

Feature



The Big Group Card Bethany Padron

Have you ever wondered what it takes

to pull off a successful big group entry? Here's one costumer's story.

In my realm of costume and con going friends; we pass about a concept we call The Big Group Card (BGC). We all have these metaphorical cards. Everybody gets one. The gist of this being: Once a year or so, one person gets to take advantage of the confluence of a majority of our mutual friends' presence at one event to present a big costume group.

When you have this epic costume group idea that just HAS to happen, you get to play your group card and these friends will join you in making it happen. It doesn't matter if it's not everybody's 'thing'. It just has to be a good enough idea to warrant investing your time, money and creative energies into the project in order to make the one person's vision a reality. Over the last five years, we've worked around many schedules, budgets, travel plans and mishaps to achieve three of these.

The first BGC, for Dragon Con 2010, was instigated by Aurora Celeste. This group involved 13 people in 6 States, 9 costumes, a litter and an inflatable globe. Dragon Con formerly hosted a "Dawn Look-Alike" Contest on Saturday evening. "Dawn" is a comic book character whose

artist produced a "Seven Deadly Sins" set of the character plus one "Virtue." We were going to recreate each Goddess and the accompanying set pieces from each print, All of which would enter at different times, and sides and end posed in a different way onstage to create a final tableau.

Once our cast was set, we created a closed LiveJournal group to communicate questions and progress over the course of the year. Affreca tested multiple wires for consistent winding roses to be voted on. Musical options were tested for time and appropriate mood. To keep coherence amongst the costumes, we all purchased the same spandex fabrics and the same color and style of wig. Despite the planning and forethought, some of us were finishing costumes in the hotel room.

The largest hurdle for this size of group at this particular event was choreographing that many people into their final posed positions. We would have no time onstage to rehearse and very little time during the con when all parties were available to run through



Left to Right: Envy - Kristen Moffitt, Gluttony - Jennifer Old-d'Entremont, Pride - Lauren Pedersen, Lust - Aurora Celeste, Wrath - Bethany Padron, Envy 3rd Place - Agnes Constantino, Virtue - Jessica Procopio, Greed - Leo d'Entremont, Sloth - Valorie Jennings. Not Pictured: The Muscle-Affreca - Will Salt and Peter Zellner, Death - R. Paulsen

the entrances. There is also very little free space of any size anywhere during Dragon Con. We turned to YouTube and paper dolls to create a walkthrough. I wrote up the walkthrough and ground plan. Aurora Celeste edited our music selection and filmed the tutorial. All of these items were posted to the group and reviewed before we arrived in Atlanta. It can still be found lurking about the edges of the internet on [YouTube](#).

Fiona's BGC, for Arisia 2014, was the 1920's styled Batman Villains. This idea was to reimagine the 1990's Batman film franchise villains as 1920's gangsters. This took 8 people in 6 states and was organized much the same as LJ but via an invitation only Facebook group. This platform allowed for much greater media communication by the chat, video and album functions and made it very easy to add the 8th villain, Harley Quinn to the set even at a later date.



Left to Right: The Riddler - Milo Martinez, Catwoman - Bethany Padron, The Penguin - Aurora Celeste, Mr. Freeze - Jennifer Old-d'Entremont, Poison Ivy - Valorie Jennings, Two Face - Megan McQueen, Harley Quinn - Kristen Moffitt, The Joker -Leo d'Entremont

We could also readily link our finished success to the blogs and cosplay accounts our members had already accrued.

With the document feature we could upload and edit documentation as it came through. Progress pictures kept the group excited as we moved towards January. It also made it easy to trade the task loads. I loathe tedious rhinestone-ing, so I traded Fiona for making pants. We also uploaded fitting photos and commented for those members who had no extra hands or eyes. This was especially helpful since we were taking artistic license to historical wear instead of straight recreation.

Most of us could access the media and information from multiple platforms even as we travelled and shout out for things missed, such as supplies for a last minute mallet for our Harley Quinn. Further information on can be found on this [project summary page](#).

My BGC, for Costume Con 33 this last year, 2015, ventured into original design. This one involved 7 people in 7 states. We set out to design and execute a set of practical yet high fantasy costumes from the *Old Kingdom* book series by Garth Nix.

The initial design process began by citing every physical description of characters and classes from the text, collating visual research of fan art, graphic design and historical garments and then designing the costumes from the skin out over a period of 3 months. For this, we used Google Drive and Documents to keep the

group on the same page aesthetically. This is also how my USD Department of Theatre manages production documents across multiple departments.

With the massive amount of research and documents we generated, it was useful to keep the extremely detailed costume research condensed in the folders and on a spreadsheet as we narrowed down the options for certain characters and made sure all pieces were accounted for. Multiple people can edit a document at the same time and leave notes for later consideration. Google Drive became very useful for its media storage capacity as we could upload and share musical options and the editing thereof for the presentation.

Google also has a video chat function called Hangout with screen-share that we utilized to talk through larger concepts and conducted fittings for people who were alone. Hangout has a feature that can draw onto video and screencaps, which made video fittings much clearer than still photo uploads.

This group expanded and contracted as more people could and could not participate over the first 4 months of 2015. I could easily revise the privileges of those who could view, edit and add particular files and



Left to Right: Paperwing Flight Clayr - Jolene Wells, Merchant Clayr - Jennifer Old-d'Entremont, Sabriel - Bethany Padron, Nine Days Watch Clayr - Lauren Pedersen, Medica Clayr - Leslie White, Lirael Goldenhand - Kristen Moffitt, Touchston - Milo Martinez. Photo: Ken Warren.

folders as they related to class and character. We then choreographed mail and transportation arrangements to smooth travel with the weaponry and other TSA suspect items.

To say the least, large choreographed groups require time, planning and patience. It can also help to have a designated “stage

manager” individual. One of the perks of large group projects is having a pool of people with a variety of skills and interests to delegate appropriately. Our groups are often full of people who have a dearth of forcefulness and don't want to mess things up. Sometimes someone just needs to say what's going on and there needs to be someone who will do that, even if it not the progenitor of the idea.

However, I've found that effective and fun Big Group Cards have a clear vision to begin with, that can sell the group into going along on the crazy costuming ride. While this silly system mostly came about from a general inability to say no; as we became successful with it, we kept going.

***Bethany Padron** has fostered a love of costuming in theatre and is the Costume Studio Manager for the University of South Dakota. Her research interests include costume crafts, non-traditional materials, and appendages. She holds a BA in Technical Theater from Creighton University and a MFA in Costuming Technology from the University of North Carolina School of the Arts.*