

Feature



Becoming the “Tooth Fairy” Félicia Dussault

Having joined the world of costuming and cosplay because of her love and desire to embody her favorite fictional characters, a young artist shows us how she gives life to her latest inspiration.

Since I've discovered the fabulous world of cosplay, costuming and conventions, discovered that it was possible for me not to wait until Halloween to develop the clothing and the wearing of a costume, it doesn't take me a lot to be inspired and desire to embody a character I love by reproducing his/her costume.

Whether a film, a novel, a TV series, an anime or a manga, I'm always on the lookout for any opportunity to express myself in my passion. Thus, at the release of Dreamworks' 2012 animated film *The Rise of the Guardians* I had the

inspiration that would cause one of my biggest works so far. This film features all the characters and legends of our childhood, in revisited forms and appearances. “Jack Frost,” the central character, is the free and playful guy who brings cold and snow, announcing the arriving winter. It also includes “Pitch Black”, the boogeyman who acts as the antagonist; “North,” also known as “Santa Claus;” “Bunnymund, the Easter Bunny;” “Sandy, the Sandman;” and finally, “Toothiana, the Tooth Fairy.”

Initially, I had no idea that I would develop a desire to make a costume for “Toothiana.” Like most of the other cosplayers with whom I've discussed this movie, the character of “Jack Frost” was very attractive to me to use for an upcoming costume. Everyone, even before seeing the film, spoke only of “Jack Frost,” and several of them were already thinking about making him their next costume. From my side, despite my admiration for that character, I was already preparing to carefully observe the design of the “Tooth Fairy.”



“Toothiana, the Tooth Fairy” (above) from Dreamworks' 2012 animated film, *Rise of the Guardians*. Image: Dreamworks Animation. Félicia Dussault as “Toothiana” (right). Photo: Kevin Hodgson.

On the screen before me there was a magnificent creature, half woman and half hummingbird. Her plumage was blue, turquoise, green and yellow and it was twinkling like a peacock. Her head was fully decorated to frame her beautiful and made-up face. To finalize everything, long, wide tail feathers fell down behind her and she moved with huge sparkling and colorful wings. “Tooth Fairy” was always escorted and assisted by thousands of small “baby-tooth”, those who were charged to go collect the teeth of children around the entire world and bring them to the Tooth Palace, where they were kept.

I loved the personality of “Tooth,” both bubbly and fun, but also protective, combative and committed. In addition, I kept observing her, wondering how it would be possible to recreate her appearance to make a good costume. Several hypotheses arose in my head, but nothing first convinced me that any of them would actually work. This idea stagnated in my head for a while. It was only when I went to see the movie a second time, at the theater, with a friend that a real willingness to personify “Toothianna” was finally awakened in me. I knew I was getting into a long, hard process, but I was ready to give my best to bring this project to achievement.

There was a period of half-a-year between me and the convention to which I intended to wear “Tooth” for the first time. The beginning of the process was a bit shaky. I really wanted to start by building what would be my feathered headdress,



Newsprint over aluminum foil and cardboard cap.



because I thought it would be the most complex piece to make for my costume.

To do this, I first tried to build the headdress from a plaster mask covering the whole of my forehead and my temples. However, I quickly realized that it would be too hard to cover my head with enough feathers to recreate the right shape. So I started looking for another way to build the head to not only be covered with feathers, but for me to be able to give it the shape I wanted.

The shape and strength of some feathers are too random, so what I needed was a solid structure that I would then cover with feathers. Inspired by some tutorials that I've watched in the past on how to make some costume pieces with inexpensive hardware, I first made a base by wrapping my head in aluminum foil and securing it with masking tape. Then, to recreate the elongated form of “Toothianna's” head, I set a large cone of cardboard on top of my headdress base. I covered the cap with newsprint to seal it and solidify it. Once dry, I now had a sort of custom-made helmet, adjusted to my head, that would be strong enough so that I could work on it and decorate it in my own way without fear for its strength.

In the end, the head of “Tooth” turned out to be much less time consuming and less difficult to make than I initially thought it would be. First, I painted it with blue and green acrylic paint, and then started to stick on my blue and green feathers with some hot glue. In some places where the feathers were



not the right shape, I glued pieces of blue fabric that I previously had cut in the shape of feathers. Finally, to decorate everything, I had to add the long yellow waved feather starting from Tooth's forehead up above his head. To do so, I used an aluminum wire, that I first twisted to create a large wave, between two layers of yellow feathers placed end to end, so I could create the illusion of a large feather that rises undulating to the top of the head.

The head was almost done. There remained for me to apply the yellow feathers arranged at Tooth's ears. At the last minute, fussy about details, I noticed that four small yellow feathers were placed on blue stems extending from Tooth Fairy's head. I made those by sticking bits of yellow feathers on

blue pipe cleaners I then inserted and glued to the top of the headdress, under the layers of feathers, to give the impression that they really came out of the stems in the plumage of the head.

To give a less cartoony finish to my head plumage, I finish painted some areas with acrylic paint, trying to recreate as closely as possible the visuals of *Rise of the Guardians*. The headdress of my costume was now completed. I made some makeup tests and I was very happy with the result.

Next, I had to start working on what was to be the longest and most grueling part, the making of my "Tooth Fairy" costume.

Detail of head piece (top left and right). "Toothianna" from *Rise of the Guardians* (top center) Image: Dreamworks Animation.

Starting from a blue bodysuit made of spandex, I had to decide how to recreate "Toothianna's" plumage for it to be as accurate as possible and as clean as possible. I first got inspired on the net by viewing many pro and con examples of some "Tooth Fairy" costumes that were made by other cosplayers and costumers. The full bodysuit was of course frequently used, but the techniques employed to recreate the plumage were almost always different, with several different results for each of them.

Painting the feathers directly on the fabric of the bodysuit was unthinkable to me, because I found that in many cases, it ended up looking like scales and did not sufficiently recreate the illusion of feathers. I also came across some versions crafted



Finished front of "Tooth Fairy" body suit.

with real feathers or colorful artificial feathers. That was not an option for me either because I did not wish to stick feathers directly on the suit and risk seeing my costume deteriorate with time. The maintenance of a costume is very important to me. I believed that to entirely cover the bodysuit with feathers would not be ideal if one day I wanted to wash my costume. Not being able to wash it from time to time, it would not be very clean after a while and would quickly become unusable or I would have to make it all over again eventually.

The use of feathers on many "Tooth Fairy" costumes I've seen almost always ended up giving an inflated or too fluffy effect, almost hairy looking. Observing "Tooth's" plumage closely, we can see that it is very smooth and not as fluffy as some creature's plumage. The colors in her feathers gently melt and change gradually, which is a difficult result to obtain when you have only a limited choice of colors for craft feathers sold on the market. It would have been possible to paint them after, but however, the original problem still remained. I wanted to avoid using feathers on the bodysuit for the sake of cleanliness, sustainability and resemblance to the original design.

My solution was to make feathers myself by cutting them out of a colored fabric, then hand sew them one by one on the bodysuit and to paint them one by one, once they were all set. The idea was crazy and I was already visualizing the amount of work, but for me it was a necessary evil if I wanted my costume to be perfect in my own



Finished back of "Tooth Fairy" body suit.

eyes. In addition, feathers made out of fabric would be easier to maintain and would set more firmly and permanently on the bodysuit, unlike real feathers or artificial feathers.

I used some blue Chinese silk and I cut over a thousand feathers by hand. Then, to prevent the fabric feathers from fraying on the edges, my technique has been to coat the contour of each one of them with a fine line of clear nail polish. Again, I had to finish each feather, one after another, and to let them rest on a flat surface for the nail polish to dry.



Painted Chinese silk feathers hand-sewn to leotard.



Using prosthesis to shape arm for sewing on feathers.

The longer part was yet to come. Once most of my feathers were cut and sealed, I started hand sewing them on my bodysuit. At the time I sewed the feathers while I was wearing the suit (among other things, to sew the feathers on the legs), because I wanted to make sure every feather was in the right place on my body and that they all overlapped well. However, for the majority of the work (mainly, for the torso) I inserted a pillow covered with a sheet of rigid plastic in the bodysuit and I sewed the fabric feathers on it.

The date of the first convention to which I intended to wear this costume was pretty close. I had to work on the costume anytime I could and for as long as I could. When I needed some more feathers to continue my work, I had to go buy more Chinese silk to make another batch and repeat the same process all over again. I cut more feathers and sealed them before continuing to sew.

To set the feathers on the arms of my costume, I borrowed my cousin's prosthesis that I inserted into the sleeve to be able to sew it. To avoid problems of friction between the legs and under the arms while wearing and going around with my costume, I left the bodysuit without feathers on those zones. In addition, to be able to sit down without fear of damaging the feathers and because the surface of the "Toothiana's" arms had to be very smooth, I also left those areas without feathers.

In the end, I've sewn precisely 1,243 feathers to cover my bodysuit, from the ankles to the neck. I could finally see my costume taking shape and the result so far pleased me enormously.

The next step was making the "Tooth Fairy's" tail. It was made of large feathers, very long and very colorful. I cut them in the same fabric I had used for the feathers on the body, before painting them with a mixture of acrylic paint and shimmering



Painted tail feathers drying on a rack.



fabric paint. Then, I had to fix them together with a blue ribbon and attach everything on the bottom of the back, just below the zipper. My tail was completed!

I used the same mixture of acrylic paint and fabric paint that I used to paint the tail to paint, one by one, all of "Tooth's" feathers on the body. (previous page) I tried to recreate the same look as in the film, so I had to be careful with my brushstrokes to recreate a perfect finish on the whole fabric plumage. Surprisingly, fibers of the Chinese silk helped a lot to create this effect and add a semblance of additional texture.

Finally, about a week before the convention, I was left to make my fairy wings and my little "baby-tooth" fairy (next page) that was going to be fixed on my shoulder, like a "mini-me." Twisting a thick steel wire, I made each wing and covered that with nylon. I painted everything with pink spray paint and I traced the thin lines on the semi-transparent nylon wings with a fabric pen and some acrylic to cover the base, the root of my wings. Once dry, I put all the wing parts together by gluing them and sewing them by hand until everything seemed solid enough.

To fix them to the rest of my costume, I used super powerful magnets I found at my job. They are used among other things for



Wings made of heavy wire and transparent nylon.

Back of "Tooth Fairy" showing tail and wings. Photo: Christine Mak.

installations in big box stores. I wanted to find a way to put on and take off my wings pretty easily without having to remove any part of my suit. I did not want to use any harness or elastic that would go over my feathers. The magnets I used were super powerful, so my wings would not fall off easily but they would still be easy to remove if necessary. I put four magnets inside my suit, and then I put four other magnets under the surface of my wings. They held great! I could easily move and go around without fear of losing them and they were very easy to put on and to take off.

Regarding "baby-tooth", I had time to make her a few hours before packing my suitcase before leaving for the convention. I made her out of two styrofoam balls and papier-mâché that I painted with acrylic and decorated with a little yellow feather. The small wings were made out of plastic film painted with vinyl paint. I stuck a coin under my "baby-tooth" fairy and another magnet under the bodysuit at the level of my shoulder to be able remove her easily to take some pictures and to put her on so she would fit right in place.

Right now, "Tooth Fairy" is the costume I wear most often to conventions. I would say that it is this costume that made my fame. Everywhere I wear this it always has a lot of success and a lot of great comments, especially among those who have seen the film, but also among those who knew nothing about the character or the movie. The makeup on my face and hands, and my pink contact lenses perfectly complement the look of my character.



"Baby-tooth" made from styrofoam balls and papier-mâché.

Tooth Fairy is probably the costume I am the most proud of. I will never get tired of wearing it and I love to improve it from time to time. I have already implemented several changes here and there, so that my costume is quite different now than it was the first time I wore it. Among other things, I added some shimmering fabric paint on the feathers and the head, so that today it shows more shiny feathers and a glitter effect that recalls the visual of the Dreamworks movie. I have also discovered a way to iron my fabric feathers to make them flatter and smoother between each convention. Sometimes the feathers crease, so instead of using an iron that would, for sure, ruin the spandex of the bodysuit, I use my hair straightener to flatten each fabric feather. It doesn't damage the paint and it makes them look all beautiful again.

In addition, over the conventions I've noticed other details that could be modified and I've had the chance to talk about how to improve my costume with some masquerade (costume contest) judges. I received a lot of advice to help me to modify what could be modified to make my "Tooth Fairy" costume even better. However, ultimately, this costume ended up to be exactly the way I wanted it. I really adore it, and a lot of people love it too. I could not ask for better than having the chance to personify this fabulous character.

Felicia Dussault, aka "Darkarnival Butler," was born and raised in Quebec City. She is a Visual Arts student at the Université Laval. She began cosplaying in 2011 because of some friends who already knew her interest in costuming and acting. She made her own costumes and props herself, since the beginning. She also styles wigs and she creates her own makeups. She obtained her international Master cosplayer title in 2014, and her main strengths are presentation/interpretation during masquerades in conventions and her patience for very complex and detailed costumes. What makes her different is her will to cosplay characters not everyone would think to personify. She also is a passionate artist; she sings, she dances, she paints/draws, she writes stories, she edits videos, she acts, and so on. Visit her [website](#) and [Facebook](#) page.

"I think that the most important thing in cosplay is not to win prizes but to give a good show!" -Darkarnival