

A COSPLAY

RETURN TO

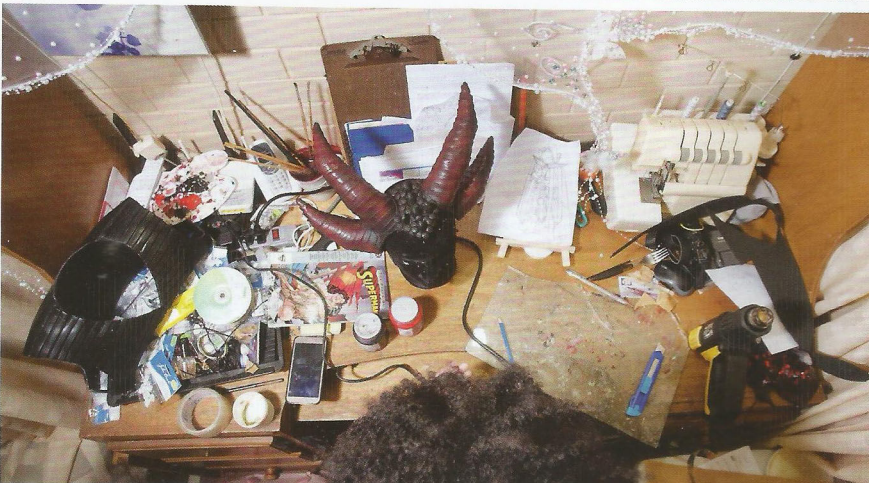
CARNIVAL'S ROOTS



Josette James with her mannequin Saucy, displaying the Dragon costume at her Laventille home.



The Worbla thermoplastic that's used to create the band's costumes can appear soft and almost silky (left) or hard and chitinous (right), depending on how it's finished. Most pieces require six or more coats of finishing paint.



One of Josette James' workspaces at her home.



Dwayne Caberrea works on rivet placement for the Dragon costume



Natalia Henry listens to costume feedback from Clayon Chandler, taking notes during the fitting.



Naomi Anderson, Chene Downie and Shalla Khan have an early rehearsal of the flow of the wings of the Dragon costume during a fitting in a room at UWI's Department of Engineering.

FORM FOLLOWS FANTASY

Photographs and story by Mark Lyndersay

There's a leafy green cool shading us from the blistering sun under the huge tree that towers over Josette James' mas camp in Laventille.

Here, high up on a hillside with a commanding view of east Port of Spain, the young woman is turning her considerable skill at cosplay, recreating and reinterpreting costumes from fantasy, adventure fiction and superheroes to the business of Carnival and bringing the idea of masquerade full circle. What, after all, were the old masters of the festival doing but costumed play based on military uniforms, Roman armour and the wonders of Egypt?

So Josette James will lead a mini-band of 15 players, ALIAS Mas: The Mythical Realm-Battle of the Four Armies, to competition venues. It's the theme of the band's cosplay expo planned for later this year as well.

James and Natalia Henry designed the band, Henry creating the Camelot section while James created The Dragons, The Fae and The Council of Magic.

Henry claims to be the country's first cosplayer, making her debut 16 years ago at the Genesis event Anime City. James isn't far behind, having cosplayed for the last 14 years.

The handcrafted costumes, built by the designers with assistants moving the work along, are created with sheets of a German thermoplastic called Worbla that's malleable when heated but hardens to a lightweight but solid shape.

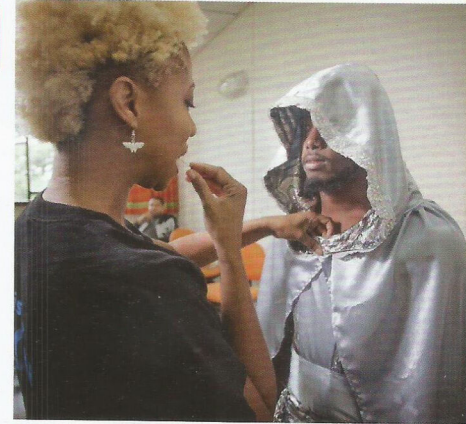
The material is popular with cosplayers, and James is the agent for it in the Caribbean. She's demonstrated it to local Carnival creators who had no interest.

One reason might be the handcrafting inherent in the work. Simpler costumes take the pair two to three days to create, but the frontline designs can take up to two weeks. That doesn't scale well for even a medium band.

Masqueraders are allowed a surprising degree of customisation and the cost of a finished costume ranges between TT\$1,200 and TT\$6,000. For that, players will receive multiple pieces with finishes that look like insect chitin, polished metal and delicately laced armour. Each features stunning detail and delicate texturing. Despite the surprising lightness of the work, it looks like a lot for a masquerader to wear in modern Carnival.

"All our masqueraders are cosplayers so we have not had any push back," says James.

"They are all excited to be a part of it, and some are also first-time mas players as well. Many have opted for comfort over bulk, but we think that we were still able to deliver on both fronts, so the judges are in for quite a show."



Josette James pins a hood on David John into place during his fitting.



Fiona Boochoon and Natalia Henry discuss costume options after a fitting at Henry's San Juan home.



Chene Downie and Shalla Khan try their costume pieces during the fitting and rehearsal session.

CARNIVAL

2018 EDITION



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