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FEATURES

I Fell Asleep At the Eisners And Other Stories from Comic-con

by [Liz Miller](#)

Comic-Con. Four days and three nights with five people in a two-bed, forty-dollar motel room.

Any way you add it up, a good time.

It's hard to admit that I'm a bit of a poser in the world of comics--I love the big titles and the big heroes, read whatever and whenever I can, but I just don't have the finances and energy to keep up with what's hot and what's not. But with a little help from my friends--one aspiring artist and three hardcore comic "enthusiasts"--I managed to enjoy one of the nerdiest weekends I've ever known. My goals were simple -- try and learn more about the industry, the books I like, and the books I should be reading. Most importantly, find out if there's any chance that I'd stand a chance as a comic book writer--after all, what young girl doesn't dream of writing about superheroes? Okay, a lot of them. But they're not very interesting people.

And they wouldn't have had a good time this weekend.

Thursday

5:30 AM, Los Angeles: The alarm clocks--three of them--start to go off. I get up and turn them off before they wake anyone up. Including me.

6:30 AM: My cell phone rings. NOW I'm awake.

6:35 AM: I throw my bags in the back of my friend's car and hop in. In twelve hours, I'm really gonna want a shower. Right now, I just wish there had been time for breakfast.

9:30 AM: Outside San Diego, the other people I'm riding with start to wake up as we hit the city limits and the midmorning traffic. "The San Diego Comic-con starts today, so expect, like, 65 thousand people to be converging on downtown," the traffic reporter informs us.

9:45 AM: In San Diego proper: "Where do I go? Where do I go?" "Follow the jeep with the Spider-man sticker on it!"

10:00 AM: Finding the convention center? Easy. Paying for the parking lot? Hard. Alison is flipping out because she thinks we're going to miss the first big panel of the day. But how long can it take to feed eight dollars into the

parking machine?

10:45 AM: Still in line.

10:50 AM: Rush to the convention center to pick up our badges. Turns out that waiting in line for registration takes less time than parking. Order of the day for tomorrow--finding another parking lot.

11:00 AM: The panel Alison thought we were going to miss is not until Saturday, giving us plenty of time to cruise the dealer's room--a football field-sized expanse of booths--and more importantly, free goodies.

As we enter, Alison starts listing off all the creators she needs to have sign her books. I scoff. "I still don't get autographs. What's the point of... HOLY SHIT, THAT'S MICHAEL CHABON!"

11:05 AM: Dig my (so-very-fortunate) copy of [*McSweeney's Mammoth Treasury of Thrilling Tales*](#) from my bag, and hand it to Michael Chabon. Try to avoid becoming an insane squealy fangirl. Fail miserably.

Michael Chabon has great hair. And you wish that you had an autographed *Escapist* poster.

11:10 AM: Return to meet Alison. Say nothing as we troop over to Brian Michael Bendis's booth to get issues of [*Alias*](#) and [*Daredevil*](#) signed.

11:45 AM: Having made it through about half the dealer's room, my bag is already full to bursting with free swag.

12:00 PM: Time for my first panel of the day and because I'm writing this thing for Bookslut, I've decided that I want to focus on the more intellectual panels. "CAC #1: Superhero Identities" should fulfill that need nicely.

12:30 PM: SO BORED. Asian representation in comic books can be summed up as follows: Was really bad, has gotten better. And this new woman's entire premise for her paper is "All my friends read [*Love and Rockets*](#) and it's really cool." Duck out of panel and scoot up hallway to "Seduction of the Innocent."

1:00 PM: After watching rare video clips of Vincent Price argue intelligently with Fredric Wertham on the subject of violence in film, it's a shame to turn away from the screen and watch the angry men on the panel shout about how the comics industry let itself be handicapped by the Comics Code. An interesting point is made, though, about adding violence to make books fit into the more mature lines like Vertigo and Marvel MAX. I'd disapprove, but when the bones splinter in [*Preacher*](#), it's just so cool!

3:30 PM: After lunch, I decide to find out "What Publishers Want" in terms of submitting as a writer or artist. According to the panelists, though, including representatives from Oni Press and Top Cow, they like it if you're both, and they like it even better if you're already self-published. In short, folks, there be no room for this amateur. At least, right now.

4:00 PM: I head to "From the Cradle to The Keyboard" a bit early, and find myself mere feet away from TV's Wil Wheaton.

When I was a teenager, Wil Wheaton had a minor role in the remake of *Flubber*, which was shooting in San Jose. I nearly staked out the set. That was how much I liked Wil Wheaton. Meanwhile, behind me, one writer pitches his screenplay idea to another writer. "It's like *Tootsie* on ice," he says. Hollywood seems close by, and not for the last time.

The panel starts--Nalo Hopkinson, Wil Wheaton, James Rollins, and Vernor Vinge discussing their childhood influences and their favorite books: pulp fiction and Judy Bloom and sci-fi. Everyone admits to a crush on Wesley Crusher. It's nice to know I'm not alone.

For Vinge, solving problems at the sentence level cascades upwards to fix larger problems. But later, he references buying something on Amazon, and the moderator--proprietor of the Mysterious Galaxy bookstore in San Diego--slaps him down.

Nalo Hopkinson has a lovely deep voice and admits to being a lost and lonely nerd child. She's just plain neat. I make a note: add her new book to my Amazon wishlist.

6:30 PM: After attending a screening of and Q&A regarding Neil Gaiman's "A Short Film about John Bolton," I have learned two things: "John Bolton" does not suck, and Neil Gaiman is bad at putting up shelves.

Friday

2:37 AM: I wake up on the floor of our crappy motel room with Billy Joel's "Only the Good Die Young" stuck in my head. The motel room smells like my grandparents' house did--like cigarettes and death. And when you think about the ending of "A Short Film About John Bolton" at 2:37 AM, it's much, much creepier than before.

10:30 AM: I'm craving a latte and a chiropractor, but I make do with a panel about comic books in the movies, which I arrive late at, only to discover that it's been hijacked by Stan Lee.

Stan Lee wears his ego on his sleeve, and there's something strangely adorable about that. He's a genius who should never be allowed to write, but I make a note to add [Excelsior](#) to my wish list, anyways.

Best quote of the morning comes from Robert Miles Burnett: "The technology has finally caught up with our imaginations." Perhaps, by *Spiderman 2*, the storytelling will be up to par as well.

1:00 PM: Faced with a horribly difficult choice, I go to the "Creative Screenwriting: Comics to Film" panel, primarily with the hope that someone will say to James Robinson, writer of *LXG*, "Dude, what the fuck?" But once I get there, it turns out that the panel is being heavily moderated by a columnist from Creative Screenwriting, and there's no opportunity for questions. Not even, "Hey, David Hayter--can you keep the pirates in *Watchmen*?"

1:10 PM: I duck out and over to the *Farscape* panel--and everyone's adorable even without make-up. Especially Ben Browder. But like all the TV panels, half an hour into it all the questions become, "I really really really really REALLY

love the show..."

2:05 PM: I duck back to the screenwriting panel, but someone in a baseball cap is now speaking about how the Danger Room got cut from the budget of *X-2*, and I'm not wearing my glasses. I lean over to the guy next to me:

"Hey, who's talking?"

"That's Bryan Singer."

"Holy shit!"

"He directed..."

"I know who he is!"

I have such a (fruitless) crush on Bryan Singer -- but the baseball cap? Doesn't work for him. He wins back my love, however, with the most delightful gag reel from *X-2* I've ever had the pleasure of viewing. Parts of it are unlikely to make it onto the DVD, apparently. Something about the dildos...

5:00 PM: Neil Gaiman and Dave McKean present some advance footage from *Mirror-mask* (it's like *Labyrinth*, without puppets), which is looking very pretty, and Dave McKean has a tiBook with OS X on it. This makes me feel very vindicated, geek-wise.

8:00 PM: We file into the auditorium after a quick pizza dinner, half an hour early for the Eisners. Two rows up from us, I see a young man reading *Seabiscuit*, which I read and really liked. Alison and I start our same debate over whether the movie is going to be any good. A man sitting in the row in front of us turns around and tells us it rocks.

9:00 PM: I recognize half of the books that are nominated for comics' most prestigious award, and half yet of those which are actually winning. A young man with shaggy hair and glasses accepts the award for *Fleep* and Jason Shiga, Talent Deserving of Wider Recognition. Not-Jason-Shiga's speech is a hilarious, beautiful thing, and we all become convinced that that was really Jason Shiga. His funny was deserving of wider recognition, at least.

9:15 PM: No more speeches are given as good as Jason Shiga's. I fall sleep.

11:10 PM: I fall asleep on an actual bed. Life is good.

Saturday

9:45 AM: We arrive earlier than usual, due to our eagerness to see JMS and Bendis talk about their *Spider-man* series, and sit outside waiting for the hall to open up. From our perch on the stairs, we notice Jason Shiga walking by. "Go talk to him," someone tells me.

9:46 AM: I run down the stairs and accost "Jason Fleep... I mean, Shiga..." His name tag says "Jason Shiga" and he's nice, smiling a lot. His white teeth are slightly crooked, and he does look like he could be the grandson of a marooned WWII Japanese fighter pilot.

I tell him I loved his speech and want to buy *Fleep* that day. "Will you be at

your publisher's booth?" He says yes, and I bounce away happily.

11:10 AM: Bendis announces that he's ending the *Alias* series (not at all related to the television show) for creative reasons. He's in love with Jessica Jones, the main character, and they're moving her to a new series that will make her a much more important part of the Marvel universe.

For the first time, I really see the possibilities inherent in this medium--just in the production of issues, the challenges and joys found within the steady creation of new stories.

I had to go to Comic-con to really fall in love with comic books.

11:40 AM: I stroll through the dealer's room and find the Sparkplug Press booth. The many copies of *Fleep* are now marked as Eisner-winning, and I ask the man behind the desk where Jason Shiga is.

"Oakland. There are too many germs here."

"Ummm... I saw him outside. He said he would be here."

"That's the guy pretending to be Jason Shiga." He handed me a color-bound zine. "This is the book he does."

I pick up *Fleep* and *Bainst* by F.C. Brandt. I keep an eye out for him, but I go the rest of the weekend without Not-Jason-Shiga's autograph.

1:45 PM: Things learned at the panel entitled "Do You Have What It Takes to Pitch for Star Trek?": I don't. Mainly because I don't rip off plots from old movies. Apparently, that's the way to go.

"It's *Flight of the Phoenix*! In space!"

5:15 PM: Okay, *Van Helsing* looks really really cool. Much better than it has any right to look. And Hugh Jackman? He's cut off his long girly hair, and he couldn't look any better.

Not that I'm shallow.

8:30 PM: Instead of going to Masquerade, we decide to go back to the hotel early. But instead of going back to our hotel early, we end up waiting around a parking garage for three hours, locked out of the car. I catch up on my reading, borrowing *100 Bullets* and *Dark Knight Strikes Again*. I'd read the first two parts, and Volume 3 doesn't improve my opinion of it too much. When you find yourself enjoying the vaguely incestual love between old man Batman and teenage Catgirl, just because it's the first hint of humanity in the entire series, it's a bad sign.

Sunday

11:00 PM: Quentin Tarantino shouts into a microphone. I cower in my seat and read *Y: The Last Man*. Pretty much the best book ever.

2:30 PM: As my energy flags, so does my notetaking. If you were wondering about Eliza Dushku's new series, "Tru Calling," don't. Use that energy to look forward to "Wonderfalls," which features a cynical heroine and talking plastic

animals.

3:00 PM: My last panel of the day--JMS and others talking about writing. I finally get to ask someone about the differences between comic book writing and screenwriting, and I finally get a really good answer.

In response to my query, JMS takes the opportunity to lecture a bit about screenwriting and the challenges of making it past the evil Hollywood reader. As I'm paying for this weekend in part with the money made as a evil Hollywood reader, I can't help but mention that.

"I hate you so much," JMS tells me, and we laugh, me included.

"So now you're trying to be one of us?" a woman behind me remarks, and I turn around.

"I am one of us!" I reply.

And for the first time all weekend, I believe it.

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