

THE FAN/PRO BILL OF RIGHTS

PREAMBLE: We, the fans and pros of www.peterdavid.net, in order to form a more perfect union of fan/pro interaction, wish to let it be known that: with conventions and the Internet providing extensive opportunities for fan/pro interaction and; with new fans not quite understanding the “rules” and social mores and expectations of conventions and thus feeling uncomfortable or uncertain of what is expected of them and; partly in response to some conventions where fans in general and female fans in particular were targeted for harassment and abuse, and; in order to fill what is perceived as a needed guide for fans and pros to know and/or understand what to expect of each other in order to minimize or eliminate misunderstandings or ill-will; it is hereby resolved that this document will serve as an attempt to fill that need by spelling out the specifics of these matters to the best of our abilities. This is being done unilaterally by an assortment of fans and pros, and all the matters addressed within this document are drawn from genuine, real-life experiences of the participants (as hard as that may be to believe in some cases.) The rights set forth herein are not intended to represent the opinions or policies of any conventions or organizations, and may be considered by some to be merely guidelines. Nevertheless, it is our intent to present a series of simple, common sense, basic rights to which all fans and pros should be entitled.

For the purpose of this document, “fan” will be taken to mean anyone not working professionally in the science fiction/fantasy industry, and “pro” will include writers, artists, actors, or anyone—particularly for the purpose of convention-going—who is an advertised guest and/or panelist and/or is scheduled for autographing sessions and/or is set up with a table at either artist’s alley or the dealer’s room or an exhibition hall. The male pronoun is uniformly used to refer to all pros and all fans, not to give short shrift to the female gender, but simply for convenience sake.

The order in which this list is presented is not intended to reflect on the relative priorities of each right, save for the first one, which we have decided to call:

THE PRIME DIRECTIVE

Fans and Pros have the right to be treated by each other with the same courtesy that they themselves would expect to be treated.*

Fans and Pros who act like jerks abrogate the right to complain when they themselves are treated like jerks.

**The expectations of masochists notwithstanding.*

RIGHT THE FIRST Fans and Pros have a right to a mutual understanding of what is expected and required from each when it comes to the giving and receiving of autographs.

- 1) Fans have a right to know as early as possible—preferably in the convention advertising and certainly no later than via clearly posted signs at the pro’s table—what will and will not be autographed. (EX: *only materials purchased at the table as opposed to items that the fans have already acquired.*)
- 2) Pros have a right not to be embarrassed by, or be made uncomfortable with, unauthorized materials brought for signature (EX: *that jerk who brought Emma Watson an 8 x 10 of a paparazzi photograph angled up her dress*) or the nature of the object to be autographed (EX: *body parts*). By the same token, pros should be willing to sign any material that they themselves are selling. If the pro charges for autographs, there should be no hidden costs; a price list, while not required, is extremely helpful.
- 3) Particularly during advertised, limited-time autograph sessions, the pro should have the right to not have any one individual attempt to monopolize his time. For that matter, the fans have the right not to have to stand there and watch some guy tell the pro his life’s story. In cases of convention-sponsored autograph sessions, conventions should provide one or more monitors to be responsible for keeping the line moving so that pros don’t have to be the bad guy and fans don’t have to shout at their fellow fans to keep moving, and to cap the line so that the pro is not required to remain overtime.
- 4) Unless there is prior notification otherwise, fans have a right to have their books personalized. If they desire personalization, they should say so up front so the pro doesn’t have to guess. Nor should pros have to guess at the spelling of names. Don’t assume the pro will figure out that your name has a silent “q.” Complicated names should be presented on pieces of paper for convenience. If your name is on your badge but it’s spelled wrong, do not expect the pro to intuit that. Pros should not be asked to sign potentially inflammatory messages because the fan thinks it “will be funny” or “he’ll appreciate it.” (EX: *Dear Jim: Why didn’t you show up, you asshole? Best wishes.*)
- 5) Fans do not have an automatic right to expect an autograph unless a pro is seated at a table designated as an autograph table. *An autograph table is defined as a table specifically established by the convention, or by third-party exhibitors, as a location at which the pro will be appearing for a limited time for the sole purpose of giving autographs (as opposed to artists alley tables or the pro’s own dealer table.)* Even then:
 - (1) the pro is under no obligation to sign more than one item unless stipulated by mutual agreement with the convention;
 - (2) the pro has every right, at his discretion, not to autograph items, for any number of reasons including, but not limited to, (i) not having authored the work in question, (ii) fatigue, (iii) the fan showed up just at the signing’s conclusion with a significant number of books, (iv) the fan is acting like a jerk (see: *Prime Directive.*)
- 6) Fans with excessive amounts of material to be autographed should be willing to go to the end of the line and wait again in order to accommodate fans with fewer books to be signed. The definition of “excessive” will be the sole discretion of the pro and the convention organizers. If the pro has an absolute maximum beyond which he will not sign under any circumstance, or if the convention has a set limit in order to avoid overcrowdings or excessive lines, this limit should be made clear in the welcome material presented to attendees.
- 7) If the fan has accomplished the goal of getting an autograph, he should not monopolize a pro’s time even if there’s no one waiting behind him. If the pro has stopped talking and is sitting there simply smiling, take this as an unspoken cue that it’s time to move on. Just standing there for extended periods, waiting for the pro to say or do something clever, makes the pro feel uncomfortable and makes the fan come across as kind of creepy. This is a pro, not a resident of a petting zoo.
- 8) If a fan wishes to approach a pro, he should simply do so. If he doesn’t have the nerve, he should walk away until such time as he’s prepared to approach the guest. Simply standing a short distance away for an extended period while trying to build up one’s nerve can come across as a creepy stalker vibe. Pros have a right not to have to wonder why That Guy Over There has been watching them for fifteen minutes without moving. By the same token, pros should be aware of possible nervous reticence on the part of some fans, and should make every effort to be inviting and approachable, up to and including saying something along the lines of, “Hi,

- can I do something for you?” to a fan hovering nearby.
- 9) No matter how long a line is, fans should yield the right of way to a fellow fan with a screaming baby. This may seem unfair, but it’ll make everyone’s life easier, and it beats scowling and profanities.
- 10) Fans have a right not to be abused, scolded, scowled at or otherwise upbraided if they are clearly planning to profiteer off the autographs (EX: *Multiple copies of the same book.*) If they resell the books, that will just enable them to make more money to buy more copies of books by the pro that signed them in the first place. It’s capitalism’s circle of life.
- 11) Pros should never have to remove books or comic books from plastic sleeves, particularly if the flaps are taped down. Comic books should be presented ready for signing; books should be open to the title page or wherever the fan prefers it to be signed. If a fan is frustrated because he’s been waiting for a long time, he should keep that frustration to himself and not toss his comics to or at the pro.
- 12) Pros have the right to be treated courteously at all times. Fans asking for autographs while simultaneously telling the pro everything that’s “wrong” with his work are exhibiting bad form.
- 13) If a fan tells a pro that a particular work of his is the fan’s “favorite,” the minimal acceptable response is, “Thank you.” Cringing, making a face, saying, “Are you kidding me?,” “Do you have your taste in your ass?,” “What is wrong with you?,” “That’s the least favorite thing I’ve ever done,” etc., should all be actively discouraged. If seeing past work of yours upsets you to such a degree that you feel obliged to denigrate both yourself and the fan’s taste, don’t go to conventions.

RIGHT THE SECOND Fans have a right to wear and/or carry whatever they want to a convention. But one fan’s right to personal expression ends at another fan’s right to personal space.

- 1) Fans must be aware when accoutrements widen the amount of space they take up, either side-to-side or front to back. Attendees have a right to walk around a convention without being struck by:
 - (1) backpacks; (2) rolling suitcases; (3) wings; (4) shoulder pads; (5) swords, shields, scabbards, bows, giant keys, quivers, bat’leths, batarangs, and any other type of weapon or weapon container; (6) capes; (7) gigantic signs; or any other object that can inflict pain or injury if the wearer/bearer turns around too quickly.
- 2) Fans and pros have a right to walk through convention space without being impeded by other attendees who are either taking photographs or posing for photographs. Quick photographs taken out of main traffic paths of either fans with pros or fans in costume are not bothersome as long as they do not block traffic. However, large numbers of costumed individuals posing for a battery of photographers poses a traffic hazard. It’s a convention, not the red carpet at the Oscars.
- 3) Should such blockages occur, fans and pros desiring to get from Point A to Point B should have the right of way and be able to walk directly through the picture-taking area without feeling guilty about ruining other people’s pictures. When passing fans walk in front of people’s cameras, such entries into the picture should, if possible, be accompanied by some manner of warning such as, “Excuse me.” “Coming through.” “Fore.” If photographers aren’t courteous enough to concern themselves about fans and/or pros getting where they need to go, then fans and/or pros shouldn’t have to worry about the photographers getting their pictures of five slave Leias and a Wookiee.
- 4) Fans have a right not to play along. Everyone appreciates dedication to one’s character; nevertheless, you don’t get a free pass to act a jerk just because you’re cosplaying a Klingon or Lobo.

RIGHT THE THIRD Pros have as much right to enjoy conventions as anyone else. Pros are typically referred to as “guests,” and even “guests of honor.” If you treat guests in an insensitive manner, they will stop coming to your house.

- 1) Pros have the right to attend panels as audience members, walk the dealer’s room, or in other ways enjoy the convention without being approached with questions or requests for autographs. Fans who make such approaches do so at their own risk. Pros should make best efforts to extend such extra courtesies when

- possible, but should not be subjected to subsequent fan exhortation if they choose to demur. (EX: *“He refused to sign my program book even though he was just standing there doing nothing.”*)
- 2) As corollary to the above paragraph, the one situation where under no circumstance can pros be approached is when attending to bodily functions. Toilets are to be considered Off Limits for purposes of fan/pro interaction. Do not ever try to hand something to someone to sign while they are peeing. Do not push a comic under a stall door because you know they are in there and can’t get away. Do not decide that a toilet is the best possible place for a photograph with or of your favorite creator. Just... don’t.
- 3) Pros have as much right to privacy as anyone else. Under no circumstance should fans hover near, spy on, or eavesdrop upon private conversations that pros are having with each other off in a corner somewhere or while walking along a hallway. Such behavior would be considered rude if it’s done with total strangers, much less respected guests; fishing for dirt or leaks about upcoming work is bad form.
- 4) If an author is sitting around in a bar and you wish to approach him, you should offer to buy him a drink. This is particularly applicable with guests from the U.K. and/or Ireland. The technical term for this is “a bribe.” With conventions in the U.K. or Ireland, the technical term for sitting around in a bar and buying authors drinks is “a panel.”
- 5) Some authors, because they have no one to watch their artist alley or exhibition table, will choose to eat at their table rather than go out to lunch. They have the right to this personal time without intrusion. Just because a fan says, “I don’t want to interrupt you” before they drop ten books in front of the pro does not make it any less an interruption. Furthermore the pro’s hands may not be clean, which could result in anything from crumbs to mayo stains getting on the material to be autographed, which no one will be happy about.
- 6) Authors are not your bitches (AKA *The Neil Gaiman Assertion.*)
- 7) Actors are not your performing monkeys (AKA *The Misha Collins Declaration.*)

RIGHT THE FOURTH Fans and Pros have the right to enjoy panels.

- 1) Fans and/or convention organizers should reasonably assume they have the right to film or video record panels unless explicit notice is provided at the beginning of the panel that visual recording is forbidden, or a blanket prohibition is published in the program book by the convention.
- 2) If a fan is so exhausted that he might fall asleep, he should be seated toward the back of the room, not the front row where his sonorous snoring and trickle of drool down his chin provide both audible and visual distractions. If a pro is likewise exhausted, he should beg off being on the panel. Should anyone choose to ignore this advice, the strategic and retaliatory use of air horns by either panelists or fans, while not encouraged, shall be excused. Should air horns be employed, said usage is not to be filmed and put up on Youtube unless it’s really, really funny.
- 3) Cell phones should be shut off or set to vibrate during panels. If a fan forgets and his phone rings, people are allowed to voice loud annoyance. If a panelist forgets and his cell phone goes off while he’s on the panel, loud annoyance is NOT permitted. However laughter, snarking and Simpson-esque “HA ha!” are not only acceptable but also encouraged.
- 4) Question and answer sessions are designed for succinctly phrased questions that will, in turn, elicit answers. They are not intended for fan pontifications, declamations, circumlocution, or soliloquies. They are not intended for a fan to try and bond with the panelists or show them how special the questioner is. They are not intended to be preceded by a lengthy preamble that explains how the fan’s entire existence and the fates conspired to bring him to this particular point at this particular time to pose this particular question. This is a panel, not *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*. Fans choosing to ignore these guidelines proceed at their risk and better hope their personal narrative is compelling enough that audiences will not find it onerous.
- 5) Audiences have a right to boo or bemoan the following questions:
 - (i) “Can I have a hug?”
 - (ii) “Can I have a kiss?”
 - (iii) “Can I have my picture taken with you?”
 - (iv) “How YOU doin’?” (or any similar come-on or question involving asking for a date.)
- 6) If there are certain topics or works that are known to be provocative subjects, do not be a smart ass and bring it up anyway just to get a reaction or show that you’re fearless. If you poke the bear, don’t be surprised if you get the claws (AKA *The Ellison Exacerbation*). Should a novice fan who poses such a question happen to be ignorant of its provocative nature, he will likely be tipped off by the collective gasp of the audience and the scowl from the pro. In this event, he has the right to withdraw the question, no harm, no foul.
- 7) Good rule of thumb: if a question sounds like something that would be asked by the main fan geek from *Galaxy Quest*, avoid asking it. If you must posit technical questions, particularly involving contradictions, save them for writers. Actors have the right to not be their characters, and they do not generally have responses for picaresque errata, especially since James Doohan passed away.
- 8) Attendees should not have to put up with redundancy. If you are a latecomer, quietly inquire of people near you if your intended question has already been addressed.
- 9) Pros have a right to express unpopular or inflammatory opinions on panels or elsewhere without it immediately resulting in fans announcing that henceforth they will never read anything by that author ever again. Pros also have a right to believe monkeys will fly out of their ass.
- 10) Fans with children have as much right to enjoy panels as anyone else. Fans without children have a right to enjoy panels without children crying or disrupting them. Pros have a right to express themselves freely without concern as to language or subject matter. Children have a right to be immersed in the conventional culture since they are the future of fandom. Everyone has a right not to have their feet run over by strollers. In instances where any and/or all of these rights conflict, the Tim Gunn rule applies: Make it work.

RIGHT THE FIFTH Convention-related rights stem from solid organization, and therefore convention organizers have certain expectations that they should meet.

- 1) Fans have a right to an efficient registration procedure.
- 2) Fans have a right to a central information booth, staffed by people who actually either have the answers or can find them quickly.
- 3) Attendees have the right to be able to read, with no effort, the badges of other attendees. Appropriate place for badges to be worn is either around the neck on a lanyard or in the upper left or right of one’s shirt. Do not place your badge at hip level. No one needs or wants to be made uncomfortable staring at your crotch.
- 4) Attendees have a right to expect that convention organizers will heed the Maximum Occupancy signs and not endanger the attendees by overselling the convention. Rarely does anyone cosplay a Fire Marshal; if you see one, chances are he’s real and you’re in trouble. Nobody needs this grief.
- 5) Guest pros being sponsored by the convention have a right to written confirmation of all terms of their convention attendance at least ninety days before the convention, with travel arrangements finalized no later than thirty days prior. Travel in such instances should never be the expense of the pro with subsequent expectation of reimbursement unless the pro agrees to this...in which case, the pro better be damned sure the organizer is good for it, because otherwise he’s on his own.
- 6) Fans in wheelchairs or similar devices for locomotion have a right to proper accommodations for their personal needs, such as sufficient aisle width. They also have the right: not to have people cut in front of them in line; not to have items they’re considering buying grabbed out of their hands; not to be assumed to be mentally challenged. Which, when you get down to it, all fans have these rights, but those in wheelchairs appear to be victimized by it more often. Non-ambulatory fans should also be given preferential treatment for elevators, since stairs are not an option.
- 7) Conventions should take security measures and have people designated specifically to handle disruptive individuals, crowd control, etc., as well as an advertised security ombudsman to whom fans can go if situations of harassment arise. Should the convention opt for security forces composed of local groups of Storm Troopers, Dorsai, Klingons, etc., it should be emphasized to them that they are there for the convenience and safety of the fans, and not to cosplay as bad asses. Security guards should be able to distinguish between groups of fans blocking access as opposed to a single fan who is simply standing still for a minute or two deciding which direction he’s going to go.

The foregoing represents the best efforts of a particular group of individuals to enumerate the rights of fans and guidelines for behavior that will ensure and protect those rights. So say we all.