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## Bears and Bots at Anime Expo 2007

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*The level of talent in Artist Alley was impressive, reflecting developmental maturity of original English-language manga artists*

By Kat Avila | Web Published 7.12.2007

My press friends from Guadalajara are hardcore.

They were in line at 6 a.m. Friday to buy tickets for the S.K.I.N. concert (an orgasmic J-Rock extravaganza) at the Long Beach Arena. When I saw them at Sunday night's Masquerade costume and skit showcase, they told me they had gotten up at 5 that morning to be among the first 50 in the Exhibit Hall in order to get a free poster of pop singer Halko Momoi.

Carlos admitted he had had only one hour of sleep.

That was Anime Expo 2007 held at the Long Beach Convention Center, June 29-July 2, with a record attendance of 44,000 fans.

I got more rest than Carlos since I knew there would be lots of walking to individual events, more than at last year's convention in Anaheim. I had attended AX in 2002, the last time it had been in Long Beach. It had been a real challenge getting around with my father in a wheelchair. Wheelchair-bound Daniel Stanford said that a quarter of his day was spent getting from point A to point B.

I saw old friends and made new friends. I took it as a good sign when I sat next to a fun-loving mother-daughter set during the opening ceremonies. Former California residents, Kim and Betty Davis had flown over from Austin, Texas, for their fifth year of attendance together.

Down the row from us sat a cosplayer dressed as a bear. David said he was Kuma/Jinnosuke from the TV anime series Afro Samurai. The head was made of papier-mache covered with fleece. Later, I saw him in the Exhibit Hall patiently posing for photographs with children. A U.S. Army man who considers California home, David was a long way from Germany where he is stationed.

In Artist Alley, a familiar face to me was Crystal Gronnestad from Alaska who has never missed an AX convention in 16 years though she spends the entire day at her sales booth. This year the level of talent in Artist Alley was impressive, perhaps reflecting developmental maturity of original English-language (OEL) manga artists or artists from a wider demographic.

Even with the running around I was doing, I found time to donate blood at the on-site American Red Cross blood mobile. The average age of AX donors was 20 years old (you have to be at least 17 years old). Besides the usual after-donation juice and cookies, I walked away with a free box of chocolate-tipped Pocky biscuit sticks, a free Trinity Blood novel courtesy of TOKYOPOP, coupons for a free appetizer at Chili's, and was entered into a raffle for a \$500 gift certificate for gasoline.

After seeing the long winding line, I almost skipped an advance screening of the live action Transformers robot movie. Some fans had already waited two hours in the hot July sun. I changed my mind when I realized the whole convention was attending. I got a front row seat on the second balcony of the Terrace Theater. The



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Transformers fanboys and fangirls rabidly cheering on either side of me were as entertaining as the movie's computer graphic imagery (CGI) robots.

Next year's Anime Expo will be at the Los Angeles Convention Center because it has outgrown its previous venues. Can't wait that long to attend a comics convention? Comic-Con International is coming up soon. It will be July 26-29 at the San Diego Convention Center.

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