

Silicon Web Costumers' Guild

Silicon Web Staff

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President's Message **Kevin Roche***

We just got back from Worldcon 73 in Spokane, although Whirled-con would be a better description of my experience. The 2015 World Science Convention was a dizzying whirl of projects and opportunities for me as a costumer, performer and scientist, complete with celebrities, a “Sekrit Projekt” on a deadline, and wild late night shenanigans in a historic mansion...

It started last year, when I was invited to be the master of ceremonies for the Sasquan (aka 2015 Worldcon) Masquerade. This is a role I have aspired to for some years now, and I jumped at the chance to make my debut on the microphone, although not without some trepidation. My friend Marty Gear left some mighty big shoes (and

fangs, and cloak) to fill, and I wanted to do him proud. This would not be my first MC gig, however -- I’ve done it at a number of events including Arisia, Silicon and Convolution -- so I was reasonably certain I could rise to the challenge.

In December, David Gerrold, whom I’ve known for 30+ years, asked me at Smofcon if I could help him sort out wardrobe for him and Tananarive Due to wear while MCing the Hugo awards ceremony. We talked about some ideas and exchanged a few emails on the topic, and had a good plan in mind for what they might wear.

Then the Hugo finalists were announced, with the influence of the Sad/Rabid Puppy slate nomination campaigns, and what some have referred to as the “kerfluffle” began. I’m not going to dive into that mess here; the post-ceremony article on [Wired.com](#) covers it fairly well.

David contacted me again and asked if I could create (or cause to be created) a costume special effect for the start of the ceremony; he’d find someone else to implement the wardrobe plans.

All dolled up to MC the masquerade (official Sasquan photo by Olav Rokne).



Thus was launched my “Sekrit Projekt” (misspelling deliberate, in homage to Calvin and Hobbes, Buckaroo Banzai and assorted other tropes), one of the fastest stage costume builds I’ve ever done. About four weeks before Worldcon, David contacted me again: the party who was working on the wardrobe for him and Tananarive had failed to deliver, and could I help.

Fear my awesome Google-fu.

I knew better than to take on another construction project, but I managed to successfully remote-shop for both their outfits and dove back into the big build.

Everything was done in time for our trip (two large boxes shipped to Spokane a full six days before we left!), then we packed up our new enormous Travelers Choice Maxporter Cargo Trunks and headed to Spokane, where we landed in the middle of the smoke plume from Washington’s wildfires, and the whirlwind kicked into high gear.

Two days of rehearsal, and then the Masquerade. We had 45 entries with strong showings across all the divisions, plus a parade from the Kamikaze Kids (costumes made on-site in the Children’s Program area, ably coached and shepherded by

Persis Thorndike, and a real treat to see). Everything went pretty smoothly, the judges returned on time and we handed out the ribbons. You can see the list of winners on the Sasquan masquerade [winners webpage](#). The Official photos are posted on [Flickr](#).

Afterwards, I was paid one of the highest compliments I've ever received for an appearance on mic in front of an audience: I was told that not a single "uh," "er" or "um" came out of my mouth all night. I hope I can maintain that standard in any future gigs!

Once the Masquerade was over, it was on to the Hugos, and the next morning found me back at the INB Performing Arts Center assembling the Sekrit Projekt: Death.

David had asked me to build a Grim Reaper figure, "at least 9 feet tall with burning red eyes and terrifying." I read up on techniques folks used to build Reapers for their Hallowe'en haunts, and used some of them as a start for the frame. I also investigated the giant figures you see in parades (like Carnival). Those are usually "backpack" puppets,

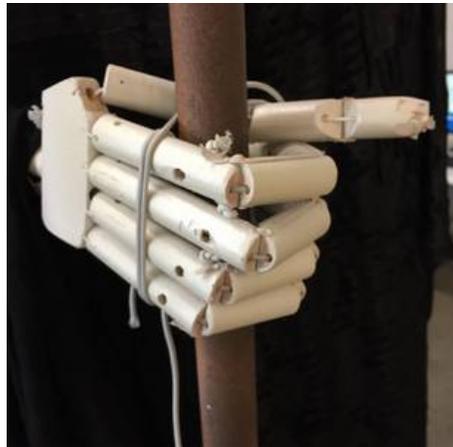


Above: Grim Reaper Frame (with Chicken Wire rib cage), assembled at the Tech Shop in San Jose, California.



which you strap on, but I don't like the rolling gait that technique gives the final figure. Instead, I built a rolling frame of PVC pipe as the inner skeleton (left), which was strapped to me with a belt, so when I walked, it glided along smoothly.

I also built articulated hands (below) that I could manipulate from inside, so he could hold his scythe with one hand and point and gesture with the other. The Reaper was half costume, half puppet, but it worked. His head was a hollow frame



Left: Assembled Grim Reaper. Scythe handle is heat-shaped painted PVC in 2' sections. Above: Closeup of articulated hand. Right hand ended up being tied to the scythe handle so I could reliably lift the scythe while operating the costume. Left hand fingers were free to move, so Reaper could point at the designated redshirt.

of wonderflex, draped in fabric, and with a flexible panel of Neopixel programmable LEDs inside, with an Arduino animating a set of flaming eyes which flickered and every so often blinked. (In a designed homage to Terry Pratchett, his cape brooch is an oversized version of the Omega pin seen in the Hogfather film.)

The result was something ten feet tall, a bit panto, but still very creepy. Backstage he invariably elicited a yelp of shock whenever someone rounded a curtain and spotted him.

The Hugo opening was thus: the "voice of god" in the theater announced: "Members of the 73rd World Science Fiction Convention, your Hugo Awards Ceremony hosts..."

Instead of the expected MCs, Bach's Toccata and Fugue in D minor plays, and the Grim Reaper drifts onto the stage, followed by his apprentice Mort carrying an hourglass.

The Reaper reaches for the Hugo on stage.

We hear a Star Trek transporter, and Tananarive Due appears on stage in a 1960s Star Trek uniform (ala Nichelle Nichols' "Uhura") flanked by two more women in ST-TOS security uniforms.

"No, you are not getting our Hugo Awards. You may have taken Leonard Nimoy and Terry Pratchett from us, but you are not getting our Hugos!"



Backstage with David Gerrold, Tananarive Due, and Death. Photo: Andy Trembley

The Reaper turns away, just as the hourglass runs out. He pauses, then points at one of the security team. The designated redshirt screams “No, not me! Take Scalzi, instead, he’s out there!” and she flees with Mort and the Reaper in pursuit...

From offstage, David asks “Is he gone? Is it safe” and then enters, in his wardrobe homage to the David Tennant, Matt Smith and Peter Capaldi versions of the “Doctor.”

Everything worked. The crowd gasped and roared when the Reaper appeared, and roared and applauded when he was held off by Tananarive’s “Uhura” and squad. David and Tananarive looked very smart in their

homage costumes. (Oh, and the Reaper neither tipped over nor managed to knock the Hugo off its pedestal, which were my big fears).

After the Hugos, Andy and I were invited to George RR Martin’s private Hugo Losers Party, held at the Glover Mansion. Let me tell you, there is nothing like a mob of SF writers, editors and artists riotously doing the Time Warp to lift your mood.

Oh yes: the Helsinki bid won the 2017 Worldcon site selection, now officially named “Worldcon 75.” I look forward to experiencing Finnish hospitality in two years. Visit their [website](#) for more info!

Coming up, in our neck of the woods we’ve got the Bay Area Rodeo, then Convolution, Hallowe’en, Loscon... So:

What are you doing? And more important: What Are You Wearing? I’m sure Phil would love to hear about it for VC, and your fellow SiWeb members would, too.



From the Editor *Philip Gust**

The Wild West vanished long ago, and today people know it only through movies and TV shows. It may surprise you to learn that a vast majority of the public in the late 1800s had no direct knowledge of it either. Yet, almost everyone in the world at that time knew what a cowboy looked like. How is that possible?

The answer is that there was also a very active mass media and entertainment industry in the late 1800s and early 1900s who aggressively marketed the image of the Wild West, at first as contemporary history, and then as nostalgia for a wilder but simpler time. The image they used to personify the Wild West was the cowboy, dressed in a Stetson hat, twill shirt, denim jacket, Levi’s jeans, a pair of chaps, and boots. The clothing worn by legendary cowboys – and cowgirls – of the time were iconic, and inseparable in people’s mind from the romance of the untamed territories west of the Mississippi.

In his article, “The Cowboy Hat: A Western Icon,” Don Reeves, who is Chair of Cowboy Culture at the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum, describes the history of this indispensable article of apparel in the late 18th to early 20th century, and how clever marketing by a hat maker named John Stetson forever linked the cowboy and his hat. Don also introduces us to various styles of hat worn by cowboys and cowgirls, and illustrates with examples in the Museum’s collections.

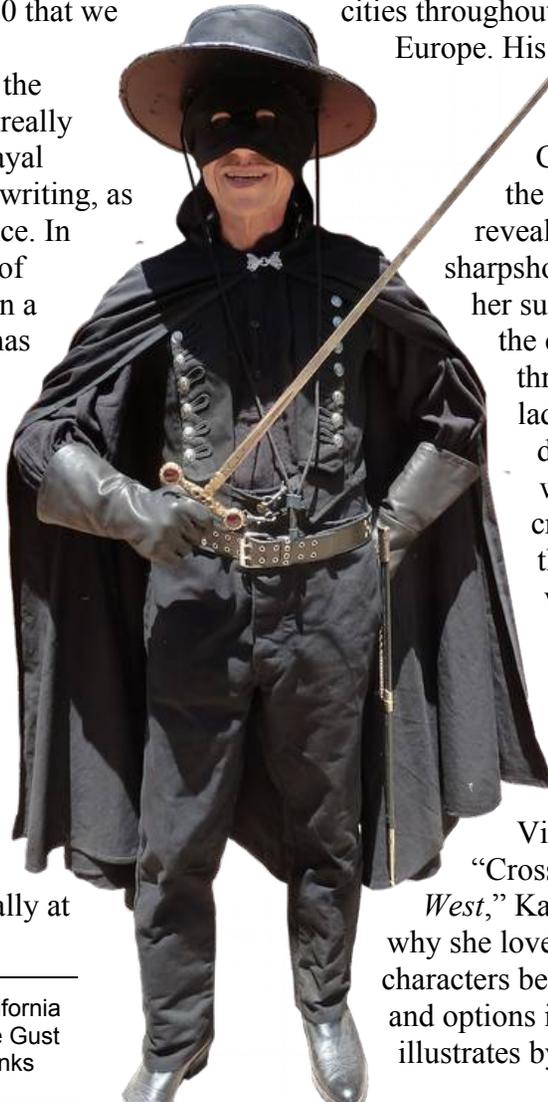
Next, Paul Trynka tells the story of “The Pants that Won the West,” about how an inventive tailor named Jacob Davis teamed up with an enterprising textile merchant named Levi Strauss and forever changed what the well-dressed cowboy wore. Paul, who co-authored the book *Denim From Cowboys to Catwalks: A Visual History of the World’s Most Legendary Fabric*, relates how Davis’ “riveting”

innovation and Strauss' keen sense of marketing and public relations made Levi's into a byword for durable western wear.

The legend of Zorro began with a serialized story by Johnston McCulley in 1918, but it wasn't until film actor Douglas Fairbanks bought McCulley's story and brought it to the screen in 1920 that we really knew what this masked avenger of Alta California, in the early years of the Wild West, really looked like. Fairbanks's portrayal influenced McCulley's future writing, as well as every Zorro movie since. In her article, "The Many Faces of Zorro," Kathe Gust takes us on a tour of how Zorro's costume has evolved in movie productions from then to now.

Kevin Roche loves going to rodeos. He also loves science fiction. When he mixes the two, the result is a fantastic blend of the traditional and the far-out. In his article, "Out of This World Chaps," Kevin provides a step-by-step description of his ambitious leatherworking project to create a fully functional pair of cowboy chaps that are equally at

Philip Gust as "Zorro" at an Alta California period event. The costume by Kathe Gust pays homage to the Douglas Fairbanks and Anthony Hopkins versions.



home in the rodeo ring and at a sci-fi masquerade (they have appeared in both). The results are stellar!

"Buffalo Bill" Cody was a master at marketing the Wild West through his shows, which brought the spectacle and legendary figures of the American West to millions in cities throughout the United States and Europe. His biggest star was Annie

Oakley. In my article, "Annie Oakley: Costuming a Legend of the American West," I reveal that her skill as a sharpshooter was only part of her success. Her secret was the character she created through her athletic but lady-like behavior, and her distinctive costumes, which she designed and created herself. If ever there was a costumer who embodied spectacular presentation and meticulous workmanship, it was Annie Oakley.

Finally, in her Virtual Soapbox article, "Crossplay in the *Wild Wild West*," Katrina Lynn explains why she loves to "crossplay" male characters because of the freedom and options it provides. She illustrates by showing how she

researched and took on the character of "James West" from the TV show *The Wild Wild West*, with her husband Mikhail portraying West's sidekick, "Artemus Gordon." The result was a very believable performance in the sci-fi/fantasy masquerade at Costume-Con 30.

Here is a quick preview of what is upcoming in *VC*. The theme for the November 2015 issue is "Wings!" This issue will delve into the many and varied aspects of using or incorporating wings into costumes or accessories.

In February 2016, we learn all about the "Art of the Masquerade." This issue will cover the many aspects of preparing for, performing in, judging, and running these costume competitions that combine presentation, workmanship, and documentation into a unique art form.

I'm pleased to announce that the theme for the May 2016 issue will be "Polynesian Apparel," looking at the traditional clothing of the people of the Polynesian islands, from the Maori of New Zealand to the ceremonial dress of Hawai'i. The apparel of the many islands of the central and southern pacific present new opportunities for costumers to explore these cultures through their dress.

See the [Upcoming Issues](#) page of the SiW website for details. Now is a great time to start writing for *VC*, and share what you know and love with your fellow costumers.