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FanimeCon 2004: You Comics Maniac!

But you have to go home sometime

By Kat Avila | Web Published 6.10.2004

Guy at the bus stop: "You're lookin' fine, woman, walkin' like that."

Me: "Outta my way! I gotta get to FanimeCon!" (what I wish I said)

FanimeCon 2004 was held over the Memorial Day weekend at San Jose McEnery Convention Center. It was a daily three-hour round-trip on foot, by bus and train from San Francisco. All for my favorite manga artist You Higur, creator of fabulously sexy guys. This was her second U.S. appearance after Yaoi-Con 2001. Her next appearance would be at Animagic in Koblenz, Germany, in July.

"Bye, fangirls!" - Mom dropping off the kids

Sometimes it crosses my mind that I'm getting a little too old for comic conventions. Still, I remember my dad happily scooting around in his wheelchair at conventions like a kid in a candy store. You're never too old to have fun.

Fanboy #1: "You can see all the cute girls in costume."

Fanboy #2: "That'll be cool."

Imaginative cosplayers provide amusement throughout the day. Another attraction is the opportunity to meet your people, the ones who understand when you go to the Asian Art Museum not for the art but to check out the swords so you can draw them authentically, who know the difference between manga and manhwa (Japanese comics and Korean comics), who can find the dealer room with their eyes closed.

"The art show is a showcase." - Dann Lopez, FanimeCon art show director

It's refreshing to see a well-run art show, which is what Dann Lopez was doing. Wearing many hats, Dann and his artist wife Mo Starkey are also the owners of SiliCon, "Silicon Valley's annual convention of Science Fiction and Science Fact."

Entering convention art shows and related events puts me in a better position to encourage other artists, as well as to get ideas from them. I know what it's like...

- ...to stay up all night working on drawings because you decided at the last minute you wanted to be in the art show,
- ...to be front and center in a quick draw competition, with friends watching, only to come up with something a kindergartner could have done better,
- ...to spend days on your artwork only to have a geezer at the copy shop not care enough to wipe the platen glass to make good copies,
- ...to try to get good scans while the clock's ticking on a rented and expensive copy center computer,
- ...to apologize for artwork that you've worked so long and hard on that you certainly shouldn't be sorry.

"Manga is a method of communication between the artist and readers."



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- You Higuri, FanimeCon guest of honor

I went to Friday's "You Higuri Q&A," the Saturday morning press session, Sunday's "Manga Techniques with You Higuri," Monday's "You Higuri & 'Shannon'" (a collaborative comic with U.S. writers) and that afternoon's autograph session. By the time I reached her table for autographs, she smiled in recognition.

"Drawing to please myself is having the cake. The money [from art sales] is icing on the cake."

--James Bender, FanimeCon art show volunteer and artist row vendor

I admire the artists who work artist row or artist alley at conventions. They come in all flavors. Some are professionals; others are hobbyists. What they all have in common is they love to draw and share their work publicly.

James Bender volunteered 17 hours in the art show and put in another 9 hours selling his sexy prints and cards in artist row. He has been a FanimeCon art show volunteer since 1999. Like my cosplayer and artist friend Sihaya, he was selling his artwork in both the FanimeCon art show and artist row.

Stephanie Pui-Mun Law is a fantasy illustrator who works in watercolor. Fifty percent of her work is commissioned. Her clients have included Wizards of the Coast, HarperCollins, and Harlequin. She attends about six to seven conventions a year.

David Wong is a self-described "convention artist by trade." He averages 1500 projects a year, not including movie work. At present, he is doing conceptual design work - monsters, rayguns, ships - on three movies. His specialty is on-the-spot character designs.

I first met P.M.B.Q. (Phuong-Mai Bui-Quang) at Anime Expo 2002. That year she was debuting her comic "Tea Club." Five issues of "Tea Club" were published by Icarus Publishing before she discontinued working on it due to declining sales. Regarding her online store, she said, "It's still not enough to do full-time." She started with six related clothing designs and now has 17 girls' designs and 16 boys' designs.

Ben Seto, runner-up in TokyoPop's first Rising Stars of Manga contest, was handsewing Black Sheep Comics caps to "grow the brand name." This is his third year as a self-publisher. Scribbling away at an adjacent table were his artist friends Shaheed Khan, Derrick Chin, and Dave Talag. Shaheed explained they were using a random video feed through twin Sony PSones to show their work, including Ben Seto's.

Then there was BAAU (Bay Area Artists, Unite!), a group of about 50 artists who meet once a month. The official launch of their annual comic anthology is at FanimeCon. The anthology takes about six months to put together. They sell out their 500-print run at Anime Expo.

"Any scene you can imagine in your mind can be done with computer animation."

-- Allen Hastings, FanimeCon guest of honor

"The Beauty of 3D with Allen Hastings" was one of the many panels and workshops I attended. Allen is credited with developing LightWave 3D software. Another enjoyable workshop was "Manga Manga with Fred Schodt and Gilles Poitras." Other FanimeCon guests of honor were Hiroaki Inoue, Akemi Hayashi, Hiroyuki Yamaga, Fred Gallagher of "MegaTokyo" comic fame, J. Shannon Weaver, and Jonathan Osborne.

I missed two of the biggest events at the convention, which were Saturday's Der Cosplay and Sunday's Music Fest with Nami Tamaki, The Beautiful Losers, BLOOD, Camino, and Duel Jewel.

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*Kat Avila has a web site at www.geocities.com/buscandocalifornia.
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