

# PARTY AT ANIME EXPO 2002

By Kat Avila



Over the July 4th weekend, the largest party in the U.S. for Japanese animation and comics (anime and manga) was in Long Beach, California, encompassing the Long Beach Convention Center, Hyatt Regency Hotel, Westin Hotel, and Renaissance Hotel. There was a 24% increase in attendance over last year's convention with attendees from 44 states in the U.S. and 17 countries. The event was organized by the nonprofit Society for the Promotion of Japanese Animation (SPJA).

Anime Expo is in its 11th year, and celebrated this with announcements of its upcoming premiere in New York City (August 31-September 2, 2002) and its planned 2004 premiere in Tokyo, Japan, bringing to that country a more expansive animation convention than the smaller festivals they are accustomed to.



Every year the best cosplayers in the country descend upon Anime Expo to strut the anime and manga character costumes that some have slaved over all year long. Several Anime Expo guests of honor were pleasantly surprised and inspired by the sight of cosplayers partying 24 hours a day at their hotel.

Many cosplayers enter the Masquerade, the high point of the convention, where they compete for prizes awarded in the areas of costume construction and presentation. There was even a grandmother-granddaughter team this year. Much of the entertainment in the Masquerade comes from watching the cosplayers parody their favorite characters and shows. This year the awards for Best of Show, Costume Construction, Individual, went to a Bubblegum Crisis combat boomer robot created and worn by Blair Heald (who has done 40-hour weekend anime marathons with friends); Best of Show, Costume Construction, Group, to Acme Boyz Cosplay for their Final Fantasy X costumes; Best of Show, 12 & Under, to Mini Magical Girls for their Sailormoon SuperS costumes; and Best of Show, Presentation, went to the group Fake Meat!, who impressed everyone with their gorgeous Vampire Hunter D: Bloodlust costumes and dramatic performance based on the movie.

Besides the cosplayers (and the guys with cameras chasing down mini-skirted Sailor Moon girls and chicks in leather), there were plenty of other distractions at Anime Expo. Fans with their wish lists lined up to enter the dealers room; it was a line that at times extended the length of the Long Beach Convention Center. Akarapon Sutamivol was at his booth [Boltshop](#), which displayed monster-warriors he and his friend had constructed from auto parts and other machine parts. The price tag on the featured Alien sculpture was \$6,900.00, while most of the other sculptures were selling for a



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more affordable \$35.00 and up.

Some fans visited Artist Alley to commission sketches of their favorite characters and to buy related fan art. Kathleen Rhee, director of a local Korean afterschool tutoring program, was there with her two young daughters who were asking all the artists to autograph their newly purchased T-shirts. She held up an autograph-filled T-shirt promoting [Tea Club](#), a doujinshi (amateur comics book) created by P.M.B.Q. (Phuong-Mai Bui-Quang) that will be debuting in September about a mint tea-loving college freshman Hana Neko and an unusual campus club that has a talking bear as its president. She was sitting in Artist Alley with two other members of Bay Area Artists, Unite! (BAAU) - [Ian Sy](#) and [Diesel Throop](#). About his own work, Ian said later, "I prefer to work in a style combining a draftsmanly accuracy to perspective and volume, but prefer to balance it with abstraction and simplification. It's a good mix I find more often in Japanese comics. That's why I enjoy them more and why you found me at Anime Expo."

[Jen Chan](#) from [OFU](#), a Canadian artist circle, was selling TOFU 4 anthology. Sitting beside her was fellow Canadian [Florence Chan](#).

The Charity Auction was a good place to find one-of-a-kind items, including merchandise donated and autographed by the guests of honor. A color sketch of Himura Kenshin from Rurouni Kenshin (Samurai X) by manga creator Nobuhiro Watsuki fetched \$6,000. Altogether \$27,500 was raised by the auction to be donated to the victims of last year's 9/11 tragedy. A check will be forwarded along with the money raised by the auction at Anime Expo New York.

After emptying their wallets on videos, J-pop CDs and anime soundtracks, animation cels, sketches, and other collectibles, fans could attend workshops and panels, or retire to the film/video rooms and gaming arenas. Among the regular panels, the [Yaoi/Yuri](#) (homoerotic) panel open only to 18 & older fans (due to U.S. censorship - "We have to protect our children from sex") was among the more provocative and highly entertaining offerings at the convention. The discussion was lead by Erica Friedman, organizer of [Yuricon](#), "a celebration of shoujo ai and yuri for lesbians and their friends," to be held on June 13-15, 2003, in Newark, New Jersey.

With her were fanfic writer [Sparkle](#) and comics and manga scriptwriter M Moneure're. They covered the historical background of both subgenres in anime and manga, as well as topics such as the fan crossover between Japanese yaoi (male x male) and Western-based slash (male/male), how yuri (female x female) is generally seen as "a guy thing" which Yuricon is trying to change, and related legal issues.



At the focus panels, fans were able to hear project updates from a number of Anime Expo's guests of honor and to ask questions of the panelists. Popular voiceover actress [Maria Kawamura](#), known especially for her enthusiastic cackle as the big-breasted Naga in *Slayers*, involved the audience in demonstrations of how anime is dubbed. She became a voiceover actress by accident after she interviewed Tomino Yoshiyuki, director of *Mobile Suit Gundam*, as a favor

to a friend who published an anime magazine. Tomino later asked her to audition because her voice was the one he had been searching for. Maria said if she had not become involved in anime, she would have become a flamenco dancer. She was excited about trading shop talk and exchanging cultures with American voiceover actors and actresses and was looking forward to future collaborations with Americans.

For voiceover actress Mamiko Noto, it was the first time she had spoken to such a

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large group of fans. Mamiko's big break in the industry came from doing Kotori for the CLAMP anime X and it has been her favorite role to date. After high school, Mamiko went to a voiceover training school where there was lots of physical training, line readings, and discussions about acting. It is a highly competitive profession, and she shared how she had been to audition after audition and rejected many times. She finds anime more difficult to perform than radio drama because in anime the actress must fit her performance to the visuals.

During his focus panel, *City Hunter* manga artist Tsukasa Hojo announced that his comic would make its English-language debut in the weekly manga anthology [Raijin Comics](#), produced by Gutsoon! Entertainment, Inc., that he cofounded. Raijin Comics is skewed toward a slightly older audience than its formidable monthly rival [Shonen Jump](#) by Viz Communications, Inc., which will debut its North American version at about the same time as Raijin Comics this fall.

In Japan, 3.4 million copies of Weekly Shonen Jump are sold each week. Both magazines will maintain the right-to-left (or back-to-front) reading format that has become accepted in recent years by North American manga readers (much European manga is in the right-to-left format); in April 2002, [TOKYOPOP](#) became the first U.S. publisher to announce all its new manga titles would be in the right-to-left format to preserve the original artwork, reduce publishing costs, and increase publishing frequency.

It is general knowledge in the industry that the U.S. is the last market for manga in the world (Europe and East Asia is also more accepting of anime), partly due to the standard format of comics in the U.S., partly due to cultural reasons, including the perception that comics are just for children and because of censorship (Toys 'R' Us pulled Dragon Ball Z off its shelves in 1999 because the comics contained nudity). In addition to Raijin Comics and Shonen Jump, the slick Newtype USA Magazine ([www.newtype-usa.com](http://www.newtype-usa.com)) will also be launching later this year; it promises more current and in-depth information than its nearest crosstown rival [Animerica](#).

On the character designers panel and directors panel, much good-natured ribbing was exchanged among the guests of honor representing rival interests. In response to a fan question about how to become a character designer, Hellsing's designer Toshiharu Murata quipped, "You can become one right now. The question is whether you'll have any work coming to you." For some of the panelists during their careers, being in the right place at the right time was very important. "Luck is a very important element toward achieving what you want to do," said Oh My Goddess! director Hiroaki Goda, adding that, "Capable people are capable of keeping their luck," in a nod to the skills and talent needed to support a career.



Other fan diversions at Anime Expo included an appearance by J-pop duo Puffy AmiYumi, special concert by anime singer Yoko Ishida, karaoke contest, modeling contest (kit and custom models), and music video contest. The winning music videos were shown during a judging break in the Masquerade. Best of Show and Best of Drama were given to Anthony Bennett for Silent Lucidity.

During the closing ceremonies for Anime Expo, it was announced next year's convention would be at the Anaheim Convention Center, in Anaheim, California, which had been Anime Expo's home in 1998 and 1999. The final act of the convention was widely respected elder director Koichi Mashimo's painting in the right eye of a large-sized good-luck Daruma doll whose left eye had been painted in at the start of the convention. Of course, Mashimo first did a practice run on director Koji Masunari's glasses - who was wearing them at the time and seated on stage with the other guests of honor - to the gleeful howls of the audience.

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Kat Avila (buscandocalifornia@yahoo.com) regularly writes on issues affecting both the Asian American and U.S. Latino communities. She has another Anime Expo article titled "Anime Finds a Home in Mexico" (<http://www.latinola.com/story.php?story=368>) based on her communications with the Mexican anime and press media she met at Anime Expo.

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