

# SOUTHWEST COSTUMERS GUILD

## CONTACT INFORMATION

*Southwest Costumers Guild*  
*PO Box 39504*  
*Phoenix AZ 85069*

[www.southwestcostumersguild.org](http://www.southwestcostumersguild.org)  
[info@southwestcostumersguild.org](mailto:info@southwestcostumersguild.org)

*We would love for you to join us. We have created many exciting opportunities this year to build and show clothing, costumes and/or craft projects. We plan to attend many events to show off our talents.*



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Layout by Diane Harris and Randall Whitlock  
Photos provided by Anne Monday, David Jeppesen, Jeff George,  
Randall Whitlock, Anna Caggiano

# SOUTHWEST COSTUMERS GUILD

*A Chapter of the International Costume Guild*



*The Southwest Costumers Guild is an exciting organization, for those who love all manner of costumes. We design, build, model, and appreciate the clothing of many periods and genres including Victorian, Regency, Medieval, Renaissance and Modern Historicals; as well as Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Animé. We invite any and all who have a desire for serious fun to join us.*

## **The Costume Closet: Some Thoughts on Hall Costumes**

by Randall Whitlock

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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.

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 fans, 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. Ignore them. 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 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. You don't need a long backstory. 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!