

Hojqu' je'wl! (BUYER BEWARE!) Consumer Ed 101

Often, life experiences make great fodder for columns. I am sorry this one came up, but I hope his tale will prevent this from happening to others.

I was contacted by a fan who wanted some help with his Ferengi costume. He sent me photos of a jacket and shirt he had purchased from a costumer (who shall remain nameless) and wanted me to make him some pants and to help make the rest of his outfit look better. I am pretty anal when it comes to this stuff, so I wasn't impressed with what I saw in the photos. The fabric combination was suitably tacky, but the fit was poor and it didn't have much Ferengi style in its lines.

We agreed on the alterations and the pants and he sent the jacket and shirt to me. The actual costume was worse than I anticipated. (Here, q'IDar falls into sew-tech mumblings.) The jacket was not properly faced. The collar was not attached correctly and the sleeves had been sewn on backwards. The two pieces of trim were just plopped onto the front. The shirt fabric was used inside out, and while costumers often do that for effect, I suspect it wasn't the case here. The stripes were not matched on the side seams and the armholes were not finished in a manner correct for knits. The collar was not installed correctly and didn't have enough interfacing to do what was intended.

I am appalled that anyone would take money for items like these, and allow the work to leave their workshop. I do understand why the customer didn't even bother to return the outfit to have the problems corrected. The work was so shoddy I think it was assumed the maker would not have known how to fix it.

I have always tried to be diplomatic about other fan costumers. This is fantasy, when all is said and done, and as long as the customer is happy, anything goes, but this kid got ripped off!

Why? He probably didn't know that much about dealing with fan costumers, and the person he chose to make his costume may not have been very businesslike, either. There are a few things we all need to consider:

YOU GET WHAT YOU PAY FOR.

Making costumes costs materials and time. If you pay less, you will get cheaper materials and less time spent on your costume. This may result in a poorer fitting, less comfortable, less durable costume. Depending upon your expectations, that may be just fine. If your desires exceed your budget, seek alternatives. Try to find a used outfit you can buy. Buy your outfit one piece at a time, as your cash flow will allow. Costumes are often a work in progress. If

your funds are really limited, start with accessories, and save up for the big ticket item.

FIND A REPUTABLE COSTUMER.

They're not in the Yellow Pages. They may be online. They may be at cons. How do you know they're any good? The best way is to see someone wearing their work. If you see a great outfit at an event or con, ask the wearer about it. Who made it? How do they like it? Were there any problems with it or the process? How much was it? Do they do custom work? Do they know anyone else who does work like this? Someone who is unhappy with an order is not likely to want to show it off. Referrals are still the best way to get someone reliable, AND for costumers to get business. If you make a reputation for shoddy work and bad communications, it will follow you.

When you find someone whose work you like, contact them. A good costumer is an artist. Some have distinct ideas about how they design their offerings. A good conversation will help you determine whether the two of you will agree about the project. Will you leave yourself in their capable hands? If so, you may be surprised at the end result, either positively or not. If you have a very specific idea what you want, it is up to you to make that clear to the costumer. I can't say it enough. Communication is all!

KEEP THE TRANSACTION BUSINESSLIKE.

The biggest problem I have encountered is lack of communication. If each party keeps the other informed of expectations and problems, the transaction will be successful.

The client should ask the costumer to provide in writing:

- The names and contact information of three satisfied customers.
- A complete description of the costume ordered, including sketches or references. Or, the customer should send these to the costumer. The clearer the customer is with his desires, the more likely he is to get them.
- A list of materials to be used, possibly include samples.
- A description of the fitting process, especially for mail orders.
- An itemized list of all the costs for the costume, including shipping, if necessary.
- A description of the payment process.
- A completion date.

The costumer should make sure:

- He understands exactly what the client expects of him.
- He is charging enough for his time.
- He has scheduled enough time for the project.
- He has made it clear how he wants this project to be paid for.

- He ships on time.
- He contacts the client as soon as there is a problem. (After all, that mess at the crematory in Georgia started with poor communication, and the fault lay with the folks running the crematory!)

Even if you are getting your mom or significant other to make something for you, communication is essential, especially if they are not big fans. The more information you can give them to help get the design right, the happier you will be with their efforts; after all, you want to wear their creation proudly!

QAPLA'! ENJOY YOUR NEW OUTFIT!