I was doing that before it got cool and stuff. I'm like, no, no, please do more because then also it's not just for us now. It's for the next generation. If they can see those images, that helps them. And then also it helps me because that means it'll be in the stores more at a reasonable price. And I'm, I'm for that. But like, I just hope that maybe we get past the, um, the quizzing, the female Blerds about their, their knowledge. Cause that would be great. But otherwise I love it. Like it brings me so much joy. Like even, um, like Flayanna Boss and their elf ears, like I was the weird alt black girl that was wearing like cat ears in high school so to just see someone just wearing elf ears because it makes them feel happy has become a full circle life moment for me and I'm like yes embrace your magic.

LH

So how has cosplay, shifting on into just like broad reflections, how has cosplay and Jfashion or lolita changed your view of yourself or others? Um... If it has, if it has.

Nyx

1:17:27

I would say overall, I'm just, I'm always kinder. I'm kind in general. I try to be kind in general but I'm kinder to people starting out because I've experienced that fear when you just start out and you like step out onto a con floor or like you start taking your own pictures and you're sharing stuff or you're asking in a cosplay group like how do I do something I think it takes me back to like the Cinderella live action like have courage and be kind. Like it takes a lot to do that and then even with alt fashion like you will get stares. Like I think when I first went to my first meetup and seeing people blatantly taking photos of us as a group. Yeah. And seeing another Lolita be like, hey, delete the photo or at least acts properly. As a baby Jfashioner and lolita, seeing someone who's been doing it longer just batency tell someone to do that helped me slowly build my confidence to be that person for the next people behind me. And it also just helps build confidence anyway, because you can't be you can be shy and do this but also eventually you have to get to the point where like you're okay with being like no pictures or like um some of the costumes you know definitely will mess with your confidence and you just have to still um fake it till you make it is my because even though I may think this is a little, like, a lot for me, but you walk outside and someone's like, oh my god, I love your look and you're just like, okay, maybe it's not too bad, but like, just know, you'll get there. I've gotten there. Um, I think for J fashion look like or like even in cosplay makeup like my thing is like if I do my eye makeup there's no crying today there's there's no tears at all today because the eyeliner is already on I already did the setting spray I'm not redoing makeup, so.

LH

Yeah it's so true thank you so much and my last question is what advice would you give to someone just starting out in cosplay or exploring your culture culture I know just now you said you know fake it till you make it and earlier you did say just get started and you're gonna make mistakes and it have any other sage advice?

Nyx

1:20:23

My big thing is always have fun. Like if for some reason you start and you're not feeling like you're having fun, take a step back, reevaluate. And then if you try it again and it's still not feeling fun, either take a break or pivot because like my big thing is cosplay has the word play in it so we should be having fun like we all started out as nerds in costume and I before that was before the competitions and everything like it's something fun to do with your friends that's why I like group things and stuff like that like don't forget to play.

LH

Well thank you so much next thank you for your time. Is there anything else that you wanted to talk about here, but I didn't ask you about?

Nyx

Not that I could think of.

LH

1:21:26

Well, again, thank you so much. It was a pleasure talking with you today. I'm going to stop the recording here.

Nyx

1:21:35

Okay. Okay. Bye.