

Feature



Mutants and Mai Tais Kevin Roche*

The creator of one of the wackiest Polynesian costumes ever tells the behind-the-scenes story of the idea and its creation.

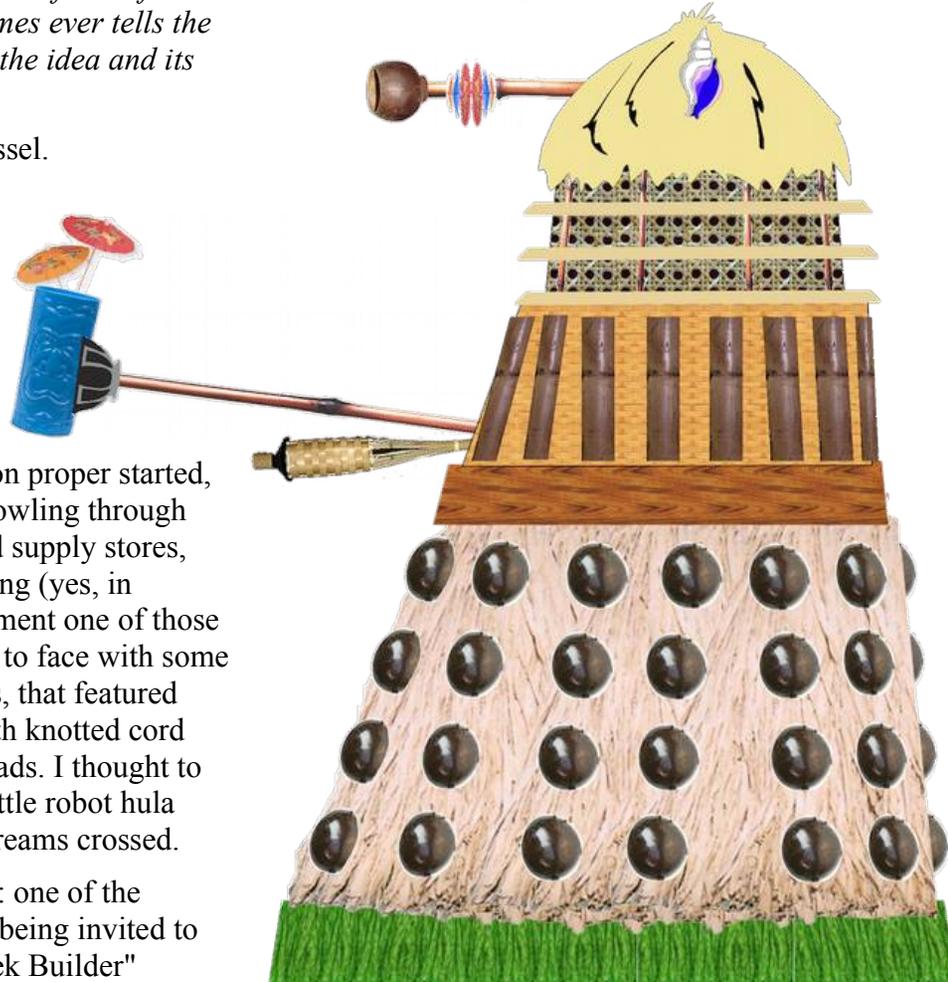
It all started with a tassel.

In Texas.

Seriously. My husband Andy and I had been invited to be “Fen Guests of Honor” at FenCon VII in Addison, Texas, in September 2010. Before the convention proper started, local costumers took us prowling through their local secret fabric and supply stores, some of which were amazing (yes, in Texas!). In the trim department one of those stores, I found myself face to face with some enormous decorator tassels, that featured square beads decorated with knotted cord instead of simple round beads. I thought to myself, “Those look like little robot hula dancers...” And then the streams crossed.

Stream Number One: one of the people responsible for our being invited to FenCon was Tim “the Dalek Builder” Miller. He has built some beautiful replica

Daleks. If, perchance, you don't know what a Dalek is, search for “Dalek Doctor Who image” online and look at the results. I'm referring to the robotic pepper-pot shaped things, which are one of the most successful (hence recurring) monsters on both the



Concept drawing of Tiki Dalek – *Doctor Who* meets *Gilligan's Island*.

original and new *Doctor Who* BBC television series, dating back to the original 1963 season.

Stream Number Two: Gallifrey One: Catch 22 (the 2011 edition of the February Los Angeles Doctor Who convention that we almost always attend) had as its sub-theme “Islands of Mystery.”

Stream Number Three: Giant Hula Robot Tassel. In Texas.

Standing there in the store, I had a sudden flash: a *Tiki Dalek* -- a Dalek, but constructed as though the Professor from Gilligan's Island had built it. And we were off!

By Halloween 2010, I had a concept sketch ready and started ordering materials. The Tiki Dalek would feature a grass skirt at the base, with coconut shells (56 of them!) for the hemispheres on the base skirt, bamboo cladding for the center shoulder section, and cane webbing for the upper neck section. The signature Dalek gun would be replaced by a tiki torch, and the plunger “hand” would be carrying a fruity tropical drink. A coconut cup would form the “eye,” with paper drink parasols replacing the Plexiglas disks on the on the eyestalk of the original. My original sketch (left) featured a thatched dome for the head, but a woven wood salad bowl proved both simpler and more effective.

I discovered that you can't order polished half coconut shells except in lots of 250. (Since I only needed 56, if you, Gentle Reader, have a use for just under 200 coconut shells, drop me a line and we can negotiate a price.)

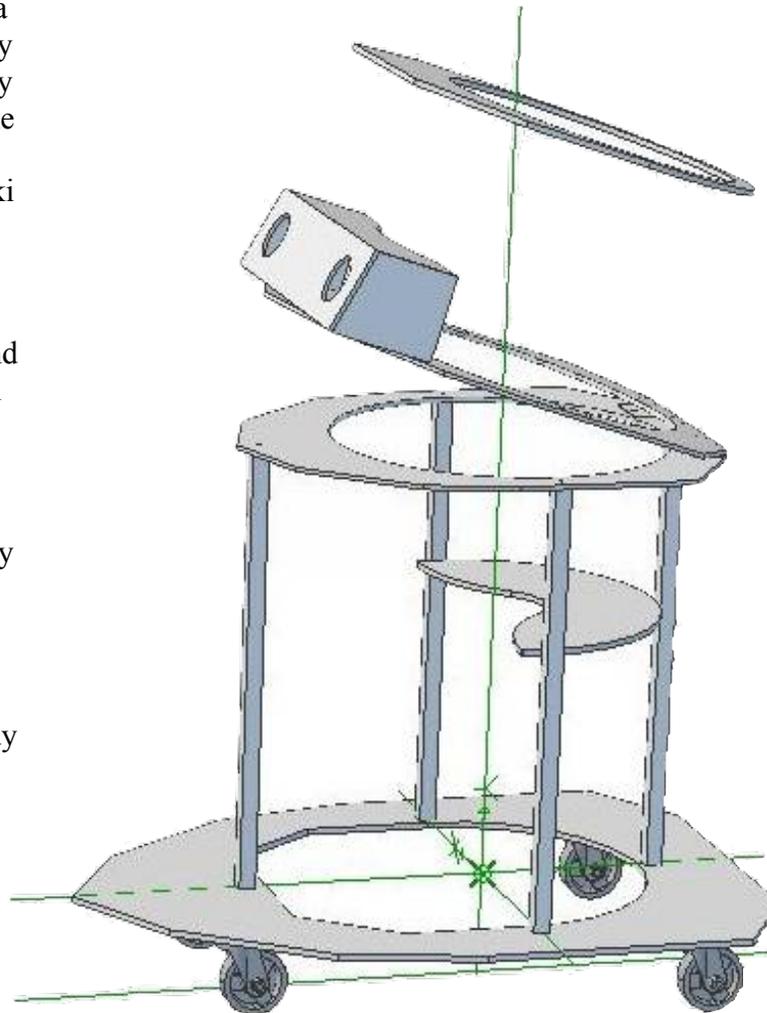
At just about the same time, I learned that Bryan Little, Mette Hedin and Johanna Mead, friends with whom I would normally share such a costume conspiracy, were very likely going to be judging the Gallifrey One masquerade. The project was promptly code-named "Secret Project TDK" (for Tiki Dalek Kraziness) so that it could be mentioned in casual conversation around them without giving anything away.

In November 2010, I began design and construction in earnest. Those interested in seeing more details can see a diary of the construction process in my [LiveJournal](#).

Building TDK proved a new and interesting costume experience. Most of my costume design and construction involves fabric with minor hardware construction; TDK was a full-on adventure in hardware, and I actually used a number of the techniques I've acquired in my research day job building automated vacuum chambers and their support hardware.

This is the first costume I've built for which creating a detailed 3D model in advance seemed a good idea. I invested in Alibre Design, a 3D parametric solid modeling program, to design the interior framework and components. I was very pleased with the results and recommend it

highly; there are several versions available including a \$99 home version which includes all the critical features. (I invested in one of the more advanced versions). I also found a number of places that my pattern drafting and sewing experience could solve problems in a unique way.



Design drawing of Tiki Dalek using 3D parametric modeling software.

One of the first things I did was join and become an active member of [Project Dalek](#). This is an online community of replica Dalek builders from all over the world, with a huge number of resources and members willing to share their experience with new builders. I downloaded plans for all the different versions of the Daleks as they've appeared on screen to get the critical dimensions I would need to build TDK, and then at the community owner John's urging, I started a detailed build diary there.

I did so with some trepidation, somewhat uncertain how my joke build would be received, and was happily surprised to be welcomed with open arms and encouraged at every step. I took the time in my build diary there to especially carefully explain the steps I did using sewing techniques, as I figured a community of hardscape prop builders would likely not have any experience with them. (The build diary on the Project Dalek Forums is more detailed than that in my LiveJournal, but you must be a member of PDF to read it.)

As the convention approached, the other Project Dalek members who were planning to be there all offered to help me on site if I needed assistance with anything. I finally got to meet them in person as they helped me hide TDK under sheets in "Dalek Central." Daleks are too big to go through the standard hotel room doors, so Gallifrey One very kindly provided a space where all the Dalek builders could do final assembly and storage of their replicas.

Nigel S., and Pat H. had built a beautiful radio-controlled replica classic movie Dalek named Rel, Steve had brought his human-piloted WWII Ironsides Dalek, and Jerry Chevalier his copper-hued “levitating” New Series Dalek. They were really appreciative and reiterated their offer of help, and we discussed when we might manage to parade all 4 Daleks together at the convention.

I got another hint about how TDK affected folk as I rolled TDK (mostly covered) from my room down to Dalek Central on Thursday. Bits of the skirt were exposed as I moved it, and several dozen people asked me in excited voices if that was “a Dalek wearing a grass skirt?” Every time, I put a finger to my lips and said “Shhh... You’ve seen nothing!”, and every single time they responded in kind, “Of



4 Daleks and K-9 from the other side in Dalek Central.

course... we’ve seen nothing....” (grinning conspiratorially all the while). By the time I had TDK safely stowed, I suspected a hundred or so people had an inkling that there was something happening involving a Dalek and a grass skirt, but they all kept their promise to keep the secret from Shaun Lyon, one of the convention organizers.

When the night of the Masquerade finally arrived, another friend, Jennifer Tiff, helped me roll TDK through the service corridors into the green room. We had a few minutes to practice lifting him on stage and for me to pilot him around (the first time I was in a space large enough to even try it!) and were satisfied that he’d work.

While waiting in the Green Room, a quintet of young costumers called “Cutesy Who” (3 Daleks, a TARDIS, and a Matt Smith Doctor all done as party dresses) set up camp right behind TDK; it looked like he was minding a trio of baby Daleks. Backstage, while we were waiting for



Tiki Dalek onstage with MCs Patrick Beckstead and Tadao Tomomatsu.

my cue, Chaz Boston Baden started a heroic search for lights we could drop into the dome lenses. He managed to come up with a pair of cyanoluminescent light sticks (one red, one green, for port and starboard) and with some clever application of black duct tape, the dome was lit up for the show.

On stage, TDK stole the show; the audience reaction as he “did the limbo” with MCs Patrick Beckstead and Tadao Tomomatsu was overwhelming. While the judges deliberated, I climbed back into him and took him out to meet the folk who might be loitering in the lobby. I had an mp3 player and some small speakers hidden in the shoulder section, so as he worked his way down the hallway, the strains of the Herb Alpert version of Limbo Rock accompanied his progress. Unbeknownst to me, many of the other masquerade contestants had formed an impromptu conga

line behind me as I navigated my way out to the bar. At one point that night nearly 20 people were dancing behind the Tiki Dalek, including a giant rhino-headed Judoon (and several Amy Ponds)!

I was thrilled when the results were announced and the judges had unanimously awarded TDK Overall Best In Show (for both workmanship and presentation). Even more important, though was how much fun everyone seemed to have every time TDK came out. I managed just barely (by luck) to get him into a photo shoot with the other 3 Daleks and a K-9, and then Jerry Chevalier took his R/C copper NSD (New Series Dalek) out for a bit while I piloted TDK.

Once again, we ended up with people dancing along behind TDK, running up to get photos hugging him, “clinking” drinks with his parasol-bedecked Mai Tai, and generally whooping it up. Several times the NSD stopped, rotated its dome and eyed TDK, demanding I “EXPLAIN... EXPLAIN...” to be answered (to the crowd’s delight) by TDK with “EXUBERATE...EXUBERATE...” or occasionally “PARTY ON DUDE...” Ian McNeice channeled his Winston Churchill character to pose with the two of us. We even took a turn through the dealers room, where several of the BBC personalities took the opportunity to join in the silliness and pose for photos. Frazer Hines (“Jamie MacCrimmon”) couldn’t resist the urge to join the dance.

Finally it was time to roll TDK back to Dalek Central, and then, eventually back to our suite for disassembly. Few of my costumes have been just so much fun to take out into a crowd to play with people, and I’ve made a whole set of new friends as a result of this Secret Project.

I’ve brought TDK back to Gallifrey several times since that first visit in 2011, and have made several modifications and improvements since then. TDK still makes occasional appearances at other events, so don’t be surprised if you come around a corner at a convention to be confronted by

this [Island Survival Suit](#) playing the “Banana Boat Song” with a line of fans dancing behind him, and please do join the conga line!

Kevin Roche is a sci-fi/fantasy and historical costumer with extensive experience entering, judging, and running masquerades. He was Chair of Costume-Con 26 in 2008. Kevin received the ICG's Lifetime Achievement Award in 2007. He is a past ICG vice-president, and is currently president of SiW. Visit his [website](#) to read his blog and view his costume photo album.



Kevin Roche and Tiki Dalek with other contestants after the awards.