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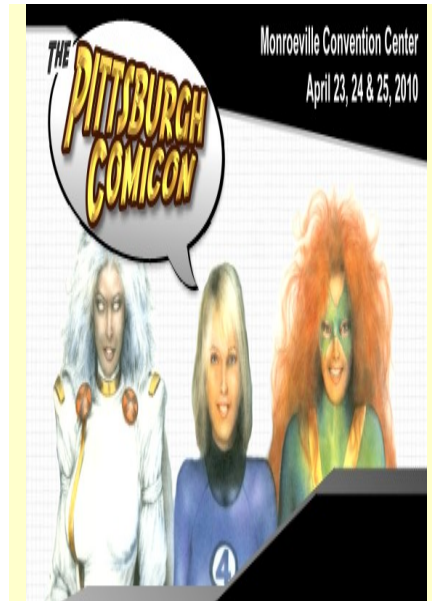
Bagged & Boarded: Pittsburgh Comicon 2010

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April is quickly becoming one of my favorite months. Winter is in the rear view mirror, the temperatures are on the rise and baseball is back in action. It's also time for my now annual pilgrimage to Pittsburgh with my friend and fellow writer, Daron Kappauff of [ComicsNexus.com](#). [The Pittsburgh Comicon](#) is our destination, where we can revel in our comic book passion with friends, creators and vendors alike. There are a lot of comic conventions across the United States every year, but what sets the Pittsburgh Comicon apart is how accessible the comic artists, writers and guest celebrities are. At many shows you're forced into cattle lines and given no more time with your favorite creator as it takes to hand a comic across the table for a quick and barely legible signature. The Pittsburgh show feels much more friendly, and you can spend plenty of time chatting with everyone from industry legends like Stan Lee and artists like George Pérez or Mike Grell to wonderful illustrators and painters such as Tom Fleming and Stuart Sayger. There are comic pros to meet like Michael Oeming, Billy Tucci and Talent Caldwell as well as many up-and-coming artists who may be drawing your new *X-Men*, *Avengers*, *Teen Titans* or *WildC.A.T.S.* comics within a year. There are always some interesting celebrities on hand, such as Peter Mayhew and David Prose (better known to most as Chewbacca and Darth Vader, respectively), Aaron Douglas aka Chief Tyrol of *Battlestar Galactica* fame, veteran actor Marc Singer and former WWE star Mike "Virgil" Jones. I've spent time chatting with these folks and they're all extremely nice -- yes, even Darth Vader and The Beastmaster!



Come join the fun at Pittsburgh Comicon, April 23-25 2010!

In anticipation of this year's show, Daron and I reached out to a few creators we've come to know over the last few years, and asked them a few questions about convention life. These talented men and women include Bryan J.L. Glass, Harvey Award winning writer of "The Mice Templar" from Image Comics; Darryl Banks, the longtime artist of DC's "Green Lantern" and the creator of Kyle Rayner (with Ron Marz); Marc Wolfe, Army veteran and Lucasfilm illustrator whose work deserves to grace many more comic covers than they currently do; Adam Withers and Comfort Love, the husband and wife duo behind "The Uniques," a terrific independent comic; Rich Bernatovech, writer of "The Sentinels" graphic novel saga through his own publishing house, Drumfish Productions; Jamie Fay, a soon-to-be-household-name artist who has contributed to "The Sentinels" and is working with Rich Bernatovech on "Neverminds;" and finally Pittsburgh Steel Man, the real life superhero of Pittsburgh! Seriously folks, a lot of conventions will have people dressed up as comic book superheroes, but how many can say they host a real one?



How many comic conventions do you typically get to in a year?

Bryan J. L. Glass: It increases every year. Will probably hit a dozen before 2010 ends.

Darryl Banks: 2 to 3 shows per year.

Marc Wolfe: In the past I would kill myself and do upwards of 18 or so. In the past two years I have cut way back due to commission responsibilities and do maybe 6 or so.

Adam Withers and Comfort Love: Typically we do a lot. For 2010 we're aiming for 20 shows, though we may not quite hit that mark. Several shows we wanted to go to are on the same weekend this year, which makes it impossible to do every show we'd want to.

Rich Bernatovech: Definitely not as many as I'd like. They get expensive and I have a full time job so it's also hard to get off from work for a lot of them. But I've basically been doing 5 a year.

Jamie Fay: I do enough to show face but not to over-do it. More than 10 a year for an indie creator is crazy especially with working a full-time job and creating books!

Pittsburgh Steel Man: The Steel Man only attends about two or three comic convention per year at the most. I just started my Steel Man comic series and I have two other series in the works, so, when things start to get going more, I will probably make it out to more comic conventions because I love promoting my character, products and entertaining. My writing is very fast because my story is based on a true story, however, the artwork takes extra time with my current process, but hopefully, as I get more finished work out there, I will get out to more comic conventions.

What was the first comic convention you ever attended? How did it influence the writer/artist you would become?

Bryan: This is a toughie...

First convention I ever went to was a Philadelphia Creation Con way back in '79. An astoundingly good time, and it told me this was the community of folk I wanted to be associated with.

First con as an aspiring pro was probably another Philly show in the early 90s.

But the first con to ever host me as a guest was good old Pittsburgh Con, shortly after my novel *Quixote* was published by Image back in 2005.

I feel the most powerful creative influence a con can have upon the aspiring creator is to connect with the pros at every strata of the industry, and of every individual art and discipline of the craft, and realize that they're real people. So if they can make it, so can you. For the aspiring creators that are honest with themselves, there are stories aplenty to be heard by creators that have tread the path before you.

Darryl: I don't remember the name of it. It was a small, local convention in Columbus, Ohio back in 1981. I won an amateur artist contest and got critiques from Jim Shooter, Val Mayerik and Joe Rubenstein.

Marc: The first convention I ever attended was the Motor City show (second was Pittsburgh). I had attended shows beforehand as a fan and enjoyed seeing all of artists showing their work. At every show you see a wide range of talent from beginners to top pros. At the time I gauged myself somewhere in the middle and figured I would give it a shot. My first show I was lucky and had a great welcome from the fans.

I was hooked and never looked back at having a "real" job.

Adam and Comfort: We both had our first con

experiences at the Motor City Con, Adam around '97 and Comfort the fall of '99. We're both from Michigan originally, so it was kind of our home town show.

Fun as those shows were, it wasn't until we went together to a WWChicago show in 2001 and brought our portfolios for review that we had a deeper experience. This was when we hit a major creative inspiration point; getting reviews from artists and editors we respected and feeling like we were part of something so big and bright and possible made us want even more to become professionals.

Rich: The first comic convention that I attended where I had was the Big Apple Con in NYC. This was waaaay back when they used to have a lot of big name guest there. It influenced me a lot as I finally got to met many artists and writers who I always admired. Seeing them as real people and interacting with them showed me that I could one day follow in their footsteps.

Jamie: The first convention I ever attended was the Pittsburgh Comicon and it totally influenced me. I met a future collaborator and friend in Rich Bernatovech. Since then I've had art published, moved to NYC and have got a legion of the best fans on the planet.





Steel Man: My first comic convention was the 2008 Pittsburgh Comicon. I enjoyed my first comic convention the best because I did not know exactly how I wanted to set things up and I had a ridiculous amount of products to sell that were Steel Man and Steel Dog related. My booth ended up looking like a dollar store but my crew liked it. We were very unique and I have never seen a booth set up like my first one. Maybe someday I'll go back to the "old-school style booth arrangement" – just to shake things up again. I also had some very bad homemade videos that I played at my first comic convention with some make-shift acting along with scenes from me on local and national TV. The first comic convention video that I

created, as a whole, was very unprofessional and very unfinished but I liked it because it was very funny – kind of like Italian

Spider-Man. I combined my amateurish work with the better "professional" work from my public appearances on the news, local and national television. My video had a cheesy amateurish look that was very unique. It is very important for the Steel Man to be different than any other performer, writer or artist. I take pride knowing that my work is different than any other artist and, in time, I will demonstrate to all that I am the very best at what I do. During my first comic convention, I even had some of the so-called professionals in the Pittsburgh Comicon make fun of my video, especially when I was dancing to classic KISS music. I am especially proud that one so called professional had to go out of his way to try to belittle me. He just made the satisfied customers list and we'll be seeing more of each other in the future as I launch my upcoming new comic series. Negativity only feeds the flame of Steel Man's furnace and it helps me to be a better artist, writer and most importantly a Real Anti-Hero. Each convention I have attended, I have tried to get a little better and I believe I have and I hope you come and visit me at the 2010 Pittsburgh Comicon. The first convention I attended established a baseline for which I intend to improve. Each year that I attend the Pittsburgh Comicon – I expect to be better than the previous year and that is a goal again this year for me at the 2010 Pittsburgh Comicon. However, in the scheme of things, comic book conventions are not very important to the Steel Man. In time, you will realize why the Steel Man wrote the greatest real graphic novel ever conceived. From my perspective, "I really had no choice."

What is the strangest request you've ever received from a convention attendee?

Bryan: When attending a con, as a guest or attender, strange simply comes with the territory. Weird is simply part of the overall charm.

Darryl: Years ago I used to get requests for porno sketches which I don't do. I consider that

strange because I'm usually surrounded by artists that will do that but people kept asking me. It's pretty much clear nowadays.

Marc: Well... There have been a few that definitely stand out. I have had a few asking for particular female heroes nude or in distasteful ways. I refuse to do those based on the fact that I respect the characters and wouldn't want to sign my name to anything like that. The weirdest is a fan that likes these anime girls that are also mermaids that happen to wear dresses and such. Oh, but they are also dancing in front of a waterfall. Yep, dancing mermaid anime schoolgirls. Hmm.



Adam and Comfort: This would probably be a request from a guy with a theme sketchbook that was all pictures of Muppets locked in mortal combat with Sesame Street characters. We did a picture of “Reservoir Muppets,” with the Swedish Chef as Mr. Blonde, dancing in front of a tied up police officer Bert after having just cut his ear off. Classic, hilarious, bizarre...and fun.

Rich: Hmm. I've seen a lot of odd and strange things at conventions but I have to be honest and say that I've never gotten a strange request made upon myself. I have a high tolerance to strangeness, lol. So maybe things just don't bother me too much at conventions. I'm used to the unusual.

Jamie: Well, it was strange but oh so fun. I was asked to draw Fisher-Price peg people as superheroes!

Steel Man: There are just so many. But, if you want strange, well, I would first like to remind people that the Steel Man comic is rated M for Mature so some of my humor and real life situations can get a little racy. In the past, I even wore a massive, real-life cod piece that made the George Clooney's Batman suit look like a pee-wee version. For one of my many requests, two young women knelt down and posed for pictures caressing my magnificent cowl. I had no choice but to allow these beautiful young women to do as they desired as, technically speaking, I am a Real Life Anti-Hero. My only request to the young women was, “Please be gentle.”

What makes the Pittsburgh Comicon different from other conventions you've attended?

Bryan: It has always been a very cozy, warm and welcoming environment for me. Pittsburgh is a great city with great people who always make me feel very much at home.

Darryl: I don't have a definitive answer for that other than I just like it and I always have. Promoter Renee George is always very nice to work with. She's very professional while remaining very personable. Pittsburgh is stuck with me for the time being!

Marc: Pittsburgh is great because it gets a ton of top artists and celebrity guests and you actually get to meet and talk to them without feeling too rushed like you would at other shows that seem

to just try to pump fans through the lines and get them to move on. The show makes everyone very approachable. Hanging out at the hotel bar at night is also very cool because most of the guests are there. It's not every day you get a chance to buy a Cylon or Darth Maul a drink.



Adam and Comfort: It has a real family atmosphere. The show runners are all very nice people, very personable and friendly. You spend a weekend at that show and you feel like you're part of the family too. We love that kind of welcoming and comfortable vibe; it makes you feel like you belong. The Pittsburgh Comicon is like the opening to the show "Cheers."

Rich: Pittsburgh was one of the first conventions I went to as a professional and they treated me with a lot of respect. I like how they treat the creators who come back year after year with appreciation and don't treat you like you're there

to serve them. They want to help you make the show the best it can be for you. The guests are among the friendliest around and I always have a great time with the other creators. It has a very nice community feel to it that I enjoy.

Jamie: The Pittsburgh Comicon is different because the owners of the show actually care about the creators present. They feed us, and make sure we have a good time after the shows as well. They are also some of the nicest people to chat with. A+ to them all!

Steel Man: The Pittsburgh Comicon is different from all other convention because a Real Life superhero takes stage. Not the make believe Hollywood developed Level B superheroes types that were on Stan Lee's "Who Wants To Be A Super Hero" but the real deal that finds himself in all sorts of dangerous and deadly serious situations. Even the comic fans don't quite know or believe what I mean when I say this but, hopefully, in time, as my story unfolds, they will realize that a real life superhero walked among them which many comic fan skeptics never believe possible. There is a movie, "Kick-Ass," coming out to the theaters very soon and the premise is that there are real superheroes without any superpowers – just normal people with costumes, gadgets, training and desire to fight crime- well that story already really happened in Pittsburgh and the real story, The Steel Man Story, is so incredible that nobody will believe it on first read. I guarantee the Steel Man story will be a much bigger hit than "Kick-Ass" when the story comes to the big screen.

Do have any advice for first-time attendees?

Bryan: Pace yourself. Make time to see everyone you planned to, as well as every scheduled event that caught your interest... but then see what new things there are to discover. Embrace some new title, writer or artist at every show you attend. You'll surprise yourself by what you find!

Darryl: The convention is great but make sure you attend some of the after-hours events like the charity auction. Expect to have fun and you will!

Marc: HAVE FUN! Don't be shy to go up to your favorite artist or celeb and have a book or photo signed. The Pittsburgh show has a nice relaxed atmosphere so take your time and enjoy. Oh, and stop by my booth and say hi!

Adam and Comfort: Don't be afraid to talk to the people behind the booths. Pretty much all of us used to be attendees ourselves, and part of why we go to cons is to meet people and introduce you to our stuff. We want to say hello, so you don't have to be nervous about being friendly or conversational. It makes the weekend more fun for all of us. Just be polite and you'll be fine.

Rich: Don't just walk around the convention looking at things, talk to the creators! If you're an aspiring artist or writer, ask them questions. Most of them will be happy to help and answer you.

Jamie: Hmm, definitely make good friends. And make the right ones. There are so many people at the cons that act so nice and you wanna like them, but then they turn out to be liars, thieves and cheats. It reflects on you who you associate with--the wrong people can hurt you. Other than that, talk to people when they are at your table. Stand up and give them a moment of your time. SMILE! Don't sit there and look like you are depressed or sad because its gonna scare people away. SELL your product.



Steel Man: If you are referring to new guests, artists or writers: Have fun, differentiate yourself, never quit and work like hell. I do all these things when I'm at a convention. When the show is over, I am tired and that's for a damn good reason because I put out more energy than anyone else in the show. Work hard and never let anyone tell you that you cannot do something. And if you truly believe in your work and have done all the hard work and preparation to make it succeed, then you know it is already a success. To the non-believers, just give them a Steel Man salute for me.

If you are referring to comic fans coming to the show, come see the Pittsburgh Steel Man booth – it does not get any better than, “Steel Man, Pittsburgh's Official Super Hero.”

