

THE BOOK OF COSPLAY - PHOTOGRAPHY -

IN FRONT AND BEHIND THE CAMERA

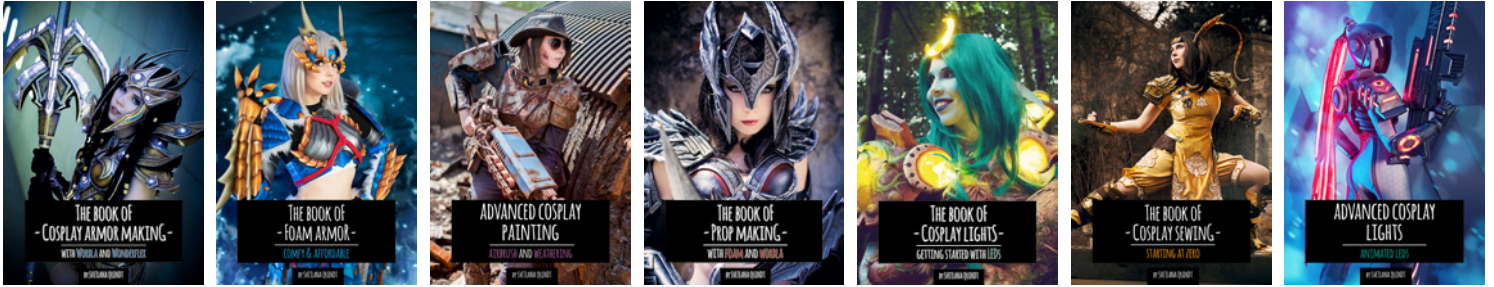


BY SVETLANA QUINDT

GO MAKE SOMETHING!

Interested in armor, prop making, painting or sewing? Check out my other books!

kamuicosplay.com/books



Cosplay is all about bringing your favorite characters to life. You can build your own costumes (or buy them), act like your hero at conventions, or even participate in contests! Sadly, after you've taken your costume off again, the fun is over.

Wouldn't it be awesome to have a lasting memory? With cosplay photography you can bring a fictional character into reality and create a scene that looks straight out of your favorite fantasy world!

Searching for the right location, staging a convincing scene, and adding special effects, all for a single photo, sounds like quite the task though. As a cosplayer, posing and acting confident is the hardest challenge, while new photographers often have trouble picking the right gear, setting the correct lighting and creating an interesting composition.

Don't worry though! This book is all about how fun photography is and doesn't need to be expensive or full of tech-

nical terms. Everybody can do it! I'll show you how to find good equipment for your budget, shoot at places that truly bring a character to life and edit your images with the right software.

This is a book for both cosplayers and cosplay photographers, and I hope it will help you feel more confident both in front and behind the camera. I'll try to keep the technical parts short and show you that taking cosplay photos is simple, exciting, and most of all - fun for every party involved!

Photography is art that is equally created by both sides. A cosplayer works weeks and months on a costume, while a photographer invests a lot of time to practice his or her skills. Both parties contribute the same effort into creating a unique piece of art, no matter the quality of the costume or the value of the camera.

Always treat each other with love and respect!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



KAMUI COSPLAY

We're Svetlana and Benni but most of you know us as Kamui Cosplay. If you're into making costumes, chances are you've already stumbled upon one of our videos, tutorials or books before. We consider ourselves very lucky to be able to make our living by helping creative people like you with their crafting dreams. We're humbled by all the love you send our way and try to give back as much as we can.

Thank you for your support by buying this book! Hopefully you will find it helpful and inspirational!



A camera is just a tool

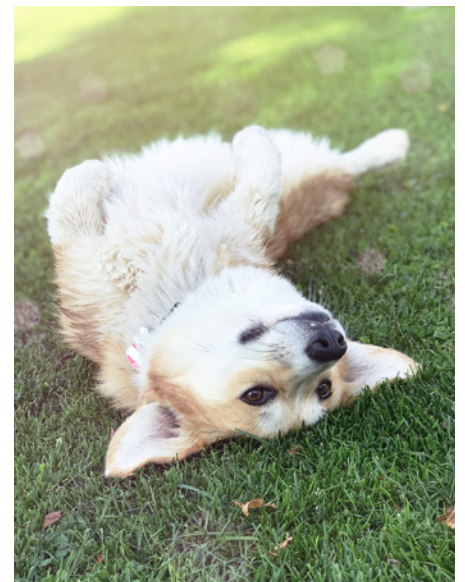
At first glance, photography seems to be all about expensive cameras, lenses and flashes. It can look very intimidating, especially if you have to work with a limited budget. Keep in mind however, that a camera is only a tool. A bad artist cannot create a good painting, even with the most expensive brushes, while a good one is able to create a mesmerizing piece of art with only one cheap pencil. Your equipment is not as important as you might think and a simple smartphone camera can already be everything you need for an amazing photo shoot.

A good photographer isn't defined by his equipment, but by his patience, experience and creativity. You don't need to spend a fortune to create amazing images and a good camera won't magically turn you into a professional photographer over night. In fact, many of the photos I use for my Cosplay&Corgi Calendars were shot with my smartphone. If you're smart about when and where to take your photos, it's entirely possible that it is already enough for you!

What a "proper" camera allows you to do however, is to work with less daylight (inside buildings or in the evening), offer you a variety of lenses for

all occasions and allows you to tweak every single aspect of your settings to bring the best out of every picture. If you're serious about getting into photography, you will have to upgrade to an interchangeable lens camera (DSLR or mirror-less digital camera) eventually. Their prices start at around \$400 - \$500 (for a quality product) but it's an investment you definitely won't regret. Before you can make an informed decision on what to buy however, it's important to first know a few of the key technical photography terms.

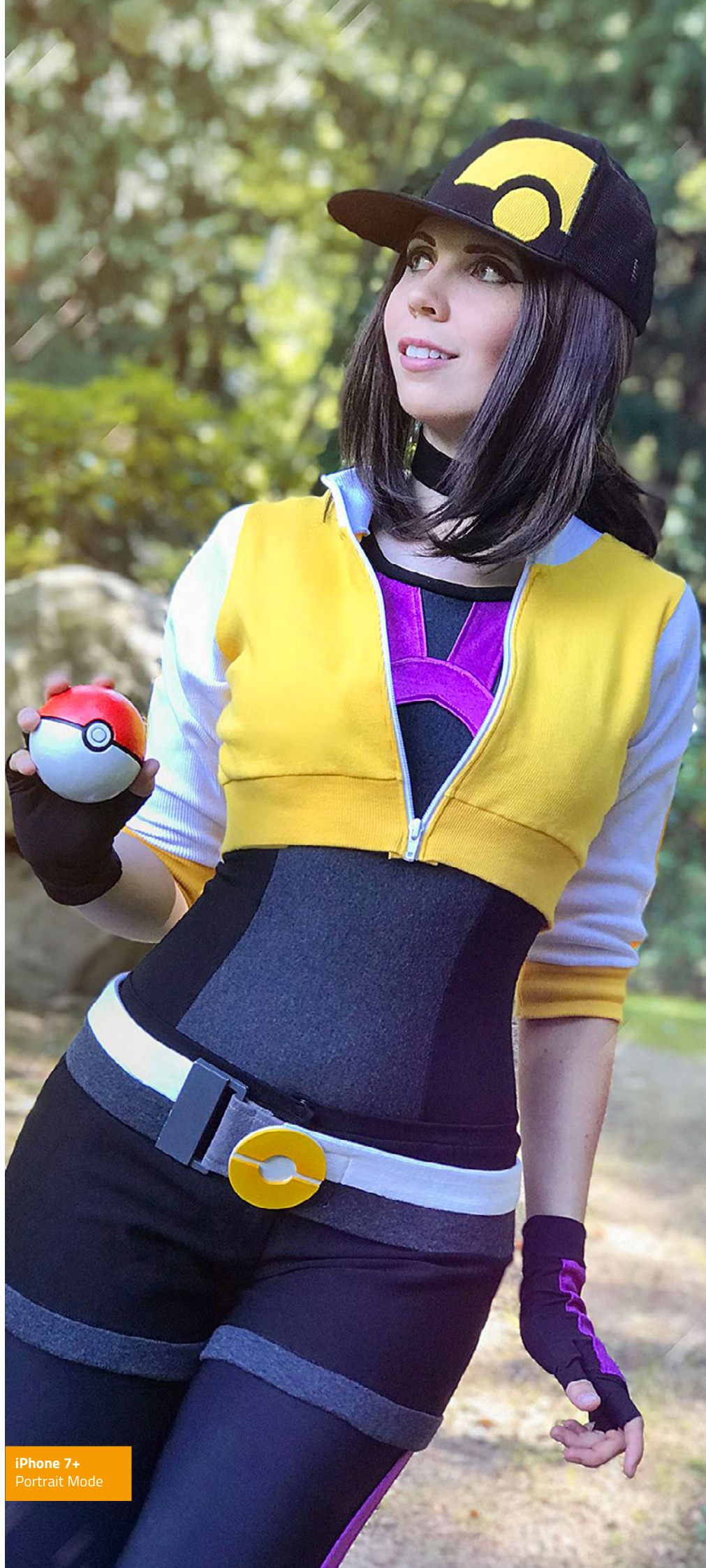
Don't worry, I'll try to keep it short!



NOTE

Don't be scared to take photos with a camera of lesser quality or even your phone. Sometimes it's simply all you have with you and that's totally fine! Benni and I did a few photo shoots with my iPhone 7 too. This is one of the results. The photo might not have the best resolution, but it is still good enough for a print and showcases the costume properly.

There even are a few phones that can take RAW photos (see next page). Aside of using simple apps to improve the brightness, contrast, and colors of your photos, you can also use more advanced editing software - but more on that later in this book.



iPhone 7+
Portrait Mode

A few terms you should know

While you surely can shoot everything in "automatic mode", understanding a few important terms and features of your camera is the key to great photos. These will help you to handle different light situations as well as improve the overall quality of your work.

RAW image files

Compared to JPEG (the standard file types for images), RAW files give you a lot more control over your images. They allow you to edit light, color and contrast even after you've already taken the photo. JPEGs however are already processed and compressed and carry only a minimum of information to stay small. This means until you've edited your photo in a dedicated software (like Photoshop or Lightroom), there are many possible ways your image could look. Using this, you can "rescue" photos that you took way too dark or too bright as well as change their brightness and color temperature. I recommend always shooting in RAW, even if it takes up a lot more space on your memory card.

When you're just getting into cosplay photography, you might encounter some cosplayers who will ask you for your RAWs after a shoot. This means they would like to edit the final photos themselves. It's completely up to you of course if you want to do this, and it's best to talk about it beforehand.



Resolution (in megapixels)

The number of pixels in your image is described by the resolution. One megapixel stands for one million pixels. The higher the resolution, the finer the details in your image. The image size increases as well of course. You won't need a very high resolution if you only upload your images to the Internet though. Even for cosplay prints you won't need a very high resolution. As I mentioned, I'm even using my iPhone camera (12 megapixels) for some of my corgi calendar photos and it's already enough. If you're looking at a DSLR however, anything above 15 megapixels should be fine. A good lens is a lot more important for the image quality than resolution anyway - but more about that later.





f1.4



f5.6



f16

Aperture (f)

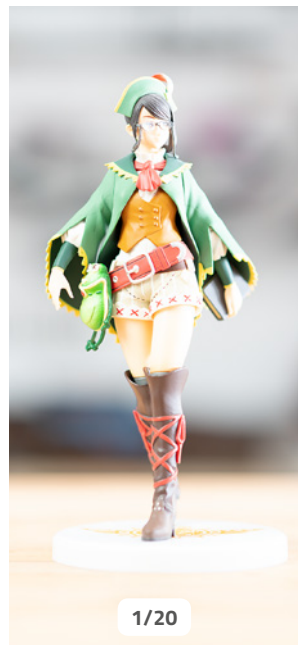
This term explains how wide your lens is open (how much light gets through) and how much of your focused object is sharp (depth of field). The lower the aperture number, the brighter your picture and the smaller your area of focus. If you set your lens to f1.4 and take a photo of your favorite Monster Hunter figurine, it will look crisp while everything else is blurry. On f16 however, the background is a lot more in focus too. Which aperture is available to you depends on the lens you use. Prime lenses (that you cannot zoom with) have the best aperture. My favorite lens for cosplay has f1.4 and is just perfect to place the model in focus and give the image a nice blurry background. In addition it allows me to shoot in the evening and still get bright images. Keep in mind that using a low aperture number for portraits might result in images where the nose of your model is crisp, while the eyes are blurry.



1/200



1/100



1/20

Shutter speed (in seconds)

Shutter speed or exposure time defines the time your camera sensor is exposed to light. 1/100 means you exposed your photo for 1/100 of a second. The longer you expose, the brighter your image will be. Your photo might also turn out more blurry, since you shake your camera more in a longer period of time. Just use a tripod like I did here for example. Give your camera more exposure time and you can take brighter images in the evening; set the exposure shorter (like 1/2000s) and you will get photos of people or things frozen in movement. If you like these kind of action shots, consider getting a faster DSLR that can take multiple photos in a single second. Since cosplayers are pretty limited in their movement however, you'll be fine even with a slower one too (1/125s should be enough for a clear image).



ISO 100



ISO 800



ISO 50000

ISO (in ... numbers)

The ISO number of your camera tells you how sensitive its image sensor reacts to light. If you shoot during daylight and turn your ISO very high, your photo will turn out white. At the evening however, a high ISO number helps you to shoot even in low light. Keep in mind that cheaper cameras have more trouble handling higher ISO settings. These photos might turn out "noisy", which means you'll get colored spots all over your image. You can remedy this by using a higher aperture and a longer exposure time. When shooting in the evening, it actually helps to use a camera that offers a higher ISO number. This means, the camera handles the "noise" a lot better and you are able to work even after the sun goes down. Benni and I always shoot outside without any additional lights or flashes, so having a high ISO capability is quite important for us!

Choosing the right camera and lens

Finding a camera that is right for you not only depends on your budget but also on what you plan to do with it. If you're just starting out, it doesn't really make sense to invest in high-end equipment. You also won't need a super fast camera, if you mainly want to take cosplay pictures and portraits with it. The camera brand also doesn't matter as much as their ads try to tell you. They all do exactly what you need them to do - which is taking photos (hopefully in RAW)!

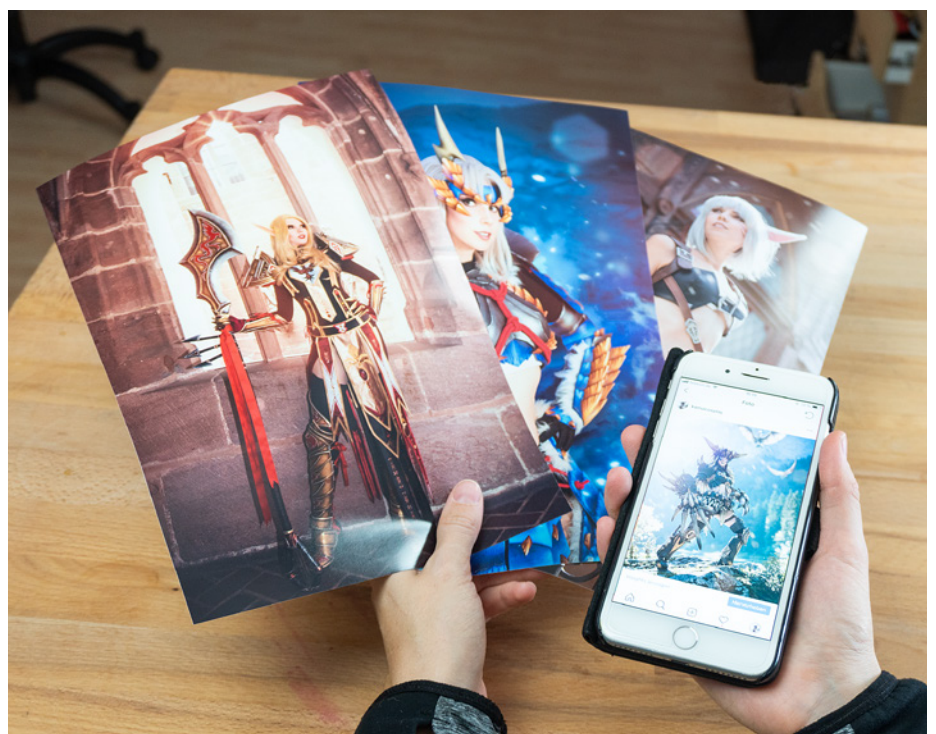
Picking a camera

While there are many different camera brands to choose from, Canon, Nikon, and Sony are the most popular (at least where I'm from). So if you stick to any of those, you shouldn't have too much to worry about. Whenever I am looking for a new camera, I start by setting myself a budget. With this in mind, I search for and browse through countless review articles on the Internet and YouTube. Then I pick whatever I like best and still can afford. Most manufacturers already bundle their camera bodies with a cheap all-purpose lens. While it may be good for progress and travel pictures, it's probably not really what you are looking for to take good cosplay photos. Luckily you can also buy the camera body only and save the money for a different lens.

What do you need?

If you are searching for a camera primarily for cosplay, you won't need one that can take a hundred images per second or one that has an incredibly high resolution. A cosplayer will most of the time stand still in front of the photographer and the final images will probably only end up on the Internet or on cosplay prints. No need to get the best of the best. Anything above 15 megapixel should be good enough to start. You will also work mainly during daytime, so no need to get the very best ISO for night shoots. Since you'll work relatively close to your model, you also won't need a crazy paparazzi zoom lens.

During all this, try to keep in mind that cosplay photography will probably stay "just" a hobby for you. It's highly unlikely that you will be able to make a steady income by taking photos of people who spend all their money on costumes or video-games. Unless you're already making a living with photography, getting a new camera is an expense, not an investment. Stay true to what you really need and don't try to search for excuses just to get better gear.





Lenses

When picking a lens, you have to look at the aperture number and the focal length. The higher the focal length, the more zoomed in your view becomes. 50mm is pretty close to the human eye, but 200mm is enough to take a photo of a bird in a tree. Here are a few handy tips!

Short on money? Buy third party or prime lenses! Third party manufactures like Tamron or Sigma offer high quality products for cheaper prices. You can also get prime lenses with a fixed focal length. While it's surely more comfortable to zoom during a photo shoot, prime lenses only cost a fraction of a zoom lens. You might need a bit more practice, but this way it's far easier to get some great equipment if you are just getting started.

Get an all-rounder: The very first lens I bought specifically for cosplay was a fixed focal length Canon 50mm, f1.8 for 100€ on Amazon. It's a great piece of equipment that served me well for many years. 50mm and 85mm are in general great focal lengths for cosplay photography, no matter if portrait or full body shots. An aperture of f1.8 is great to create blurry backgrounds and also does well in low light. Even today, many years later, I still work with a 50mm lens for almost every photo shoot! The only real downside of a fixed focal length is that you can't zoom. Whenever you want to get closer or farther away, you actually have to walk!

Get a wide-angle. If you want to give your photos a more dynamic angle or capture more of the landscape around your model, go below 50mm like a 24mm f2.8 for \$130. A wide-angle lens is great for full body shots, crazy perspectives or action poses. They are a little harder to handle than the portrait lenses though. The smaller your focal length, the more deformed your model will look, so don't go as low as fish-eye (under 15mm). I mostly use my wide angle lens to show more of the background and highlight the location I'm shooting in. If you're driving for hours to a pretty location, might as well show something of it, right?



Sony a7R II
50mm, f1.4
1/400s, ISO 100



Sony a7R II
24mm, f2.8
1/125s, ISO 1600

NOTE

Investing in a new lens can be risky. To avoid any regrets, it's helpful to visit your local vendor and ask if they also borrow lenses or allow "test runs". Many shops offer this service! Check if you feel comfortable with it before you lay down your hard earned money. There are also services that specialize in renting camera gear and lenses. No need to buy equipment that you only need for one photo shoot.

My photography journey

Most of the photos shown in this book were taken by my husband Benni and me. While they might look professional these days, it all started with a tiny budget and having no idea what we are doing back in 2009.



I first got into cosplay photography in 2009. After putting so much working into my costumes, I wanted to take it one step further and create pictures of my characters within a fitting environment. There weren't so many cosplay photographers however and it would have been too much effort to drive through half of Germany just to take a few pictures. Instead, I decided that I could do it all by myself. I saved some money from my part time job and got my very first camera, a Canon 450D (Rebel XSi) for \$450 (400€). It wasn't the best equipment, but all I could afford with my budget. I handed over the new gear to

Benni, and drove with him and my cosplay partner Selina to the woods for our very first cosplay photo shoot. We had no idea what we were doing but the photos still turned out way better than the dark convention hall shots we had before. We were hooked!

Despite working with a relatively low budget gear we practiced and improved a lot over the next couple of years. I became much more self confident in front of the camera and learned how to pose properly. Benni in return became comfortable with handling a DSLR, and trained his eyes

for great photo compositions. We also upgraded later to a Canon 600D (Rebel T3i) and then a 6D. All of this doesn't happen overnight of course. You can only create really good cosplay photos if you've taken a lot of really bad ones before.

These days (the end of 2018) we are working mainly with a Sony a7R II, which we used for a lot of the photos in this book. It's a great piece of technology, but, as I hope you'll understand on the following pages, it's the artist that creates art and not the camera.



Sony a7R II
32mm, f2.8
1/500s, ISO 100

NOTE

This photo of my Aloy costume from Horizon Zero Dawn is one of Benni's and my more recent projects. We just upgraded to a new camera (the Sony a7R II) and used this as our test run. Benni struggled a bit with our old equipment and just didn't enjoy photo shoots as much as he wanted. He had to get the focus right, choose a good composition, make sure all settings were correct and also had to check if my costume sat properly and my pose worked well. It was tricky to handle all of this at once. The new camera did a lot of that automatically and Benni could press the release button without worrying about his settings. Without that much stress during the shoot, we were now able to focus more on posing and composition. While we could surely achieve a similar quality with our old gear, switching to the new camera made our photo sessions just more relaxing and fun.

On the original photo (below) and the finished image (right) you can already see what we changed in editing. Benni had to increase the brightness, give the image a natural color tone and added some iconic buildings and creatures from the source game into the background. I won't talk about this shoot in the book in detail, but I still wanted to show it to you. You can also see this same location again at the end in my Nergigante example.





Handling a DSLR

When you're holding a DSLR for the first time, you will probably feel a bit overwhelmed. The manual is thick and complicated (better throw it away, quickly!), the options seem limitless and there are buttons *EVERYWHERE*. Don't worry! No matter which brand you buy, they all handle pretty much the same way. Here are a few handy tips!

Even if the buttons are at different positions, all cameras work in kind of the same way. They mostly have a wheel for different modes, a button to get into the menu and then more buttons for additional options like setting the ISO, aperture, and shutter speed. Well, and of course a button for focus and taking the photo. If you're like me and have no time (or interest) to even glance at the user manual, just go on YouTube and find a video explaining how your camera works. Another good idea is to go outside and play around with it. Don't worry, you can't break anything by messing with the settings.

Before you do this however, the very first thing you should do is go into the menu and tell your camera to take all the photos in RAW format (or RAW and JPEG). That's the way to get all the fancy photos!

P for Program Mode: The easiest and maybe the most tempting setting on your camera is P for program mode. This is the automatic mode in which your camera adjusts all the settings of aperture, shutter speed and ISO. You simply focus, press the shutter release and get an image. That's all. Most modern cameras have a pretty reliable program mode and there is no shame in using it if you're starting out. Sadly it doesn't work all the time and since the camera is just trying to get a bright enough picture, you're leaving a lot of potential untapped. In addition the results often vary a lot in brightness, aperture, and color which is bad if you're trying to get multiple photos with the same "feeling".

The complete opposite of the Program mode P is **M for Manual Mode**. Using this, you have full control over every aspect of the camera and can adjust settings like aperture, exposure, and ISO

by yourself. This is great if you know what you're doing but can go wrong very quickly if you don't.

I personally prefer to use **A for Aperture Mode** and set my ISO to "auto". As I mentioned before, aperture controls how much of your focused object is sharp and how blurry your background is. This way I can control how much of the image I want in focus and the camera makes sure the picture is bright enough by setting shutter speed and ISO automatically. When Benni is taking photos of me, he is usually busy trying to get a nice composition and giving me posing tips, so it's good that the camera takes care of most of the technical stuff.

S for Shutter Speed is basically like A only that you can control the shutter speed and the camera sets aperture and ISO. Use this for sport or long exposure photos.



Focusing

Now that we have made sure the picture will be bright and clear enough, we only have to **focus** and press the shutter release. Every camera handles focusing a little bit different, so I can't give you many tips but generally it's only a matter of selecting the right spot/s on the picture (preferably the face/eyes) and then pushing the trigger. Most DSLRs have a pretty reliable auto focus (**AF**) that will get you almost all the way, but you still have to make sure your aperture is set high or low enough that your entire model is sharp (or out of focus if you want it that way). I don't recommend using manual focus (**MF**) because it's really hard to tell if you've successfully captured your entire model on the tiny screen of your camera. It would be bad to go home after a shoot only to find out that half the pictures you took are actually too blurry (totally never happened to us).

Many of the newer, mirror-less cameras even offer automatic face or eye detection which keeps the focus on your models all the time. While it's definitely a nice luxury to have (if you've got the cash) you can totally do it yourself.

Keep in mind: Even when using program mode (P), aperture mode (A) or shutter speed mode (S), make sure to keep an eye on the other settings and see that they are not getting out of hand. Your camera will not shy away from setting your ISO or shutter speed way too high, which might hurt your overall picture quality. Luckily when shooting in RAW format you're able to "save" a lot of pictures that looked too dark or too bright on your camera. Even after years of experience we still mess up our settings and end up having to fix our pictures on the computer later. Sadly it's not yet possible change the focus afterwards.

NOTE

Some cameras have flip monitors with adjustable angles or even a selfie mode. While you might not need this feature on the first sight, it's actually really handy when shooting in extreme perspectives. Instead of rolling on the dirty ground, you can adjust the angle of your monitor and stay clean. Works the same from above too of course. Just lift your camera in your hands and keep an eye on your image by rotating the screen downwards.

Finding good photo locations

Shooting a finished cosplay in a fitting location can make all the difference. This can be a lonely street, a forest, a junkyard or anything else interesting around you. Don't get discouraged if you live in a really boring place however, there are some tricks you can use to help you out!

Fake it 'till you make it

It's highly unlikely that you live in walking distance of every perfect photo location ever, so most of the time, you will have to spend some time searching for them. A good place to start is trying to imagine the world your character lives in. Since this place probably doesn't exist, you now have to look for the next best thing. Think outside the box! You cannot find an actual Cinderella castle for your princess photo shoot? Why not go to a flower garden in your local public park instead? Need a post-apocalyptic wasteland? Go to an abandoned building, construction site or a junkyard. You live far away from anything even closely resembling Asian architecture? Try a Japanese garden! Google Maps is my number one resource for interesting locations in and around my city/county. There are also great photography communities and forums where people share their favorite spots. Granted, these will be a lot more useful when you're from a big city. If you live in a pretty boring place (like me), it mostly falls to yourself to find them. Consider however that you will need permissions to enter some locations.

Don't cry over all the awesome photo locations you don't have access to, and try to think positively instead! You can make a boring location a lot more interesting with some creative cropping. Remember, a photo only shows a fraction of your environment and leaves the rest to the imagination of the viewer.

NOTE

The location of my last Malthael shoot was the "Pearl of Żeliszów", an abandoned old building in Poland and part of the Pixelmania event. The building looked pretty tiny and insignificant from the outside, but is a true photography treasure from the inside. These so-called "lost places" are quite popular in the community and are often passed on in photography forums and websites. Remember to be respectful of places like these and always try to leave them exactly the way you found them.



Sony a7R II
16mm, f2.8
1/125s, ISO 6400



Make the most of it

A wide open field can be a great photo location and result in amazing pictures. For beginners however, it's often difficult to work in this kind of environment. Having something you can grab, lean to or sit on can be a big help.

Personally, I prefer locations I can interact with. No matter how cool an open area with an endless sky looks, nothing places you (or your model) more in the world you're trying to create than actually touching it. Raised elements like rocks are great to stand on, stairs with railings or windows give you plenty of options to lean against, and flower bushes are great to lay in, sit next to, smell or rub in your face. You know, all the princess stuff. If you ever feel like just standing in front of a backdrop looks boring, try interacting with it! Actually doing something can really bring your character to life and incorporating the environment like this may actually help you come up with interesting poses you might not have thought of otherwise.

Just standing around gets boring real fast. Using a variety of different actions and poses can make your character far more believable and your pictures more diverse. Try to think keep this in mind next time you're stuck at a dull location. Just because the environment looks boring doesn't mean your photos need to look boring too, right?

See my video about this photo session:

<https://youtu.be/uYt96ePzg1Y>



Canon 6D
50mm, f1.2
1/50s, ISO 320



Canon 6D
50mm, f1.2
1/50s, ISO 200



Canon 6D
50mm, f1.2
1/50s, ISO 200



Canon 6D
50mm, f1.8
1/40s, ISO 2000

NOTE

My friend Naraku once asked me to help her take pictures of her finished Captain Hook costume. Since I didn't have a lot of time, the only real location we could shoot at was a forest 15 minutes away from my home. It wasn't the most interesting place and basically only trees and a few rocks. Instead of just standing around however, Naraku hid behind trees, squeezed herself through rocks and used pretty much everything the environment offered her to highlight the crazy and obsessed personality of Capt. Hook chasing Peter Pan through the jungle. I think it worked out pretty well!

Taking good photos at conventions

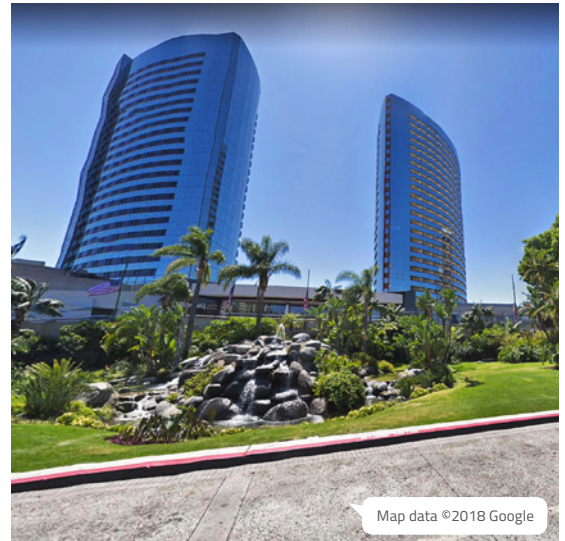
Sadly you won't always have the opportunity to go to a nice location for a photo shoot. Sometimes you need to do your best with the plain and crowded background of a convention venue. This doesn't have to mean that your photos will look bad though!

While it's usually nicer to go to a fitting location and take photos there, you often don't get the opportunity. Sometimes you wear a costume only once. Maybe you also don't have the time for a proper shoot or really want to work with a photographer or cosplayer that's only there at this one event. To avoid getting stuck in a crowded hallway with bad lighting, it's necessary to get creative.

I prefer to find quiet locations around the convention venue. This can be a lobby in the hotel next door, a hidden spot up an escalator, or just a nice looking brick wall. Don't be shy and walk around a little bit even when in costume. There are worse things than staring strangers. It might be awkward, especially when you are wearing a revealing outfit, but the effort will be worth it. The further you walk, the more likely it is that you'll find a spot no one else discovered yet. Use what I wrote a few pages back and crop your image to show just enough so people can imagine the scenery going on like that, even when it doesn't. I once found a "jungle" in front of a hotel at San Diego Comic Con for my Diana shoot **[1]**. It was basically just a tree and a few bushes in front of the lobby drive in, but it was enough for some convincing jungle photos!

Another way to avoid the craziness of a convention is to show up as early as you can. I know, getting into costume already takes a lot of time and forces you to wake up at unholy times. However, getting to the con before all the other people show up does have its benefits. This also goes for staying late. This photo of my Norn from Lineage 2 was taken at WonderCon at the Anaheim convention center (USA) **[2]**. You can still see the building of the venue in the back. It was already quite late, so there weren't as many people around anymore. The sun was already behind me, creating a lovely back light. Our 50mm lens did the rest and gave the background a nice blurry bokeh.

I had literally two minutes for the shoot of Yaya Han's Miss Fortune **[3]**. The location was the venue of Montreal Comic Con, which had some colorful windows at one side of the building. I shot Yaya in front of it and did my best to crop out the crowded hallway around her. Once done, I adjusted the colors and light a bit, added some blurry dots on top and the photo was finished.



Setting up a simple studio at home

If you don't have the possibility to shoot on location (or just don't like to go outside), taking photos at home works as well. Doing this, you can fully control the lights, are independent from daytime and weather and can manipulate and edit your photos a lot easier. And the best part: It doesn't need to be expensive at all!



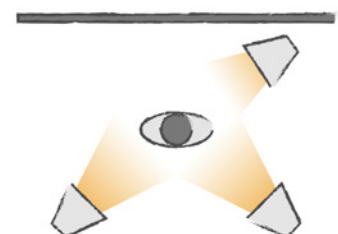
Canon 6D
32mm, f4.5
1/60s, ISO 400



I use my studio set-up mostly for spontaneous shoots. Sometimes I simply don't have the time to search for a location, the weather or season doesn't fit or I want to quickly get some photos of a finished costume at 2:00am in the morning. When I did my Symmetra costume for GamesCom a few years back, I didn't want to simply upload a bad selfie, so I did a quick photo shoot the night before the con instead! Luckily, a studio shoot can be super quick and really easy. I even had some time to sleep afterwards!

All you need for a studio setup is a clean backdrop and a few studio lights. I bought a background support system stand and gray paper roll for a total of \$50 (45€). You can buy these photo rolls (seamless backgrounds) in all kinds of colors and textures, but a neutral gray works best since it's easy to crop or recolor in the photo editing process. In addition I'm also using two or three studio lights for \$25 (20€) each. Keep in mind to buy those with a diffuser and at least 105W for the best brightness. I ordered everything straight from Amazon. Provided you have the space, this studio setup is really affordable, easy to install and truly worth the price. No need to buy expensive photography gear. Once you're done with the photo shoot, just roll everything back up again and store it away!

Focusing all the lights directly onto the model won't result in a great photo though. Instead, arrange your lights close to what's shown below. Use two main lights in front to brighten up your model and one light in the back either left or right to create an outer shine. This not only looks more interesting, it also separates your model from the background. Turn off one of the front lights if you want a more dramatic scenario or stick a cheap color-foil over the back light to tint the outer shine on your model's silhouette. Just make sure to close the curtains or wait until nightfall to have full control over the entire light situation.



Working with natural light

Don't want to buy expensive flashes? No problem! Working with natural light is the easiest, fastest, and cheapest way to create great photos. Sadly, you can't control the sunlight with your camera just yet, so you have to find the right time to shoot. Luckily it's really easy if you know what you're doing! Let me give you a few helpful tips!

I really enjoy working with natural light. You just grab your camera, strike a pose and take the photo. No need to carry heavy batteries and expensive flashes with you, adjust them, and find an assistant who helps you during the photo shoot. Even using a reflector (which reflects the sunlight) needs an extra person to hold. Benni and I rarely shoot for more than 20 minutes. Daylight is all we have, but also all we need. When working with natural light, the only way to control it is to pick the right time, weather and location for your photo shoot. Yes, this also means you have to be pretty spontaneous.

The Golden Hour

Choosing the right time to shoot is key to a well lit photo. The best time to shoot with natural light is called the "Golden Hour" and happens twice a day for most people - shortly after sunrise and shortly before the sun sets. During a clear day, direct sunlight creates really hard shadows on your models faces forcing them to squint their eyes. Working with these hard contrasts is really difficult. During the Golden Hour however, the sunlight is diffused, dim and very even. The air itself seems to glow. Shadows become blurred and this creates really smooth and pretty contours. It's like working with a natural soft box! Depending on your geographical location and season, the Golden Hour can be quite short however (it's called *hour* for a reason). So be on time! The sun won't wait for you. Well, unless you live above the arctic circle where the sun doesn't set for like 3 months.



Sony a7R II
50mm, f1.4
1/2000s, ISO 100



Search for shade

When you don't have the luxury of deciding when to shoot, you can always search for some shade or turn your back to the sun. I always try to avoid getting direct sunlight on my face as my features would create ugly shadows [see left]. By rotating away from the direction of the sunlight, I can not only create an even lighting but also get a nice glowing border around my silhouette. Don't worry if your back-lit pictures look rather dark on your camera - you can fix that later using the power of your RAW format.

Wait for cloudy weather

You're not in the mood to work in the morning or the evening? Waiting for cloudy or overcast weather might be more suitable for you. Having the sun hidden behind a wall of puffy clouds diffuses the light very nicely and gives you a great opportunity to take photos with natural light. While a bright sky with small decorative clouds might look better to the naked eye, it will create strong contrasts that are really hard to get out of your photos. So check your weather forecast and wait until the sky is well covered in puffy clouds. Not dark rainy clouds of course, just happy little clouds of happiness.



Sony a7R II
50mm, f1.4
1/160s, ISO 100

NOTE

We take many of our photos in the forest. No matter how bright the sun is shining outside, in there, the light is usually very even and it's possible to shoot at any time of the day. While not every character fits into a forest environment of course, these areas often offer more variety than you think. Just keep your eyes open! Rocks, trees, bushes and cabins are great to interact with and the next forest is (at least in Germany) just a few minutes away.

Posing made simple

Posing is an essential part of cosplay photography. Even when working with a great photographer at a perfect location, it's still up to you - the model - to bring your character to life. Just standing motionless in front of the camera just won't do (unless you cosplay a blob). In the end, your posture, hand and head position will decide if you look brave or shy.

Convincingly portraying a character in front of the camera requires you to know a little bit about your source material. Try to study the person or creature you are portraying, and keep his personality in mind when searching for signature poses. A noble princess will always stand up straight, move gracefully and keep her chin up. A mighty barbarian however will shout a battle cry, get ready for a fight or actually swing his weapon. Well, and a magical girl... you catch my drift. They have to look cute! Once you have a good feeling for how your character thinks and behaves, go ahead and practice posing in front of a mirror.

Try not to force your body into painful positions, but also don't shy away from trying out what first feels weird and awkward. Cosplay is about portraying fictional characters, who are often exaggerated, crazy or just out of this world. Once I get into costume, I usually spend the first couple of

minutes in front of a mirror, checking which poses look natural and what might work for the camera.

Small change, big difference

Look at my Pokemon trainer pictures below. While the first pose feels the most natural to me, it does not work great for a picture. I look like I just ate the biggest sandwich ever and feel great but also terrible at the same time. Now as soon as I bend one leg, put one hand on my hip and slightly tilt my head, it already looks a lot more sporty and active, right? Already much better! Now I only turn my body slightly more sideways (to get a slimmer posture) and raise the hand with my Pokeball in it. Done! I look like a proper active Pokemon trainer who is ready to battle! All done with only slight adjustments to my regular stand!

NOTE

It can be very effective to memorize a few key poses for different characters. During the last few years, I cosplayed so many confident warriors, that I already know how they behave and have a few poses I can just cycle through. When we're in a hurry, I can just quickly do them all and then switch to the next location. Now rinse and repeat. It helps me a lot to get a large variety of different photos in a very short amount of time.



Bring in some space

Posing is in general very difficult - you simply cannot see what you are doing and how it looks to the photographer. A great tip that helped me a lot in the beginning was to open up some space between your arms and legs and body. By resting your hand on your hip for example, you get some space between your arm and your waist. Instead of looking like a big blob, your body looks defined, slimmer and more interesting. Next, also bring in some space between your legs by standing wider or bending one knee (bend the knee!). If you focus your weight on only one leg and then rotate your torso a little bit away from the camera, your pose will be perfect!

When I'm shooting a new costume for the very first time and I'm not sure about the posing just

yet, I simply start by doing poses with some space between my limbs. It's always a good start and from there you can make more adjustments until you find the best pose.

You'll be out of ideas pretty quickly though if you stop here. Instead, add slight adjustments to your poses whenever you can. Shift your bodyweight from one leg to the other, spread your arms in different angles, adjust the positions of your hands, rotate your head and change the view on your torso. Also, don't forget to use props (if you have some) or interact with your environment. Swing your sword, lean on a tree or play with your hair. Try out as much as possible!

NOTE

Proper posing is a quick and easy way to improve your overall appearance. Stick your chest out and you'll look fitter and stronger. Turn your hip a bit more sideways and your waist will look thinner. Standing on your tiptoes or wearing heels make your legs seem longer. A double chin can be avoided by raising your head a bit. Try searching online for more specific posing tutorials. I only try to teach you the very basics here but there is so much more useful information to be found on the Internet.



Posing for portraits

Portraits are cropped closer to your head and therefore give you "less" space for good posing. That's not a bad thing - if you use it to your advantage! Instead of spreading your arms wide and showing off your props, you'll need to hold them closer to your body. Proper communication with your photographer is key. Ask how much space you have (or where s/he crops) and try to "stay" in the frame. An easy way to do this is to get more playful with your hands. Place them on your cheeks, comb through your hair, let them rest on your hips or cross your arms in front of your chest if this fits your character. It doesn't make a lot of difference here to adjust your legs, so try to focus on your upper body instead. Close-up portraits are great to showcase the detail work in your costume pieces, so use this opportunity to show off a pretty accessory or your mighty weapon.



Posing for men

How much male and female poses differ totally depends on the character you are portraying. They can be quite similar! In general though, if you want to look more manly, try keep your stance wide, your chest out, your head high and your posture straight. You need to look confident! Of course men can look shy, pretty or cute too, just express all of that through the right posing.

NOTE

Trying to hold your pose because you don't know when the photographer will take his photo can be physically and even mentally draining. You can't keep an authentic smile for several minutes, same as you'll probably die if you try to keep a really crazy fighting stance for more than 30 seconds. Instead, relax your body, close your eyes and ask your photographer to give you a countdown. On command open your eyes, stick out your chest and bring tension to your muscles. This keeps your posing and expression far more authentic and saves you from aching muscles.



Photo by [StudioZahora](#)

Authenticity is key

Google image search is a great resource for poses and ideas. I often use it to come up with realistic fighting poses or to check how to properly use a prop. I've never held a real bow in my life so I felt a little bit lost when I did my Aloy costume for example. Luckily, watching YouTube videos and seeing photos of professional archers helped me to learn how to draw and hold a bow and arrow properly.

After posting images of my test poses online, my followers also helped me a lot by pointing out flaws and giving me suggestions on how to improve. While I felt this kind of critique was a little bit too nit-picky at the beginning, I was very thankful for this feedback. At the end it helped me a lot to improve the quality of my work. In addition, I also practiced a lot before the photo shoot and did even test photos out of costume just with the bow in my hand. I had a very specific image in my head and really wanted to make sure I wouldn't mess up anything later.

Some poses also required a lot of balancing, which I first had to improve a bit. Once I was happy with the result, I finally got into costume and repeated all of them in front of the camera at a proper location. I even checked my references during the shoot and constantly asked Benni if he could show me all the photos he made so far. At the end all the hard work was worth it and I was very happy with the finished images.



Facial expressions

Aside from posing with your body, you might also want to try and put on the right facial expression for your character. To some people this might come naturally but to others (me included) controlling your own face is even more difficult. It's really hard to show convincing emotions when you're not a trained actor!



I admit, I'm not very good at facial expressions. Most of my favorite characters are strong and serious; always looking out for a foe, always ready to fight. Because of this, I end up having the same expression in almost all of my images. Well, and when I try to smile, it often looks fake or just not convincing. It's really annoying! Just like posing, you can try to practice in front of a mirror first and be prepared for your photo shoot. For me, I found that it makes more sense to try and feel what my character is feeling. For the photo shoot with my Barbarian, I actually screamed in front of the camera and shocked everybody around me (that family visiting the same castle on their vacation didn't see it coming - they probably still have nightmares). I tried faking a whispering scream before that, but it just didn't work out. Instead I took a deep breath and called for battle as loud as I could. It's a good practice to stop caring what other people think about you too!

When we went to take photos of my Monk in a Japanese garden, I really enjoyed the good weather and warm breeze in my face. It made me truly happy so the smile on camera was real. I smiled not just with my lips, but also with my eyes and brows which makes a big difference. During my Monster Hunter shoot I tried to imagine a huge monster running towards me, forcing me to get into battle stance and get ready to fight. I don't often use different expressions in my photos, but when I do, I try to get into the mood and keep it real and believable.

I tend to do a resting bitch face, have one lazy eye that is often half closed and my chin creates weird wrinkles when I close my mouth. Oh, and I always blink the exact moment someone pushes a camera trigger. Not the best conditions for pretty photos! There are a few tricks to avoid at least some of these problems.

Again, ask your photographer for a quick count-down from three for each photo. Relax your face and body and listen to the voice counting down. On "one", open your eyes, go into position, stick your chest out and bring tension to your body. Knowing when your photographer takes the picture is a big advantage. It makes your posing and expression far more believable and helps to get wide, open eyes in all of your photos. Too loosen the muscles on the lower part of your face, it helps to open your mouth just a little bit and let your tongue rest on your front teeth. Finally, I also avoid getting photos of the front of my face. I always rotate my face away from the camera and focus my eyes on something in the distance. For images I want to use as prints or book covers however, I look into the camera and address my viewer directly. When you want to recreate a scene however, look away. Wouldn't it be weird if your hero from a movie, comic or game would constantly stare at you? Creepy, right?

Make-up for the camera

The only time I apply make-up to my face is when I take photos or record a video. Not only does it help to make you look more eye-catching by highlighting your eyes and smoothing your skin - it also underlines your facial features for the camera. This applies to both male and female models.



It might sound weird to some of you, but you should not miss applying make-up before a photo shoot. Colors and shadows can look very different on a photo and facial characteristics might be blurred or even disappear in specific light situations. While your face might look totally fine in the mirror, it can appear flat and blank in the resulting image. To avoid this, it helps to apply a few highlights and shadows.

I personally prefer to darken my eyebrows, add eyeliner, lipstick and add contrast to my cheekbones. I'm not very good at contouring or make-up in general (not yet anyway), but Photoshop can always help with the rest. As a man you won't need just as much, but underlining your darker features like brows, facial hair and eyes will make a huge difference for your photographer. Don't believe me? Pay attention during the next movie you watch. Most male actors wear

make-up to enhance their most important facial characteristics. You might just have never noticed it before (unless you watch any of the Transformers movies - every man wears a *lot* of make-up in those). Since this book isn't about make-up however, I won't go into more detail here. Just know that applying it will be very beneficial for your photos.

Check out some YouTube tutorials if you need proper make-up tips!

Being comfortable in front of the camera

While it's easy to practice in front of a mirror when you're alone, doing the same in front of a real photographer can be a challenge. No matter if you're shy, your costume is uncomfortable or you're insecure about yourself or the quality of your work, it's important to look confident!

These feelings are totally normal and part of getting started. Opening up, becoming more self-confident in front of a camera and especially being able to come up with good poses on the spot takes time and experience.

A good start is to shoot with friends first. People you know won't set you under so much pressure and keep you good company. Even without proper equipment, pictures done with your friend's smartphone might turn out better than a professional shoot with an unknown photographer. A friend is honest, knows your strengths and weaknesses and will point out things you can improve. A photographer you've never worked with might not be that open and clear in his communication. Maybe he is just shy too! This however can lead to pictures that simply don't work.

Try to open up and start working with other people when you feel more comfortable. Don't worry if you struggle, don't know what you are supposed to do or feel lost. Every cosplayer felt similar the very first time in front of a stranger with a camera. Just be honest with your photographer and tell him or her you feel unsure and need some directions. I'm sure they will be happy to help!

As a photographer you can help make a cosplayer feel more comfortable by being open and giving clear directions and tips. You can suggest poses and even show them by posing yourself. Kind words and compliments are great boosts for self-confidence, so spread them carefully over your model like unicorn glitter. It would be a shame if an elaborate costume on a perfect location didn't lead to some great photos just because you weren't able to make the cosplayer feel comfortable in front of your camera. Be understanding that their movement may be limited, a huge armor painful to wear and a prop too heavy to lift. With all those things in mind, you will both surely create something outstanding!



Getting in contact with people

Finding someone to take photos with, no matter if cosplayer or photographer, can be difficult - especially if you're just getting started. Even with years of experience, a lot of people in our community struggle to find ways to collaborate with others. Here are a few tips!



First of all, be open and don't be scared to approach someone. If you like someone's work, just say hello, add a few nice words and ask if the person has some time. Conventions are the perfect places to find people for collaborations. Be polite but also understanding if you get a no. You surely also don't want to work with everybody, might be just busy or not in the mood. Also, don't get frustrated if nobody asks you on their own. If you really want to get some good photos, be self-confident and do the first step. You don't need to wear the biggest armor or the most elaborate costume but you also don't need the most expensive camera gear to stick out. Just say hello.

Second, set the terms! Don't expect too much from a short photo-session at a convention. It happens quite often that the result just won't be good enough to get published. If you've spent a long time shooting with someone though, it's not too much to ask for a finished picture. To make both sides happy, it helps to set realistic and reasonable expectations at the beginning of a session. Working with someone for two hours and getting only one photo is not okay in most cases - same as showing up too late or without a complete costume. Both sides should respect the time and effort of each other. For that it helps to agree on what to expect from this photo shoot in advance. You can write it all down via email or messenger and discuss it before the convention. Some cosplayers and photographers even prepare small contracts, especially for paid photo shoots.

Third, stay in contact afterwards! As a cosplayer, it's fine to ask when you can expect some results - just don't ask for them the day after the photo shoot. A photographer often has several projects in progress and edits more than one image at the same time. Cosplay photography for them is also very likely just a hobby next to their full time job and everyone has family, friends or cute corgis to take care of. Instead of getting upset that you haven't heard anything for several weeks, just write a short message and ask about your collaboration. One of my photographer friends, Mateusz from Studio Zahora, sends me previews of all the photos he took the next day, let me pick my favorites and edits at least two of them in the next few weeks. This is a great way to work together even after the shoot!

How to communicate during the shoot

Talking with each other and sharing your thoughts and ideas is an essential step to create a great photo. No matter if you're in front or behind the camera - it's important to speak your mind and tell the person you work with what you think, want and expect.

If you're in front of the camera, it's difficult to know if your poses look good or if your facial expression fits to the composition of the image. As a photographer however you don't know which poses your model is capable of or even if the light and tone you're setting fits the character. Therefore talk with each other! I always ask my photographer which crop/format he uses. For full body photos I can do more dynamic poses, go into battle stance or show off my weapons. If he's doing portraits though, I try to focus more on different expressions, keep my hands closer to my body or put my weapons in front of my chest. For horizontal photos I can do a wider poses, while I try to stand tall for vertical crops. Without proper communication here, we would both do something different and in the end it would not fit together. It also helps to take a short break every few minutes and look at the photos together. Doing this, the cosplayer can see if the poses she or he has done so far look good or where they can be improved.

If you're already close to your photographer, you might even develop a routine for your communication. When I'm shooting with Benni, we work for around 10 minutes at one spot and then he shows me the photos he took so far. This helps me to see if my posing and his compositions fit properly together. While posing Benni also gives me clear directions like "place your right arm lower", "take one step to the left" or "put your chin up a bit". Only the person looking through the view finder can give precise directions like these. Doing all this, we work pretty fast, can finish a photo shoot in a really short time and still have a large selection of different photos to choose from at the end.

NOTE

Always try to figure out how you want to communicate with each other before you begin taking pictures. A photographer might not give any directions because he believes the cosplayer knows how to pose. The cosplayer in return might not pose properly, because he or she thinks the photographer would give directions if something needed to be improved. A quick "how should we do this" talk helps to avoid these problems!



A few handy rules



Here are a few guidelines for smooth teamwork:

- **Always be nice and friendly:** Treating each other with respect and politeness is the base for any good collaboration. Always be friendly and understanding, especially if the other person says or does something you don't like or understand. We're all just human beings who make mistakes. Be honest when you dislike something, but always be respectful.

- **Value each others time:** If you need 30 minutes to get into costume or to set up your photography equipment, show up early enough! Don't make your partner wait. Everybody's time has value and letting somebody wait is very rude. Same goes for interrupting the photo shoot for a chat with friends or your photography assistant.

- **Set your expectations:** Don't expect to get five fully edited photos if you've never mentioned this to your photographer. Also, don't expect that a

cosplayer will bring a special costume if you've never asked them for it. Don't only set the time and location for a photo session, but also talk about costumes, special effects, tone or photo editing. Talk about how many photos you plan to make and the amount of time you need to deliver them. A rough estimate is enough of course.

- **Don't ask for style changes:** Each photographer has a specific style, same as each cosplayer has specific costume preferences. Don't ask them to change those. If you want to shoot a different costume or prefer a different style of photo, ask someone else. Asking an artist to change the style they have worked hard to establish can be quite rude.

- **Do not touch:** Never touch the camera of a photographer or the costume of a cosplayer without permission. Both are equally valuable to both sides and should be treated very carefully.

NOTE

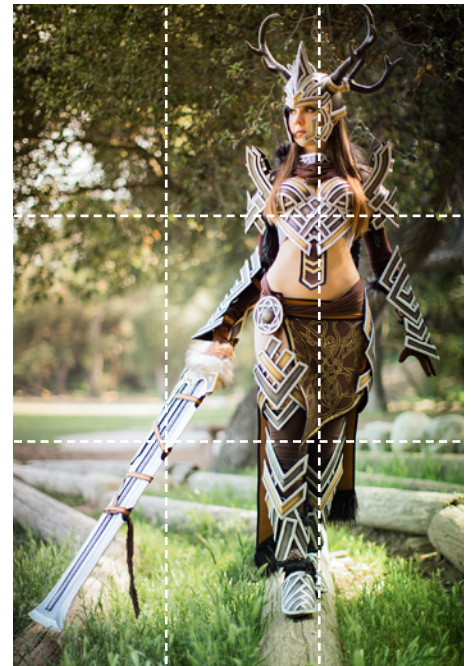
A collaboration between a cosplayer and a photographer should be always be based on trust, politeness and respect for each other. You don't need to work with everybody and you don't owe anybody anything. If you have a weird feeling about someone, don't be afraid to say no. Never do anything you are not 100% comfortable with.

Composing a pretty image

Composing an interesting scene is probably the most difficult task about cosplay photography. It's all about finding the right angle, where to place the cosplayer in the scenery and what type of crop to choose. Only with experience will you be able to tell why one photo looks good while another doesn't. If you're just starting out, here are a few key concepts you can keep in mind that will definitely help to boost your images to the next level.

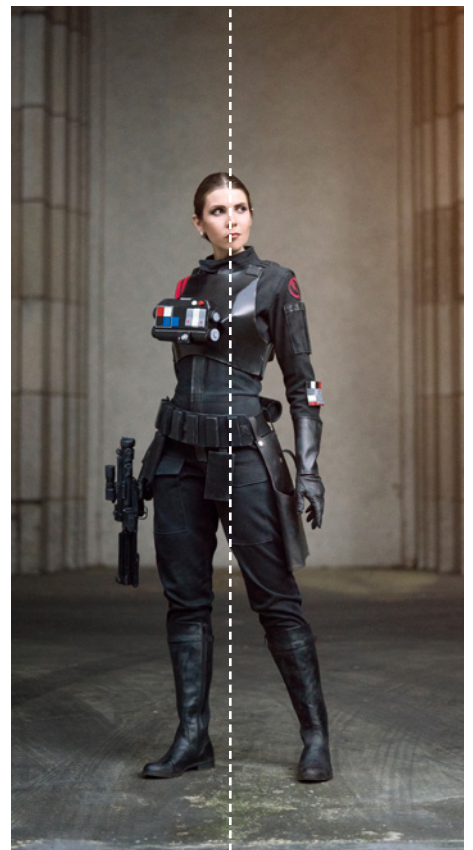
Rule of Thirds

No idea where to place the model in your picture? Why not give the "Rule of Thirds" a try? Divide your frame into nine equal rectangles by pulling two lines across horizontally and vertically. Many cameras actually allow you to display such a grid over your view finder as guide. Now try to position the most important elements of your photo (usually the cosplayers face or body) along those lines. Avoid placing them right in the center or too much to the side because this might make your image look weird and out of balance. Using these guidelines however will lead to a more constructed and well balanced image. Whenever you're unsure about where to place your model, give the "Rule of Thirds" a try. Even if it doesn't lead to the most creative photo, it's a safe road to travel on!



Center and Symmetry

If you decide to place your model dead in the center of your image, try to create a symmetry in your background to make the image even more impactful. Search around your photo location and place your model in front of anything symmetrical looking like a window, bridge or doorway. The resulting photo will draw all the eyes directly to the center of your image and highlight the cosplayer and his or her costume. I like to use these center posing shots when I want to show off a new creation without anything distracting from it. Keep in mind to take the photo from below eye level, so the cosplayer doesn't look like he or she has short legs or a way too large head.





Layering and Depth

You can make any image look a lot more interesting by adding multiple layers of depth to it. Try to keep some space between your model and his or her environment. Use a smaller aperture number to keep the focus on the person while the background blurs with a pretty bokeh. This automatically draws all the eyes to what's in focus! I'm using this technique mainly for full body shots, since it gives me a lot more space around the character. It would be a shame if you barely see anything of the surroundings, especially when you're at a nice location, right? Separate your image into foreground, middle and background to unlock the full potential! By adding further elements in front of your model (like dust or leaves), you are able to add even more layers and make your photo feel very dynamic.



Diagonal lines

Placing the model along diagonal lines is one of my favorite ways to get a dynamic looking photo. I mostly use this for vertical portraits, which are great for prints and social media posts. As you can see, the model is clearly separated from the background, stands in the middle of the frame but is slightly rotated. This works best when the photographer is either clearly above or below the eye level of the model. While this totally works anywhere, I mostly use this composing at conventions to get rid of the crowded background. All you need is a quiet corner and you're good to go!



Cropping

Cropping your image correctly is essential for a good composition. Always keep the whole cosplayer in the frame when doing full body shots. Never cut off feet, heads, legs or arms and try to leave a bit of space all around. For portraits you can go in closer and crop at the tights. It's important to let the cosplayer know what crop you choose so he or she can adjust the pose and keep arms in close proximity. While getting even closer to the face surely works in traditional photography, cosplayer prefer show off their costumes. Therefore it's safe to just do full body shots or portraits one cropped at the tights. This works with photos both in portrait and landscape mode.

Perspective

The perspective a photo is made from can be a great tool to underline the personality of a certain character. Usually it's the cosplayers job to pose, but now, getting yourself dirty on the floor, twisting your body in weird ways and holding a pose until your muscles ache is the photographer's job!



Looking down

Depending on the type of character, choosing the right perspective is essential. If the cosplayer is supposed to look shy, child-like or cute, take the photo from above eye level. This perspective will emphasize the cosplayer's head and make him or her look small. The face and its features will look larger and expressions will be highlighted. This is also a great way to crop out crowds at conventions and get a photo with a clean background even in tight spaces. Having the cosplayer look up at to the camera with the ultimate puppy eyes will melt every heart. As a photographer, all you need to do is to pick a higher place to stand on or hold the camera above your model.

Looking up

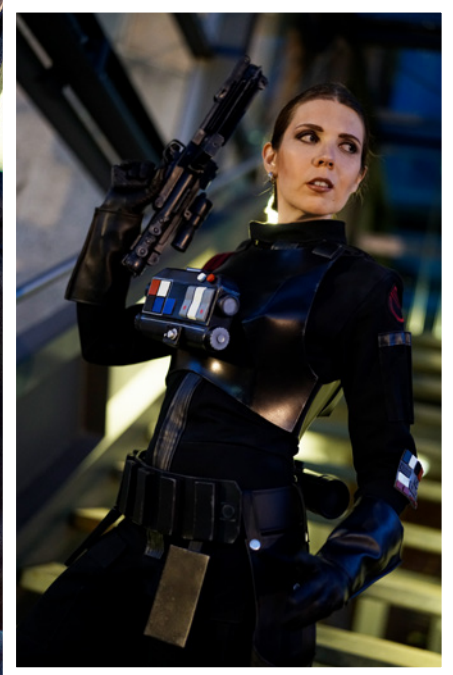
Strong and very self-confident characters benefit if the photo is taken from below. Villains look more menacing, victory poses more confident and battle stances more dangerous. Feminine characters also benefit from longer looking legs and a more elegant silhouette. It's a great way to feature dynamic poses like fighting scenes, dances or jumps. Just keep in mind that unless the cosplayer is a villain, it's best to avoid looking directly into the camera here. You don't want the cosplayer to "look down" on the viewer. Better focus your eyes on something in the distance. As the photographer, all you need to do, is to lay on the floor like a slithering snake, and aim your camera at the model above you.

Eye level

Well, and finally just hold your camera on the eye level of your model (slightly higher or lower is okay too) to get an unstretched perspective which is great for portraits or full body shots. These kinds of photos look very neutral and natural - just like you would encounter this person on the streets. The result might be not as cute or dynamic as the other perspectives, but it's a great way to put focus on the costume without distracting from it too much.



Sony a7R II
50mm, f1.4
1/125s, ISO 2500



Using photo editing software

Taking the photo is only 50% of the work. The other 50% is photo editing and it's here where your image unfolds its true potential! You can replace the sky (or the entire background), edit in special effects, enhance the posture or beauty of your model and even turn a sunny day into a rainy night.

Lightroom & Photoshop

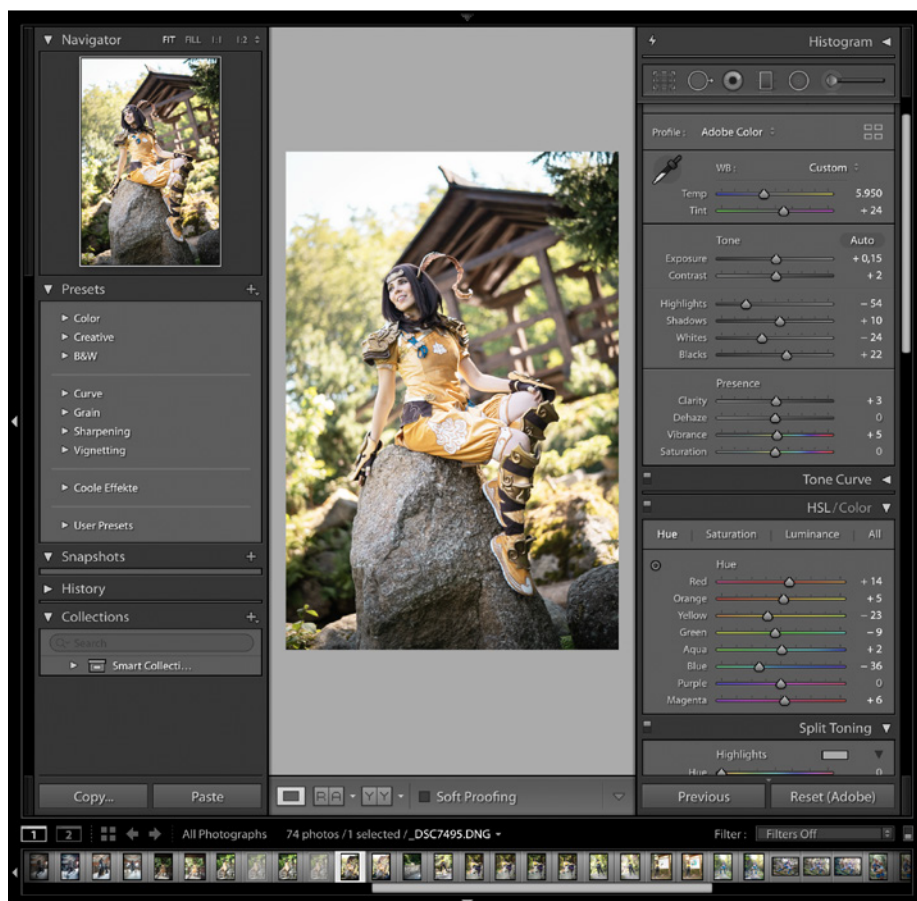
If you've followed my advice and took all of your pictures in RAW format, you're already good to go! You only need the right software to open your images. Most cameras actually come bundled with some type of image editing software, so chances are you just have to install it. Otherwise there are plenty of free and premium programs you can find with just a quick search. The most common one (and the one we use as well) is Adobe Camera RAW, which comes bundled with Adobe Photoshop. Adobe Lightroom is a great alternative and offers even more options. The Adobe Creative Cloud Photo subscription contains all these applications, but costs around \$10 per month. You can also look into Capture One Pro, Luminar, Dark Room or Raw Therapee.

When you first open up a RAW image in Lightroom or Camera Raw, you will probably be confused by all the options presented to you. Don't worry though, you won't need all of them. The main settings are exposure, white balance, brightness, shadows, contrast and saturation. You will already get very far if you just stick to those. Since I'm not able to explain you any possible program you might end up with, just play around with the settings or watch some Youtube videos to learn everything you need to know.

Once you're done with your basic edits in Lightroom or Camera Raw, open up your image in Photoshop and continue working there. You can remove blemishes, fix make-up and posture or even add special effects. If you can imagine it, you can do it.

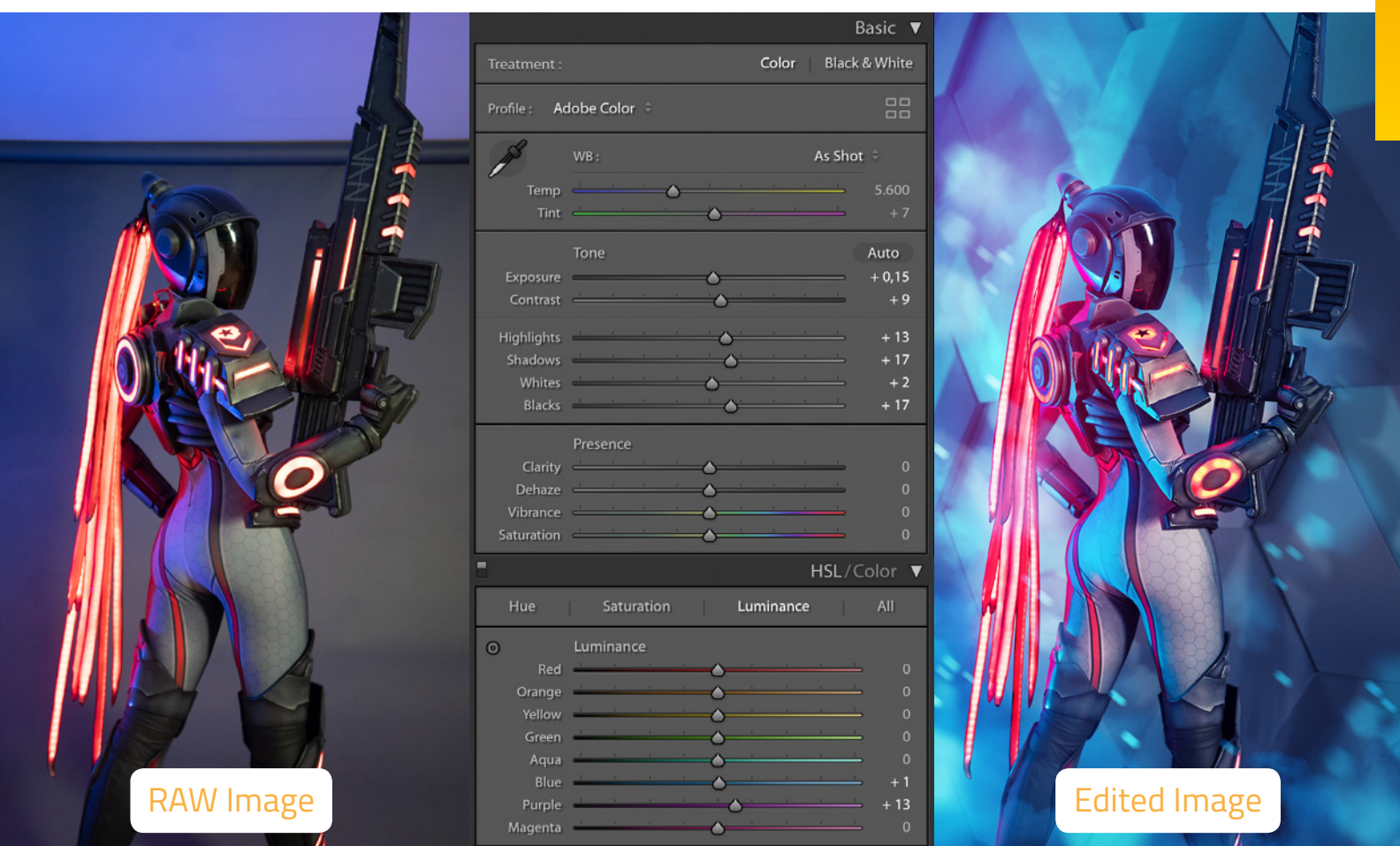
NOTE

Editing software can truly turn your photos into anything you want! The original photo here was taken on a sunny day in the afternoon. After playing around with the color temperature, brightness and adding some blue grading layers on top, the scene became much darker and more mysterious. Just perfect for a costume from the Skyrim universe.



Editing functions

I don't have enough pages to show and explain all the possible settings and functions Photoshop, Lightroom or Camera Raw offer, so I'll try to concentrate on the most important aspects here. You can find plenty of video tutorials about photo editing on YouTube. Moving images are better suited to explain these kinds of processes than a book. Instead I want to show you some simple tricks to improve your photos and make you excited for photo editing.



Exposure & white balance

Sometimes your photos look too blue, yellow or green and you only notice it when you've opened the images on your computer. By moving the sliders on the white balance (color temperature and tint) left and right you can directly see how the overall feeling of your image changes. Make sure the colors in your photo look natural! If your picture looks too dark or too bright, use the exposure slider to fix this. It's amazing how easy you can save an under- or overexposed photo with RAW! Now play around with the rest of the tone settings to brighten up too dark spots or change the overall light setting of the photo. You can also select a specific color and turn it into something com-

pletely different. We often change the greens in our photos to look more yellow like autumn leaves. Don't be scared to experiment with the rest of the sliders - you never know what you can find! If you compare your image now to the one you originally took, you will see that it makes a world of difference. But we're not done yet.

Mask and edit

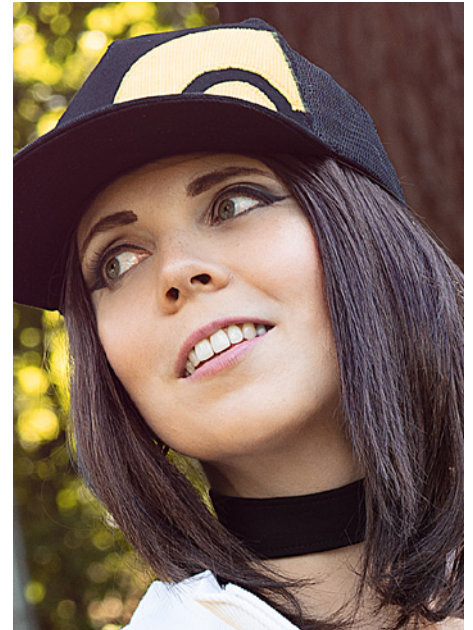
If you want to select only a certain part of your image and leave the rest as it is (it's called masking), that's a lot easier to do in Photoshop.

When you take photos in natural light and without any flashes, parts of the image often blend together or your model turns out too dark while the background is too bright. To fix this, you can "cut out" the model (or other parts of the image) and adjust the brightness for this area individually. The lasso or quick selection tool is great for this (every photo editing software has a tool similar to it). We often edit individual parts of my costumes to bring out the details. As you can see here, this function is also perfect to completely replace the background of a photo.

See a full photo edit from beginning to end:
<https://youtu.be/7oCul1Bd7tY>

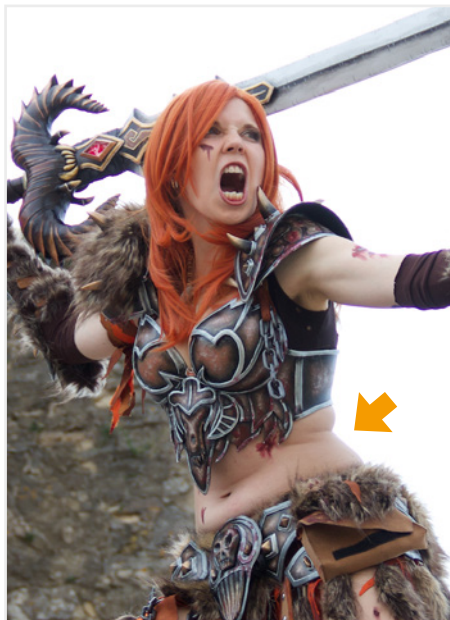
Face correction

You can fix make-up, dark bags under the eyes, wrinkles or birthmarks, but that depends on your personal taste. With my photos, I want to draw people into a fictional world with fictional characters, so I have no problem to alter or "improve" some aspects to help further this illusion. If you want to stay "all natural" that's fine too of course. The stamp and healing brush tools work great to get rid of small imperfections like dark spots, rogue hair or wrinkles. It's really tempting to use the "liquify tool" and completely reshape a face but you want to be careful that you don't change so much that you can't recognize the model anymore. I use it only to straighten my lips or pull up my cheeks. The newer versions of Photoshop even recognize human faces and allow you to reshape eyes, mouth, nose and pretty much everything else with just one click. Be mindful here however, especially when you don't edit your own but someone else's face. Always talk to your model or photographer before the shoot and agree on how much you want the photo to be edited.



Body correction

The liquify tool is also useful to edit the posture or bodyshape of the model. You are able to slim down waists, blow up the muscles, make a butt more round or the legs longer. Just because you can, however, doesn't mean you should. Cosplay is not a beauty contest and sharing an edited image on the Internet can lead to unnecessary drama. I use this tool only very carefully and mostly correct things that are barely noticeable. And even then I am very upfront and open about it (I even share before and after comparisons). Weird angles or wide lenses often lead to off-looking body proportions that can only be fixed this way. Some improvements like a slimmer waist or bigger boobs can be achieved by wearing corsets or push-up bras too. If you don't like how they feel however, it doesn't hurt do to this digitally instead. Try not to overdo it and be honest about it.



Special effects

Some special effects can only be added digitally. We've edited in monsters, snow, particles, magical runes and even placed entire fake castles into the background. This is definitely an advanced technique and takes a lot of practice but when you pull it off, it will bring your costume pictures to the next level. The original picture of my Aloy from Horizon Zero dawn looked quite plain and boring. After adjusting the light and temperature, adding a layer of fake rain on top and placing enemies and their shining blue eyes into the blurry background, this photo looked like a screenshot from the game.



I hope the last couple of chapters have helped you to get a general feel for what's important in cosplay photography.

In the following pages I'll tell you three stories of different photo-sessions and how I got some great photos of my favorite costumes. I hope you'll see that it's not always about knowing what you do in advance, but often just about having fun, being patient and getting lucky.

Wizard – Diablo III

I created my wizard from Diablo III for BlizzCon 2015. This event took place in the sunny state of California and while we were there, we wanted to use the opportunity and take some photos in a desert. Sadly, the spot we picked turned out to be quite boring. Getting a good photo would be a challenge!

Location scouting

Sanctuary, the world of Diablo III, features a blazing hot desert with only a few bushes and rocks around. There is also Caldeum, a bustling city that looks straight out of Aladdin. Looking through Google maps, it wasn't hard to find a desert like area around BlizzCon. Once we arrived however, the location turned out to be quite underwhelming (okay, looking for a desert I'm not sure what I expected). The sun was far too bright, the area wide open with barely anything to interact with and all in all it seemed boring and plain. Benni and I had to improvise.

First, we walked around the parking lot and found a little green area that was covered in shade. The light here was good enough to take a few portraits but it that was not really what we wanted to get out of this trip.

The photo session

We finally gave up and went out of the parking lot into the open area of the park. The sky was super bright and we had trouble taking photos without ugly shadows everywhere. We found an area with a withered tree and some bushes and took a few full body shots there. Then we walked up a hill and I turned around so that the sun was directly behind me. While this helped to make the light on me more even, the downside was that in the photo I turned out very dark while the background was still super bright. Benni worked with our 50mm lens set to f3.2. Even with a short exposure time and the ISO on lowest settings, the sun was still quite bright. We took a few full body photos of me but also some of the environment without me (with more natural looking camera setting). Later in Photoshop, Benni could stitch these images together to get a shot where I, as well as the background were equally well lit. He added in a more dynamic sky as well as a castle in the back on the hill.

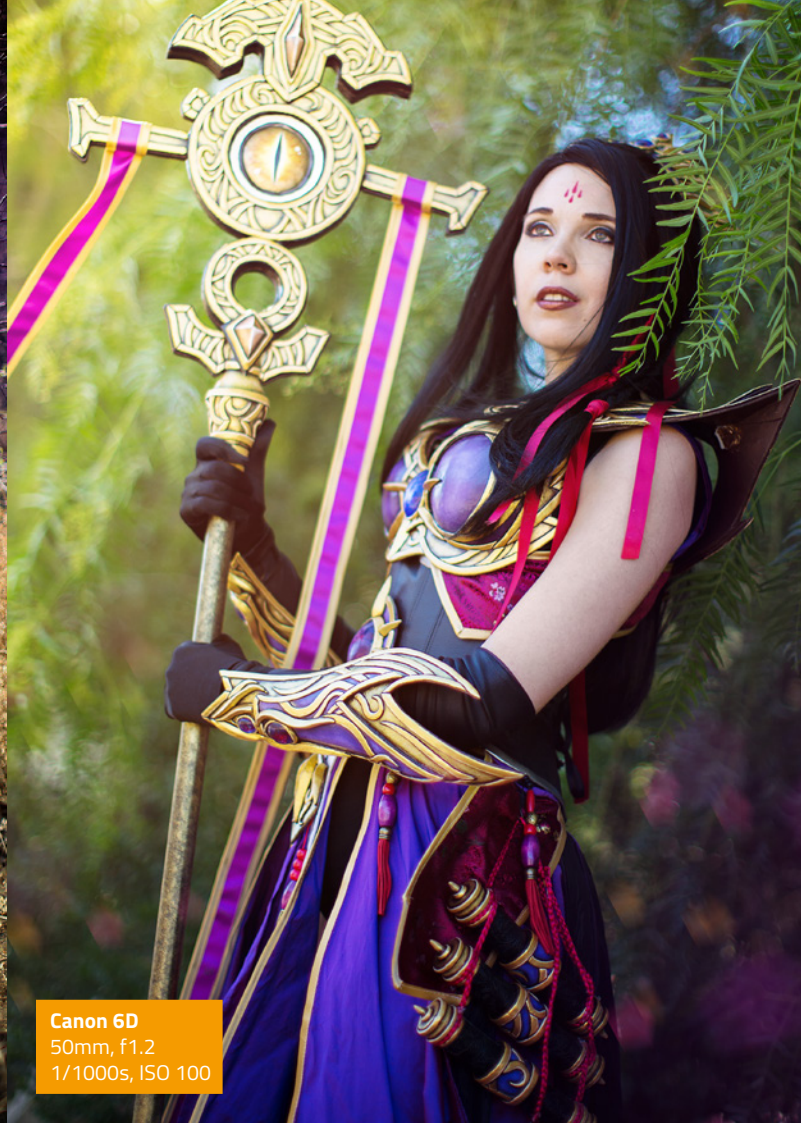
The location looked pretty disappointing at the beginning, but after exploring it a bit, making the best out of the light situation and editing the photos in a creative way, we were still able to get a variety of good pictures out of our trip.



Canon 6D
50mm, f3.2
1/1000s, ISO 100



Canon 6D
50mm, f1.8
1/2500s, ISO 100



Canon 6D
50mm, f1.2
1/1000s, ISO 100



Canon 6D
50mm, f1.8
1/1600s, ISO 100



Canon 6D
50mm, f1.8
1/2500s, ISO 100

Sole Survivor – Fallout 4

The world of Fallout is a post-apocalyptic wasteland destroyed by nuclear war. A long forgotten train station covered in moss, rust and graffiti seemed to be the perfect spot for that. What sounded like a good plan for a photo shoot though, forced us to improvise at the very last minute.

Location scouting

As always, I started with my location scouting on Google. During my search I discovered a photography community database for lost places and in there, was an entry about an old abandoned railway station in my hometown. It sounded perfect! Old rusty trains and plenty of other objects to interact with. We hopped in our car and drove to the marked location to check it out. Sadly, as it turned out, it was no longer open to the public. Frustrated, we decided to drive back home.

Luckily, we passed by what seemed to be a junkyard for old industrial metal on the way. We took a look inside and it was even better than our original location! After searching a bit, we found the owner of the place and he agreed to let us take some photos (I'm still not sure if he really understood why we wanted to take pictures of his trash). He didn't even ask for anything in return or gave us a time limit. The dream of every photographer! A few days later, we were all set and prepared!

Benni collected our camera gear, I got into costume and we drove directly to the junkyard. Aside from just working with Benni this time, I also asked eosAndy, a talented German cosplay photographer, to shoot with me. I met him a few times at conventions before, but we never had time for a proper photo-session. This was the perfect chance.



Canon 6D
50mm, f2
1/2000s, ISO 200



The photo session

Andy arrived on time and only took a few minutes to set up his gear. Meanwhile, Benni and I looked around the location, tested some poses and tried to find the best spots. It was already noon and the sun was quite bright and strong. Andy, who brought an external soft-box flash with him, had no problem with this however. When handled properly, a flash cancels out the sun and acts as your only source of light. As always, I just kept rotating between my poses and on different locations and we were done really fast. Andy and I were quite happy after only 45 minutes. During the shoot he constantly showed me the pictures he took, asked me for my opinion and if I had any other requests or ideas. He also gave me clear directions and was very patient, friendly and open all the way through the shoot. After we were done, he packed all his equipment and drove back home. At the same evening, he sent me preview files of all the pictures he took and asked me to choose my favorites. The resulting photos fit perfectly to the world of Fallout and we were both very happy. I don't often work with other photographers, but it was a great experience to work with someone as professional as him!

After Andy had driven home and Benni and I were alone at the junkyard again, we also took some more photos. Of course I talked with Andy about this from the very beginning and he didn't have any problems with it. Not every photographer would like the idea that you have another photo shoot with someone else at the same location. Always speak about stuff like this upfront. Unlike Andy, we couldn't shoot in direct sunlight and had to limit our work to areas in the shade. I also made sure to keep the sun behind me to avoid a strong contrast in my face or on my costume. You might wonder why I worked with Benni, when I already got some great photos from Andy. I use mostly of my photos for prints, book covers and more. Therefore they need to have a very specific frame and color setting. I prefer to create these kind of images by myself, instead of asking another photographer to change this style or edit too many photos. Also, I like to have a broad variety of photos and poses to choose from. We ended up taking another 325 images.



Photo editing

Over the following days, Benni edited a few of the shots we took together. Sometimes a great location is really all you need to create interesting images. The rest is just some slight color and light corrections. The metal junkyard was a very lucky find and I am thankful everything turned out so smoothly at the end.

Andy also sent me a few amazing shots a couple of days later. Benni liked one of them in particular and asked him if he could use it to create a fake advertising poster. He added some graphical elements and a bit of text and turned it into a funny Nuka Cola advertising that looks like straight out of the game. I love collaborations like these and hope that we can do more of them in the future!



Canon 6D
50mm, f2
1/2000s, ISO 100





Canon 6D
50mm, f2
1/2000s, ISO 200



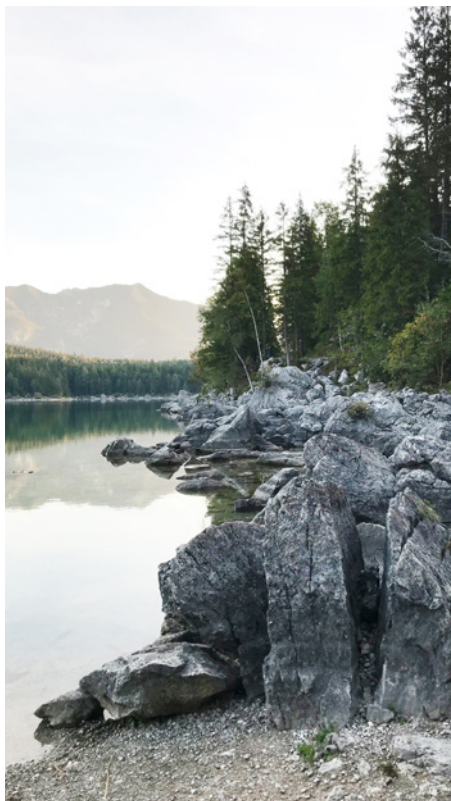
Nergigante – Monster Hunter World

Eibsee, a lake in the German Alps, is a breathtaking location with a natural wilderness, crystal clear water and stunning mountains all around. A perfect location to take photos of my recently finished Nergigante costume from Monster Hunter World.

Location scouting

The world of Monster Hunter is wild, full of untouched natural beauty and dangerous creatures waiting to eat you. It contains areas like deadly deserts, lush green jungles and lots of interesting rock and crystal formations. None of that was easy for us to find in real life. I sat down and searched on the Internet for location we could use. After some research, I found the stunning lake Eibsee in the German alps which was only three hours away from our home by car. I checked the weather forecast, booked a hotel near the lake, threw the costume into our car and then we hit the road.

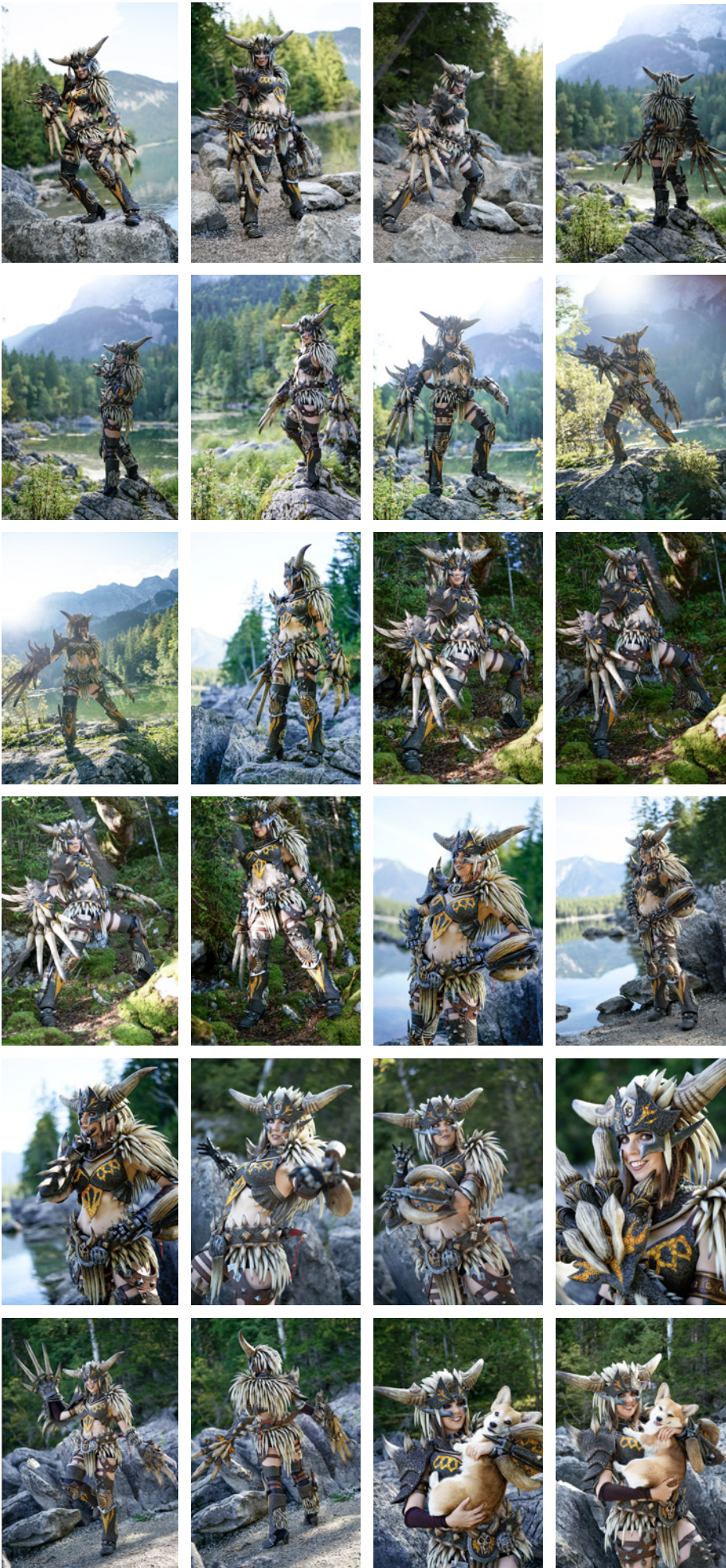
The next morning, we woke up quite early to be ready for the Golden Hour. The photo spot we picked was a mere 200 meters away from our hotel, so after getting dressed we just walked over there (all while trying to ignore the confused tourist stares). At the location, Benni, who was my photographer, and I looked around. We saw three interesting spots for the photo shoot: a large rock in front of a smaller pond with the mountains in the background, some massive rocks at the main lake, and a green area which was covered in grass, bushes and trees. All three only 20 meters apart from each other. It was a really convenient place to shoot at!



The photo session

Wearing the costume was pretty uncomfortable. I wasn't able to move my head properly since the helmet and the horns at my back would get stuck. The foam armor also turned out rather warm and well, I couldn't use my hands for *obvious* reasons. Therefore we tried to finish the photo-session as quickly as possible. Having already prepared all my favorite poses in my head, I discussed my ideas and the overall look I wanted to get with Benni. He unpacked his camera, attached a lens and I stepped onto the first rock to start shooting. Counting down from three for each photo, I rotated through my poses and adjusted them whenever Benni had additional directions. As always I did small variations of every pose to make sure Benni and I have plenty of photos to choose from later. Benni also changed his position and cropped sometimes horizontally, sometimes vertically. He switched between a 50mm 1.4f and a 16-35mm 2.8f lens for this shoot.

Once we were done with one photo spot, we moved to the next and basically repeated all these steps again. Same for the third spot. After a few more "creative" experiments with a wide angle lens, Benni attached his 50mm for a last time and took plenty of portrait photos of me. The image was cropped at my thighs, so I tried to keep my massive weapons close to my chest and even completely got rid of them at the end. We always try to get at least one good shot for every occasion - a full body picture to show off the finished costume, a portrait for cosplay prints, a horizontal image for website banners and YouTube thumbnails and some from closer up to see all the craftsmanship detail. We ended up with a total of 603 images to choose from - many of them just variations of course. Despite me being very limited in my movement and therefore limited in the amount of poses I could do, this was the best solution for us to get plenty of different photos to choose from. Back at home I selected my top 10 photos and showed these to Benni who then selected his favorites out of those. This way we ended up with a couple of RAW photos to edit that we both really liked.



Editing the final photo

After working for three full months on the costume, it was an amazing experience to finally wear it at a proper location and to get some amazing photos shot and edited by my beloved husband. As you surely notice, you clearly cannot compare these kinds of photos with a blurry selfie

or crowded hallway shoots. Cosplay photography is actually so important for me, that I wear larger costumes like the Nergigante armor only for a photo shoot, but only bring small and far more comfortable cosplays to conventions. This way the final shoot is basically like a last, bright fire-

work to celebrate the end of a long and exhausting project and a way to bring the character truly to life. The final photos however are a great memory that both of us are very proud of.



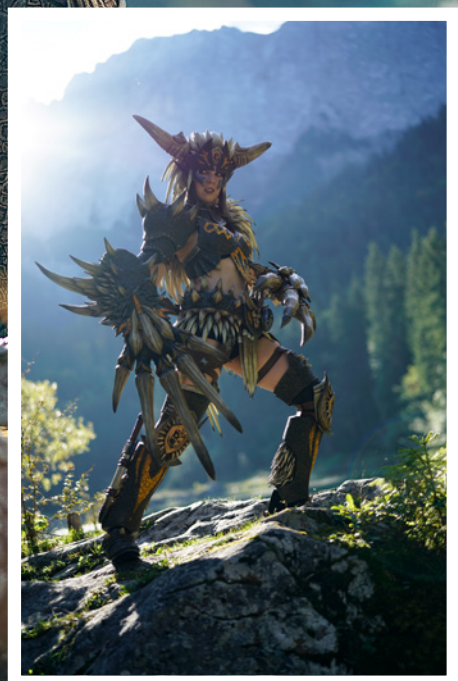
Sony a7R II
50mm, f1.4
1/640s, ISO 100



Sony a7R II
50mm, f1.4
1/800s, ISO 100



Sony a7R II
50mm, f1.4
1/2000s, ISO 100



Here we go, book #12 is done!

While it wasn't about crafting this time, I hope this volume still gave you some new ideas and inspiration to bring your favorite characters to life and enjoy cosplay even more!

If you need more inspiration, check out our website for tutorials, write-ups and videos:

kamuicosplay.com

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I want to share it in my gallery:

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