

# Cactus Needles

SOUTHWEST COSTUMERS' GUILD

Volume IX, Number 11

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## SouthWest Costumers Guild

meets generally on the last Sunday of the month, 1:00PM at members homes or someplace fun. The Guild dues for our chapter are \$10 per year, an optional additional \$4 for membership in the International Costumer's Guild, and \$18 to receive the International Costumer's Quarterly. \$8 to receive only our chapter newsletter. Send money to Kim Martin, she will notify the Editor.

**SWCG Webpage:** [www.southwestcostumersguild.org](http://www.southwestcostumersguild.org)

**International Costumers Guild:** [www.costume.org](http://www.costume.org)

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**(Deadline for submissions is the 5th of each month)**

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## **CORRECTION**

**MEETING: November 24, 2002 - Costuming From Start to Finish III - Pattern Alterations and Assembly\***  
Guild meeting/workshop at Bonnie's place. We'll discuss and demonstrate how to alter a pattern to fit your body, including alterations for bust size, and some basic assembly techniques.

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The Costume Closet  
by Randall Whitlock

Some people really do have monsters in their closets. Mine has a giant fly, a nightmare puppet, sorcerers fair and foul, a mutant killer whale, a mythical Klingon, and no fewer than three Dark Lords of the Sith.

It's okay, I'm a costumer.

Welcome to the Costume Closet, Connotations' new column featuring articles by members of the local SF and fantasy costuming community. In the coming issues, expect to see opinions, how-to's, Q&A, humor, and a bit of history.

For starters: Some of Randall's Highly Opinionated Thoughts on Hall Costumes.

You will see costumers' humans at SF conventions in essentially two venues: on stage at the masquerade; or roaming the hallways. Logically enough, these are called "Stage Costumes" and "Hall Costumes."

Stage costumes are presented at the Masquerade, which is a featured event usually held on Saturday evening. Stage costumes are meant to be seen only once by a particular audience, so the goal is to make a brief but strong impression on the spectator. Stage costumes are often larger than life, with bold features like latex makeup applications, lighting effects, broad wings, long trains, or tall headdresses. They will be worn only for a couple of hours, so stage costumes aren't designed for comfort. The model is willing to put up with a bit of pain or heat for art's sake. Stage costumes will be seen at a distance, so fine detail is often ignored in favor of broad impact. The stage already has the audience's full attention, so stage costumes are presented with a narrative introduction by the master of ceremonies, music, a short sketch, dance moves, or maybe a joke.

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# CALENDAR

**NOTE:** Information in this calendar is provided as a service to our guild please contact the individual organizations for verification of information.

**December 15, 2002 - Costuming from Start to Finish IV - Final Fitting\*** Guild meeting/workshop at Jean's place. We'll discuss and demonstrate final fitting, hem measurements, additional alterations of your costume, and help with any problems encountered during your project. Also annual officer elections.

**January 26, 2003 - Costuming from Start to Finish V - Accessories\*** Guild meeting/workshop at Jean's place. We'll discuss how accessories complete your costume and discuss shoes and other items to go with your costume.

**February 14-16, 2003 - Estrella War** An annual event of the Society for Creative Anachronism, held at the Schnepf Family Farm site in Queen Creek, Arizona. Armored combat, arts & sciences competitions, and a merchants' row to rival any renaissance fair.

**February 23, 2003 - Post-War Depression\*** Guild meeting at Stephanie's place. Decompress after the Estrella War and plan future activities.

\* Indicates a SWCG-sponsored event.

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## Costume Closet

(cont'd from page 1)

Hall costumes are an entirely different animal. They are worn by the casual con-goer for every convention activity. Hall costumes are meant for direct interaction with other fen, all day long. Practicality, comfort, and detail are the major priorities for a hall costume.

A good hall costume should be practical to wear. You should be able to move freely through all of the tight spaces of the con. A five-foot headdress may look cool, but you could find yourself swinging from the ceiling fans! A flowing cape is good, but only if you learn to control it without knocking down half the inventory in the dealer room. Thank the gods and the ADA that revolving doors are no longer common!

A hall costume needs to be sturdy and comfortable since you will be wearing it for many hours at a time, perhaps for many years and cons to come. It jolly well needs easy restroom access!

A hall costume will support a higher level of detail than a stage costume. People will see you at arm's length, not twenty feet. Hall costumes therefore make better canvases for display of fine bead and needlework, jewelry, or hand props.

So what works for a good hall costume? Media recreations (characters or clothing from film, television, animation, and

comics) are one obvious choice. These have several advantages. One advantage is recognition. Most people will immediately know what fictional universe you inhabit, if not the specific character. This has a downside as well since there are people who appoint themselves to criticize small details. Blow these people off! How much work went into their own non-costume? Beware, media costumes tend to attract the attention of muggle news reporters.

The media companies will sometimes help you (so long as you aren't making any money). Some Star Trek and Star Wars costumes can be purchased off the rack from authorized vendors. Film production companies sometimes work with publishers to make sewing patterns available. You can get patterns for Hogwarts school robes at any fabric store. Technical manuals, visual guides and fan web sites can provide valuable reference material.

Historicals are another good category for hall costumes. Bring out your duds from the SCA, renfaire, regency dance, wild west show, or Victorian tea party. Being real clothes from a real time, these fit the practical and comfortable criteria very well.

Closely related to historicals are fantasy and role-playing game costumes. These usually take some basic historical outlines, like a medieval or ancient culture setting, and add fantastical elements like artistic weapons, armor, and jewelry.

Strikingly slinky club wear, like one might find in the back of the Frederick's catalog, is popular among the femmefen after dark on Saturday. This look deserves an article of its own. As a fortyish, hairy, pot-bellied guy, I haven't done much work in the category myself.

Your hall costume can be a complete original, not derived from any imagination but your own. My basic Friday evening duds are usually a field uniform from some band of space traders/mercenaries/pirates whose story has not yet been written. This lets me combine some of my favorite clothing elements that are not usually found together, like pocket vests, puffy-sleeved shirts, hiking boots, berets, and capes. Don't expect the other con-goers to recognize your "look" at first, but keep your explanation brief. After a few cons, your persona can become as natural and well known as your real world identity.

Final thought: Mind your manners!

When you wear a costume, you become memorable. People will remember rudeness and discourtesy from a costumed person for years when the same behavior would not have been noticed from someone in street clothes. The hall costumer should compensate with warm courtesy, even (especially) when playing a villain. You may be one of the Padishaw Emperor's hand-picked Sardaukar guards, but this does not give you the right to shove people in the hallway or stick a prop lasgun in someone's back! Cluelessly rude people in mundane clothes will tug at your props and ask the same fool questions over and over. Smile with patience and show strangers that you are above this.

Just do it! Disguise de limit!

Randall Whitlock has directed three Coppercon Masquerades, serves as president and webmaster for the Southwest Costumers Guild ([www.southwestcostumersguild.org](http://www.southwestcostumersguild.org)) and hawks his medieval/ren/highland-inspired clothes and sewing patterns at [www.moirandalls.com](http://www.moirandalls.com). His stage costumes run to visual puns (Dances with Werewolves, The Dookus of Hazzard) while his hall costume efforts have included assorted originals and re-creations from Star Trek, Star Wars, and Futurama.