

## San Diego 2005 : Extracts from the journal of David Baillie

### Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> July

I wake up on San Diego's Ocean Beach (or Obi as the locals call it) and brush myself down. I am in town for the world famous San Diego ComicCon that is held here every year and I intend to:

- a) See lots of cool stuff
- b) Meet up with friends I don't see often enough, and have a good time
- c) Pimp myself to the many US editors that will be here.

After a shower and shave back at my hotel, I head into town where I meet up with Joel (of Tripwire fame) and Andy (of Goldust Comics fame) who have just flown in from London. I tell them about my recent adventures in Las Vegas and LA over a bite to eat. Andy then heads down to the convention centre (or center as the Americans insist on writing it) to do some buying and selling. Joel and I take in Romero's new zombie flick *The Land Of The Dead* and then show up in time for ComicCon's Preview Night, which is open to all pre-booked attendees.



The first thing that strikes me about SDCC, in comparison with the UK conventions that I've attended, is its sheer size. Someone tells me the floor is a mile long and a quarter mile wide and I have no reason to doubt them. There are over 100,000 attendees and thousands of booths. There is a Pikachu on one end of the floor that is about the size of my house and a full-size Optimus Prime (or at least a big red truck with an Autobot symbol on its cab) at the other.

The next thing I notice is the costumes. Every second or third person is dressed up as some super hero or genre film character. My favourites so far have been the Elvis Stormtrooper, the guy in the General Grievous exoskeleton and the family of zombies who are wandering round the convention floor in character. Lane blockages are frequently being caused by young



ladies dressed in either Catwoman or Batgirl outfits...  
Or rather overweight men queuing to take photographs of them.

I decide that I won't harass the editorial staff present on the first night but nonetheless end up chatting to Dan DiDio and Karen Berger in the course of the evening. I spend the rest of my time taking in the incredible sights (by which of course I mean the many extravagant displays – not the Catwomen!)

The hall closes and I make my way back to the hotel to meet Dan (of Daniel Merlin Goodbrey fame) who then proceeds to demonstrate why he has a reputation for his incredible capacity for tequila.

### Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> July

Today the scheduled events and panels begin. There are often three or four things happening simultaneously that I fancy going along to so I run between them, catching as much as I can. These include:



Comic Book Law School – the first in a series of four 'lectures' discussing contracts, trademarks, intellectual property ownership and other legal issues which might be of interest to the modern comics creator...

Andrew Pepoy's Professional Networking Seminar – a guide to 'pressing the flesh' from Pepoys, a respected inker, who litters the talk with

examples from his own career – including a faux pas from this very morning that he reckons might cost him future work.

Self Publishing Guide 101 – David Lapham, Matt Kindt and Tim Stroup from Cold Cut Distribution offer advice on how to tell whether or not you're cut out for 'going it alone'.

A Scanner Darkly – preview of the upcoming Richard Linklater helmed film, based on the Philip K Dick novel,



starring a rotoscoped Keanu Reeves and Woody Harrelson. An android facsimile of PKD shares the stage with the production team and malfunctions entertainingly throughout. In the subsequent press junket, though, it behaves far better and quite happily sits and answers questions in the voice of Dick.

Spotlight on Scott McCloud – Mr McCloud entertains the audience with a brief overview of his career, a discussion of his theory of Comics’ ‘Three Tribes’ and a quick chat about his new book - all delivered at breakneck pace.

Spotlight on Bruce Campbell – I actually have no idea what happened in here as the queue went around the convention centre and I didn’t much fancy wasting an hour of my day standing in it.

A Conversation with David Cronenberg – an entertaining chat with Mr Cronenberg and the screenwriter of his new movie A History Of Violence (loosely based on the graphic novel by John Wagner). No androids but we do get a ten minute film clip.

After an exhausting day I collapse back at the hotel.



### **Friday 15<sup>th</sup> July**

I deliberately skip this morning’s V For Vendetta talk and instead relax over a sushi breakfast and plan my day. On the way into the convention I spot Stan Lee being stalked by a pack of desperate fans (I will see him again in a few hours and he will still have the same group in hot pursuit).

Today's panel rundown:

The daily Self Publishing 101 class – which is headed by Terry Moore (Strangers in Paradise) Phil Fogglio (Girl Genius) and Mark Thompson and again offers some useful advice about the nitty gritty of self publishing.



The Vertigo Panel – this is kind of similar to the kind of thing we get at the UK conventions – a few writers and artists on stage trying to look enthusiastic for the duration of the overhead projector based presentation. Karen Berger, Shelley Bond, Brian Azzarello, Brian K Vaughan, Pia Guerra, Brian Wood, Becky Cloonan and others are

in attendance, and it is probably far more interesting that I make it sound.

After harassing every editor I could find I grab a spot of lunch with Joel and head back to continue my panel hopping...

Spotlight on David Lapham – a very interesting deconstruction of how he got to where he is today (self publishing Stray Bullets and doing okay by all accounts) with a whistle stop tour of entertaining anecdotes about Jim Shooter, Steve Ditko and the rise and fall of a comics company. Afterwards he hands out signed copies of the first printing of Stray Bullets #1.

The Eisners – the comics Oscars, held every year at SDCC, and the first to happen without Mr Eisner himself sitting on the stage. I have been looking forward to this, despite many people warning me that can be overlong and a bit dull. On the way in I spot an unsteady Eddie Campbell gushing at Nick Cardy. On the way out my hands are sore from applauding. Afterwards I head to the Hyatt bar with Merlin and the guys from Isotope Comics.

I presumably head back to the hotel and crash after this, but I don't rightly recall...

### **Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> July**

This is the day that Hollywood comes to town. James 'Isotope' Sime warned me last night that agents desperate to option something this weekend will pry my comic from my hands. I decide that breakfast is more important than a movie option and stock up

on carbs for the day ahead. (Brief aside – how the hell can anyone tolerate the abomination that is the Atkins Diet? Pfah!)

I miss the Superman Returns talk and preview but do make it to the Cup O’ Joe panel, featuring Joe Quesada, Joe Straczynski, C. B. Cebulski and Robert Kirkman. They mostly pimp new Marvel projects and engage in a bit of banter on stage, but it is entertaining nonetheless. They finish with a teaser slide of the word ‘KING’ with a crown replacing the dot over the ‘i’, prompting the rumour that Stephen King will be writing an upcoming Marvel miniseries. Afterwards I approach Joey Q, JMS and Mr Cebulski and give them copies of my new minicomic, knowing full well that they are incredibly unlikely to leave San Diego with them. (I think Quesada thought I wanted an autograph, but I get one of those with every rejection letter I receive from Marvel).



Kevin Smith draws an even bigger crowd than Bruce Campbell did the other day, and it is obvious that he loves the adoration as he passes by the queue on the way into the talk room. As I have now grown averse to queuing I wander round the convention floor instead.

A Tribute to Will Eisner – Denis Kitchen, Paul Levitz, Mike Richardson, Scott

McCloud and Batton Lash head up a panel relating stories about the grand master of the medium.

Self Publishing 101 again – this time Carla Speed McNeil, Rick Spears, Diamond’s Jeremy Shorr and Tim Stroup discuss the mechanics of distribution, advertising and the importance of publishing plans.

The Mindscape of Alan Moore – I only make it to the end of this but I saw the complete article at the ICA in London last year. I have a nice chat with director DeZ Vylenz (which is not a typo – he capitalises his name this way) who I met at the Bristol Expo.

I skip the masquerade party and fail to get into the impromptu Tenacious D concert, instead going to the Mirrormask launch party / Comicbook Legal Defence Fund fundraiser with Andy and Joel. It is here that I witness the funniest William Shatner impersonation I will ever see.

Then I go to bed.

## Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> July

Usually, two days at the bi-annual Bristol Comic Convention are enough to leave me looking and feeling like a Romero zombie, so I invite the reader to imagine the state I am in now. My feet hurt (I think I've walked a hundred miles this week – I don't know how The Proclaimers thought that they could manage five hundred) and my posture accurately conveys my general exhaustion. I have neither the energy to pimp my wares nor shave, so I enter the convention hall on the last day with a bag of comics I know will get no lighter and dodgy facial hair that makes it look like I've been sleeping behind a hotel rather than in one.

I wander into a panel about a new documentary about comics, imaginatively titled A Documentary About Comics. They show some interview footage of Eisner, Gaiman and Clowes. The film looks interesting but I think the panel are feeling just as burnt out as I do, as their energy levels are mere inches from the floor.

After struggling to stay awake for this, I decide I can do no more panels this weekend and stumble across the floor to try and get my comics into the hands of yet more people. I find and chat to Stan Sakai, Mike Mignola, Eddie Campbell, David Mack and Peter David. I also get to talk to Alex Robinson and pick up his new graphic novel Tricked (his last book Box Office Poison is one of my all time favourite comics – I don't have the energy to tell him this though, so I just thank him and ask him how his week has been).



On the last night of the convention Graphiti Designs hold a 'Dead Dog Party'; attendance is by invitation only. Last year's has already passed into legend due to a brawl that featured most of the Wizard Top Ten, a giant bouncer named Marlin and his giant bouncer friends. No invitation was forthcoming but I was not disappointed as myself and Dan tagged

along with the Isotope – AiT/PlanetLar crew on their final night dinner. James Sime et crew, Larry Young, Mimi Rosenberg, Charlie Adlard and Ken Levine, Hollywood agent to the cream of comic, sat at the table – as did a bottle of whiskey, a few bottles of wine and more jugs of beer than I could count (mainly because I was partaking of the whiskey and beer almost as enthusiastically as Larry).

## **Monday 18<sup>th</sup> July**

So that's it – San Diego ComicCon is over.

I say my farewells and board the Amtrak to Los Angeles for my last couple of nights in the US of A. The story of how I coincidentally bumped into current Swamp Thing scribe Joshua Dysart and his lovely lady friend Laine on Venice Beach, and the subsequent night of bongo fury, jazz, fire breathing, stilt walking burlesque and beach bikes will have to wait for another time.

It may well take until next July for me to recover from all the excitement.  
My feet feel better already.

*David Baillie is a writer and artist who lives and works in London, however he often goes to more exotic places to do his writing and arting. This, for example, was written poolside at a villa in Cyprus. He hopes you are jealous.*