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### Comics and Mucho Mas

Comic-Con International 2005 highlights

By Kat Avila | Web Published 8.14.2005

Comic-Con International - here in nearby San Diego, California - is North America's largest popular culture and comics convention. This year Comic-Con 2005 ran from Thurs., July 14, to Sun., July 17, with an early bird preview of the Exhibit Hall on the Wednesday night before. Special guests included Lalo Alcaraz (La Cucaracha comic strip), Sergio Aragones (Mad magazine), David B. (Epileptic graphic novel), sci-fi writer Ray Bradbury (Fahrenheit 451), Bruce Campbell (Spider-Man), Jim Lee (WILDC.A.T.S comic book), J. Michael Straczynski (TV series Babylon 5), and Jhonen Vasquez (Johnny the Homicidal Maniac comic book). My sister and I attended all five days, each night deliberating over the events guide and discussing which panels and programs would be the most worthwhile.



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#### PREVIEW NIGHT (July 13):

You can enjoy the Exhibit Hall before the weekend crowd swarms all over it. It's a good time to get photos without people continuously bumping into you or stepping in front of your camera at the wrong moment.

I searched for familiar exhibitors which included Slave Labor Graphics, DC Comics, Nintendo, Digital Manga Publishing, Dark Horse Comics, KOCCA (Korean Culture & Content Agency), Tokyopop, VIZ Media, Central Park Media, as well as major movie studios.

A spooky life-sized Batman figure stopped me in my tracks. He was squatting on top of a column, his caped left arm reaching for the opposite shoulder, the ends of his cape billowing in an imaginary winter wind. His eyes stared down at my own gazing up in awe.

At the end of the night, every night, I emptied my bag(s) filled with freebie comics and sneak peaks, posters, calendars, stickers, pins, bookmarks, trading cards, and even toys. Trips to the Exhibit Hall were like an off-season, multi-day trick-or-treat. Some comics were leftover stock from Free Comic Book Day this past May 7th. One really cool freebie was a flip book featuring a scene from Tim Burton's Corpse Bride, a movie which will be released on September 23rd.

#### THURSDAY (July 14):

A panel promoted Brian Cox's indie film El Muerto based on Javier Hernandez's self-published comic book of the same name. Wilmer Valderrama of That '70s Show stars as the superhero Aztec zombie El Muerto, who was once 21-year-old Diego de la Muerte of L.A. (Did you read my March 2005 interview with Javier for comics e-zine Sequential Tart.com?) El Muerto is probably one of the first heroes where his power lies in love, spirituality, said Wilmer. Supporting panelists included actors Joel David Moore and Tony Plana. That Wilmer boy was the hottest, sexiest thing at this year's convention. Must be the accent.

Peninsula Films trailer for El Muerto:

"An ancient curse...

A perfect love...

A woman saved his soul...



Between the force of evil...  
and the power of good...  
One man has both...  
A legend is born...."

I visited the KOCCA booth for the latest news on manhwa (i.e., Korean graphic novels; manga are Japanese graphic novels) and spoke with Studio ICE editor Ju-youn Lee about ICE Kunion, whose translated Korean titles will be in U.S. bookstores starting in October. ICE Kunion is a joint venture of Korean publishers. I also chatted briefly with KNET.TV CEO B. S. Yoon about their marketing of Korean TV dramas to English-speaking audiences.

Uglydoll monsters, the orange Wage and the light blue Ice-Bat, were walking around the San Diego Convention Center posing for photos with Comic-Con attendees. At the Pretty Ugly LLC booth, I bought a small Ice-Bat to hang from my daypack: "Ice-Bat is lookin' to chill with you. He wants to sit next to your computer (which is also frozen) and hang out." The one-eyed and three-eyed plush Uglydolls looked cute, too.

FRIDAY (July 15):

Warner Bros. had late morning previews of four new films -- V for Vendetta, Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire, The Fountain, and Tim Burton's Corpse Bride. Natalie Portman, of Star Wars fame, was on the V for Vendetta panel and remained gracious, surprisingly so, even though she was getting hit with a lot of unrelated questions from some super geeks.

I went to the spotlight program on San Diego homeboy Lalo Alcaraz, creator of the Chicano Doonesbury comic strip La Cucaracha. What is a Chicano? "A Chicano is a pissed-off Mexican American." What's the difference between a Chicano and a Hispanic? "About 60 grand a year."

"The mainstream and I are getting used to each other," Lalo said, but La Cucaracha still offends a lot of people. Another criticism has been the name of his comic strip, that it is a racist slur; Lalo fired back that no one says the name of Charles Schulz's comic suggests that all white people are peanuts. Through humor, Lalo tries to promote critical thinking about Latino issues. The next day, Lalo participated in a drawing demonstration at the National Cartoonists Society's "How'd They Draw That?" panel.

I popped my head into an African American panel discussing how to broaden black culture and place black content in the marketplace. "How in the hell is a black comic book going to sell?!" Answering his own question, Reggie Hudlin, House Party film director and Marvel's Black Panther writer, said that shouldn't be an issue while the mainstream is making money off black culture. Michael Stradford, VP at Sony Pictures, advised there is more opportunity now to get information about subjects you're interested in, and that you must take advantage of the resources available; otherwise, it's your fault.

The "Portrait Painting: Digital and Traditional" workshop had the full attention of the artists in the room as Jeff Watts and Ron Lemen simultaneously painted from a live male model; one instructor used oils on canvas, the other a computer. Watts and Lemen made it all look so quick and easy. I walked out appreciating what a computer can do in the hands of an expert.

SATURDAY (July 16):

At Bandai Entertainment's "The Next Level of Japanese Animation" panel, they reported a heavy decrease in DVD sales, perhaps due to the downloading of illegal fan subs and purchase of Hong Kong bootlegs. Piracy is driving down a market that's already niche, commented a panelist.

In the Autograph Area, I met Nutopia, a fantasy art and comic book model, and interviewed her. At one time, she taught windsurfing and rock climbing. This chick can kick serious butt; she has trained all over the world in the martial arts and related

weapons. But don't be afraid to ask for an autograph or photo with her!

At "WebComics School 102: Building an Audience," panelists stressed the importance of updates, that the quickest way to lose readership is not to update. The trick is to make people happy, then they'll give you their money.

SUNDAY (July 17):

I didn't sleep well the night before because of excruciating pain shooting all the way up my left leg. I could barely walk, the result of several days of lugging around my laptop and camera stuff and freebies and purchases; no hand carts are allowed in the Exhibit Hall. (I ended up missing two days of work after the convention.)

Because I was tired and in pain, I forgot my digital camera in one of the anime viewing rooms. When I returned later, my camera was nowhere to be found and Lost & Found didn't have it. Luckily, I had uploaded my photos every night, so I lost only my Sunday photos of a movie set from the Corpse Bride. Despite a little bad luck, I'll definitely be back for next year's 37th Comic-Con International!

*Kat is reading Karen Marie Moning's paranormal romance IMMORTAL HIGHLANDER: "Five minutes later Gabby was securely tied to one of her dining-room chairs with her own clothesline." (Wouldn't YOU want to know what happened next?)*

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