Comic-Con found a new home through the 1980s at San Diego's Convention and Performing Arts Center (CPAC) and became the event everyone—fans and pros alike—wanted to visit each summer.
Aside from one year back at the El Cortez (1981), Comic-Con spent the 1980s at CPAC, starting with just the Exhibit Hall and eventually expanding to take over the entire facility. Showings of Star Wars in 35mm brought in big crowds to Golden Hall. Cartoonists from the comics section of the then very popular National Lampoon magazine (M. K. Brown, Shary Flenniken, Rick Geary, Sam Gross, B. K. Taylor, and Mary Wilshire) occupied a prominent spot in the dealers’ room. A contingent of some of Japan’s finest manga and anime creators attended Comic-Con, including Osamu Tezuka (Astro Boy), Monkey Punch (Lupin III), Yumiko Igarashi (Candy, Candy), and Go Nagai (Mazinger). Scott Shaw! MC’d the Masquerade, and writer/artist Jack Katz (The First Kingdom) hosted the Inkpot Awards banquet.

OPPOSITE PAGE, TOP: B. Kliban and his cats were almost a constant presence at Comic-Con until his sudden death in 1990.

MIDDLE LEFT: Japanese manga and anime great Osamu Tezuka (Astro Boy).

MIDDLE RIGHT: The Uncanny X-Men by Chris Claremont and John Byrne was Marvel’s #1 book at the time.

MIDDLE BELOW: John Stanley’s comic books based on Marge’s Little Lulu gag cartoons made him a comics legend.

BOTTOM: Authors Larry Niven (left) and Jerry Pournelle flank (left to right) animator Bob Clampett and actors Adam West and Kirk Alyn.

THIS PAGE, TOP: Jack Katz’s The First Kingdom was featured on the cover of the 1980 Souvenir Book.

BOTTOM RIGHT: A flyer promoting all “5 great days.”

BELOW: A Brenda Starr sketch by creator Dale Messick.
1981
COMIC-CON 12
JULY 23–26
El Cortez Hotel, Downtown
San Diego
Attendance:
About 5,000

Comic-Con made its final return to the El Cortez, which was temporarily reopened by its owners. The event finally shrank from five days to four, where it would remain until the introduction of Preview Night in 2005. The Masquerade MC was Laugh-In’s Gary Owens. Bill Woggon gave a well-received Katy Keene program. Soon-to-be executive director Fae Desmond put together an amateur film festival that drew more than 30 entries. Cartoonist Bil Keane (Family Circus) hosted the Inkpot Awards banquet, while Sergio Aragonés drew caricatures of presenters and winners. Ray Bradbury gave Julie Schwartz an Inkpot Award (Schwartz was Bradbury’s agent for many years). Bob Chapman started selling official Comic-Con T-shirts with his new company, Graphitti Designs, a partnership which continues to this day. This was the one year in the 1980s that Jack Kirby could not attend. The cost to attend Comic-Con for all 4 days in 1981? Twenty bucks!

OPPOSITE PAGE, TOP LEFT: A non-Disney Carl Barks ducks drawing from the Souvenir Book.
TOP RIGHT: Three 1981 badge, including one with Steve Canyon art by Milton Caniff.
MIDDLE: An Elfquest entry in the 1980 Masquerade caught the attention of Wendy and Richard Pini, along with MC Gary Owens.
BOTTOM LEFT: Comic strip greats Morrie Turner (Wee Pals) and Bil Keane (Family Circus).
BOTTOM RIGHT: Looks like Spidey got taken to the cleaners by MJ, in this Souvenir Book sketch by John Romita.

THIS PAGE, TOP: Dick Giordano’s DC-themed cover featured the Trinity: Wonder Woman, Batman, and Superman, with Robin in the background.
THIS PAGE, BOTTOM: Comic-Con’s first official T-shirt featured this stunning rendition of Sheena, Queen of the Jungle by Dave Stevens. It was produced by Bob Chapman’s Graphitti Designs, which continues to produce fine Comic-Con merchandise to this day.

NOTABLE GUESTS
JERRY BAILS
Regarded as the father of comics fandom

DAVE BERG
Cartoonist, MAD magazine

BIL KEANE
Syndicated cartoonist, Family Circus

JULIUS SCHWARTZ
DC Comics editor, Flash, Green Lantern, Justice League, Batman, Superman

JIM SHOOTER

DAVE SIM
Comic book writer-artist-creator, Cerebus
With budget problems, the Comic-Con committee made 1982 a year of restraint: All daytime activities, including films and programs, were in the Exhibit Hall, curtained off from the dealers. The Masquerade, once again MC’d by Gary Owens (who brought comedian Bill Dana along with him), was held at the El Cortez and featured a Fay Wray scream-alike contest, aping (get it?) the star of King Kong. A program previewing the new Star Wars movie, Return of the Jedi, had fans packed into the Continental Room at the Hotel San Diego. The Russ Manning Promising Newcomer Award was added to the banquet festivities, with Dave Stevens (a former assistant to Russ) being the first recipient.

**OPPOSITE PAGE, TOP:** Chris Claremont and Frank Miller were about to embark on their Wolverine mini-series for Marvel.

**SECOND ROW:** A murderers’ row of Art Auction art (left to right): Hogarth, Woggon, and Eisner.

**THIRD ROW:** Comic greats Carl Barks (Uncle Scrooge) and Burne Hogarth (Tarzan).

**BOTTOM:** Bob Chapman (left) at his Graphitti Designs booth with artist Dave Stevens.

**THIS PAGE, TOP LEFT:** Mark Evanier has been to every Comic-Con and moderated panels at most of them!

**THIS PAGE, TOP RIGHT:** Sergio Aragonés with Comic-Con founder Shel Dorf at the 1982 Inkpot Awards.

**MIDDLE RIGHT:** Frank Brunner’s Dexter the Duck Souvenir Book cover.

**BELOW:** A 1982 flier featuring Dave Stevens’ Rocketeer art.

**BELOW RIGHT:** Jack Kirby’s Captain Victory was the star of the official 1982 Comic-Con T-shirt.

**NOTABLE GUESTS**

**BRIAN BOLLAND**
British comic book artist, Camelot 3000

**MAX ALLAN COLLINS**
Fiction, comics writer, Dick Tracy, Ms. Tree, Road to Perdition

**HANK KETCHAM**
Syndicated cartoonist, creator, Dennis the Menace

**FRANK MILLER**
Comic book writer-artist, Daredevil, 300, Sin City, Batman: The Dark Knight Returns

**LEONARD STARR**
Syndicated cartoonist, creator, Mary Perkins On Stage
This was the first year Comic-Con tried a theme for programs: A pop culture salute to the Sixties, which was featured on the Souvenir Book cover with art by Con mainstay Rick Geary (his first cover). This is the first time a cover included the line “Souvenir Program Book,” paving the way for the bigger books in the 1990s to the present. For the first time since 1974, no Inkpot Awards banquet was held; the awards were handed out at a special ceremony at the Hotel San Diego. Also for the first time, comics companies turned out in force to promote their new products, especially for direct sales through comics shops. Among publishers present were DC, Marvel, Pacific, First, Eclipse, Kitchen Sink, Comico, and Archie’s Red Circle. The Con’s own closed-circuit TV (CCTV) in the hotel was quite popular, especially Barry Short’s morning show. Arn Saba MC’d the Masquerade. Additions this year included role-playing games and a children’s activity room.

NOTABLE GUESTS

DOUGLAS ADAMS
Science fiction author, The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy

FLOYD Gottfredson
Syndicated cartoonist, Mickey Mouse

NORMAN MAURER
Comic book writer-artist, movie producer, The Three Stooges

GRIM NATWICK
Artist, animator, Betty Boop, Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs

GEORGE PéREZ
Comic book writer-artist, New Teen Titans, Wonder Woman, JLA/Avengers
Comic-Con was held in late June, the earliest ever, because of the Summer Olympics in Los Angeles. The wide-ranging program schedule included "Con Feud" (a Family Feud-type quiz show with Marvel vs. DC), a panel on independent publishers, and one that asked the question as to why there aren’t more women reading or creating comics. Sergio Aragonés MC’d the Masquerade. The Bob Clampett Humanitarian Award was initiated, honoring people in comics and the popular arts who have worked to help others. Famous Monsters editor Forry Ackerman was the first recipient. The first Comic Book Expo—Comic-Con’s comic book industry trade show, which included publishers and manufacturers—was held June 26–27 in the basement of the Hotel San Diego, at the suggestion of Marvel’s sales manager Carol Kalish and organized by Comic-Con’s Fae Desmond. Behind the scenes at Comic-Con, Larry Geeck became president of the Board of Directors when founder Shel Dorf retired.

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Alan Moore made his only U.S. comics convention appearance. Gary Groth, Jack Kirby, Frank Miller, Marv Wolfman, and Jim Shooter (from the audience) engaged in a lively discussion during a panel on creators’ rights. The first Jack Kirby Awards (the precursor to the Will Eisner Comic Industry Awards), sponsored by Fantagraphics and administered by Dave Olbrich, were presented. Comic-Con moved further toward professionalism with the adoption of Rick Geary’s Toucan-design logo (see page 84) and the hiring of Fae Desmond as part-time general manager. Fae was Comic-Con’s first paid employee and went on to become executive director, in charge of the day-to-day operations of the event, a post she holds to this day. Volunteer—and future Comic-Con president—Robin Doig (Donlan) took over the Masquerade.
Comic-Con’s Masquerade moved to Saturday night, switching places with the Inkpot Awards banquet. Artists’ Alley was instituted, and among the first 75 artists who took turns at the 18 available tables were Scott McCloud, Steve Rude, Stan Sakai, Bob Burden, Don Simpson, Michael Kaluta, Charles Vess, Lee Marrs, Larry Marder, the Hernandez Brothers, and Bill Mantlo. Official autograph signings were also instituted at a table in Artists’ Alley. Artists’ Alley continues to this day as free juried space in the Exhibit Hall, run by longtime Comic-Con volunteer Clydene Nee.

The longest lines (and inklings of crowd control problems to come) were for Frank Miller and Stan Lee. John Rogers was elected president of the Board of Directors, a position he held until his death in November 2018. David Scroggy took over as the executive director of Comic Book Expo.

TOP: A chance meeting between Stan Lee and Jack Kirby (as wife Roz looks on) at Comic-Con in 1986. At the time, Lee and Kirby were believed to be estranged.

TOP RIGHT: A 1986 badge with art by Louise and Morgan Rendich.

MIDDLE ROW: Two of the hottest Indy comics creators in the Comic-Con’s 1986 Artists’ Alley: Kevin Eastman (left) and Peter Laird of Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles fame.

BOTTOM: 1986 Kirby Award winners include (with Kirby) Jerry Ordway and Karen Berger (front), George Pérez, Steve Rude, Dave Gibbons, John Totleben, and Frank Miller (back).

THIS PAGE, TOP: She-Hulk shows who’s in charge in this 1986 cover featuring Marvel Comics characters by John Romita.

RIGHT: And now for something completely different: British artist Brian Bolland’s take on Lady Blackhawk was the official 1986 Comic-Con T-shirt.

OPPOSITE PAGE, TOP: Comic-Con 1986 Souvenir Book cover characters © 2019 MARVEL • Lady Blackhawk TM & © DC Comics
Harlan Ellison enthralled an audience of 1,000+ with his aptly titled two-hour talk “A Brimstone and Hellfire Afternoon with Harlan Ellison.” Debuting at this year’s show was the Events Guide, permanently creating two separate publications for Comic-Con attendees, with the new magazine featuring the complete schedule of the event. A concert with Country Joe, a special exhibit in Golden Hall, and a panel all brought attention to the publication of the comic book series Real War Stories. Actors Bill Mumy and Miguel Ferrer were auctioneers for the Art Auction. Jackie Estrada started a three-year run as the MC of the Inkpot Awards. A special “Women’s Power Lunch” on the Sunday of the Con was held at downtown’s new mall, Horton Plaza. A major highlight for many pros was the surprise 70th birthday party held for Jack Kirby at the Hotel San Diego.

OPPOSITE PAGE, TOP LEFT: Writer-artist Scott McCloud was a few years away from his groundbreaking book, Understanding Comics, but was already a comic success with his Zot! series.

TOP RIGHT: Author Harlan Ellison.

MIDDLE LEFT: Comics creator and publisher Art Spiegelman had critical acclaim for the first volume of his graphic novel Maus, which went on to win the Pulitzer Prize.

MIDDLE RIGHT: Will Eisner’s Souvenir Book sketch.

BOTTOM: Jack Kirby’s surprise 70th birthday party was the event of Comic-Con in 1987.

THIS PAGE, TOP AND BOTTOM: Moebius’s charming and ethereal cover and the official T-shirt choice of Lone Wolf and Cub with art by co-creator Goseki Kojima, underlined the increasing influence of international comics and art on Comic-Con. It would be a few years until this influence manifested itself in a name change for the event.

WARD KIMBALL
Animator, one of Walt Disney’s “Nine Old Men”

FRANÇOISE MOULY
Editor, publisher, Raw Books; art editor, The New Yorker

MIKE PETERS
Syndicated cartoonist, Mother Goose and Grimm

ART SPIEGELMAN
Comic writer-artist, RAW, Maus

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Comic writer-artist, RAW, Maus
Comic-Con expanded its exhibit area into Golden Hall, which became primarily the publishers’ booth area. The “supergroup” Seduction of the Innocent debuted as the musical entertainment following the Inkpot Awards banquet. The band included Max Allan Collins, Steve Leialoha, Bill Mumy, Miguel Ferrer, and John “Chris” Christensen. Superman’s 50th birthday was celebrated with a special display of Man of Steel memorabilia. Special movie presentations included the first Batman film, directed by Tim Burton, and Who Framed Roger Rabbit? The first annual Will Eisner Comic Industry Awards (replacing the Kirby Awards) were MC’d by administrator Dave Olbrich. The Masquerade was held at the Civic Theatre for the first time. The Con created two new departments to meet fan needs: Disabled Services (instigated and run by Robert Goodwin until his death in 1997 and now run by William Curtis) and Japanese Animation (founded and run by John Davenport to this day).
Comic-Con saw a major jump in attendance as it marked its 20th anniversary show with a big party. Past chairmen took turns cutting a giant cake in the form of the Toucan logo. Afterward, Seduction of the Innocent played and Jack and Roz Kirby could be seen dancing to some of the slower tunes. Mark Hamill was just one of the celebrities to drop in for a visit, while an unknown young writer from England, Neil Gaiman, attended his first San Diego Comic-Con. Archie and the gang visited Comic-Con for the first time in the pages of Pep Comics; they’d return in 1991 and 2003. Scott Shaw! won the Hawaiian shirt contest at the luau-themed Inkpot Awards banquet. Clydene Nee took over the Art Auction, which ran into the 2000s. Today it’s been replaced by a series of How-To panels featured each year at the convention.

Jerry Robinson’s 1989 Comic-Con T-shirt art, celebrating Batman’s 50th anniversary.

Bill Sienkiewicz
Comic book artist, New Mutants, Moon Knight, Elektra: Assassin

Gahan Wilson
Cartoonist, The New Yorker, Playboy, National Lampoon

Bill Sienkiewicz’s 1989 Souvenir Book cover is one of the most memorable—and wildly creative—covers from this era.
I got older. I got to see Roger Corman and American International sci-fi, Hammer horror, George Pal, William Castle, and Ray Harryhausen films at Saturday matinees and all night drive-ins along with mainstream classics like Forbidden Planet, The Day the Earth Stood Still, Invasion of the Body Snatchers, and The Haunting when they first came out and many other genre classics that have informed modern fandom.

At one point, a number of other people were doing what you do. Who were they and what did they bring to Comic-Con? While there were always guests related to Hollywood throughout the 1970s, they were basically about favorite shows and movies of the past. It was publicist Charlie Lippincott, a friend of George Lucas at USC, who came up with the idea to create a convention campaign for Star Wars, showing production art and slate shows. That started the shift from nostalgia to previews of future films.

Jeff Walker (center) with Batman co-creator Bob Kane (left) and legendary movie director Francis Ford Coppola (right) at Comic-Con in 1992 to promote Coppola’s Bram Stoker’s Dracula.

Jeff Walker’s portrait at Comic-Con in 1992

I was also hired for Warner Bros. the year after Superman came out because they had sent a publicist down to Comic-Con the previous summer who had been booed because he had no idea who Kal-El was when asked a question. During the 1980s, my work for the Ladd Company led me to also be hired by Disney and Amblin’. And since Amblin’ released films through every studio, I was lucky enough to work on films for Universal, Columbia, Paramount, and Fox among others. I also moderated most of our panels for over two decades and my emphasis was always letting the Q&A with fans dominate the time we had.

How did you first come to Comic-Con? At the 1973 Comic-Con, I took T-shirts and a record display that included album covers for a King Kong score with liner notes by Ray Bradbury and the soundtrack for The Golden Voyage of Sinbad. In the late ’70s, a friend and I formed The Thinking Cap Company, creating baseball caps emblazoned with the names of great writers, philosophers, and artists. To our surprise, they did really well, and when I was covering Alien for Rolling Stone, I noticed Harry Dean Stanton’s Nos- tromo crew cap and wondered if we could somehow get permission to create that cap . . . . [We got an] Alien license at a time when film merchandising was not the major industry it was about to become. We subsequently made crew caps for Blue Harvest (a.k.a. The Empire Strikes Back), Raiders of the Lost Ark, Dragon Slayer, and 42. We even had a booth at Comic-Con for a few years.

How did you shift into doing this full-time? In 1978, I got a call offering me what would be a dream job and ultimately a career I could never have planned or anticipated. The top execs at 20th Century Fox were forming their own production company, The Ladd Company, and it would be based on the Warner Bros. lot. Their first production slate included three genre films: Outland, Blade Runner, and The Right Stuff. I was asked to do for those films what Charlie did for Star Wars.

Two weeks later, I found myself at Finch Studio at the San Diego Convention Center on the set of Outland actually directing Sean Connery as we filmed a “making of” featurette for Outland. It was every bit a “pinch me” moment, and thus began my long adventure of bringing presentations to Comic-Con.

My favorite part of mounting these campaigns was that I allowed it to write and produce many “making of” featurettes that we would show on 16mm, and later video, at conventions. This was well before they became staples of electronic press kits and then today’s DVD/Blu-ray extras.

What was the first film you brought to Comic-Con? The first film I brought to Comic-Con was Outland, showing the featurette I mentioned earlier. We gave out Con Am shirts and tickets to a Jupiter shuttle. I also began very early to look at Blade Runner in production and gave out Equal Rights for Replicants buttons.

You brought the 1989 Batman movie to Comic-Con twice. Fan reception to Tim Burton and Michael Keaton’s involvement was very mixed at first. How did your Comic-Con appearances with Batman creator Bob Kane change things? When WB announced that Tim Burton would be directing the long-awaited Batman film and that Michael Keaton would be playing the title role, fans were originally outraged. Fresh off Frank Miller’s revolution in The Dark Knight Returns and the decisive vote to kill the current Robin in comics, fans were worried the film would be a comedy and were in no mood for that. Neither Tim nor Michael had any intention of making a comedy, and it was my job to turn those fan perceptions around.

The first convention panel on Batman was at the 1987 Comic-Con, where I brought the first dramatic role in Clean and Sober. Warner Bros. had asked to bring a suit and the fan reaction was electric. I knew the fans would love it, but once they got that out of their system we showed a making of featurette with an appearance by Tim and a tour of the costume shop and the garage where the Batmobile was being built as well as a slide show of Anton Furst’s Gotham City, featuring production art that reassured fans this was going to be the Batman film they were waiting for.

In 1988, Bob and I came back and unveiled a new trailer and an exclusive clip that featured the first images of the Batwing silhouetted by the moon. We also gave out “I Heart Gotham City” and “Gotham City Bi-centennial” shirts and buttons as well as Batman insignia pins and another button featuring Bob Kane art. In spite of—and frankly because of the controversy—Batman had the best opening in WB history and went on to be a massive hit that spawned many films. Batman was the first to prove the actual power of fans and word-of-mouth to influence studio choices and decisions, as well as at the box office.

The 1990s saw a number of movie proprietors visit Comic-Con. What were some of them and what was your involvement? As Comic-Con continued to grow, many more filmmakers and actors made personal appearances. Highlights included: Disney revatilizing the animated film division and showing extensive reels of scenes and songs from The Little Mermaid and Beauty and the Beast. Disney animators came to Comic-Con every year to do presentations...
with artists drawing live on stage. I had the great pleasure of bringing Francis Coppola to promote *Dracula*. I took him to the dealers’ room in search of an original Captain Midnight decoder ring (which he found).

But the biggest fan attractions of that era were the 1997 re-issues of the original Star Wars trilogy, 1999’s *The Matrix*, and the first presentations at Comic-Con for *X-Men* and the Lord of the Rings trilogy. The turn of the century ushered in Sam Raimi’s *Spider-Man*, and Steve Sansweet took over the fan campaigns at Lucasfilm for the prequel trilogy with a first look at *The Phantom Menace*. Film and TV presentations at Comic-Con became so prevalent they needed bigger venues and most were shifted from Ballroom 6 to Ballroom 20.

**The 2000s saw a rise in movie (and television) properties coming to Comic-Con. What caused this influx to happen?**

In 2004, the first panel to be held in the rather imposing, cavernous Hall H was appropriately for Warner Bros., featuring *Batman Begins* with Cillian Murphy and *Constantine* with Keanu Reeves, followed by Disney/Pixar and the first *Hellboy* film with Guillermo Del Toro.

And that began the unprecedented growth spurt of Comic-Con that has led us to today. The last 15 years have seen a new and diverse generation of fans and filmmakers flock to San Diego every year. A new wave of talent emerged, including Peter Jackson, Quentin Tarantino, Joss Whedon, Simon Pegg, Edgar Wright, Christopher Nolan, Zack Snyder, and many others, all who have made the pilgrimage to Comic-Con. The casts of *X-Men* and the Lord of the Rings films, the entire lineup of Marvel’s *Avengers*, alongside TV shows like *Lost* and *Game of Thrones*, appeared.

The power of fans spreading the word over social media exploded in 2006 when Zack Snyder, Gerard Butler, and Frank Miller came to show clips from their revolutionary adaptation of Miller’s graphic novel 300.

In 2007, Comic-Con added programming on Thursday in Hall H. With *Iron Man* in production and a full panel already scheduled for Saturday, director Jon Favreau agreed to appear on Thursday and show the footage Paramount had planned on debuting as a surprise. The response was phenomenal and word-of-mouth spread everywhere overnight and the Marvel Cinematic Universe was born. *(Since then, Marvel Studios has made regular appearances at Comic-Con, often announcing their movies and casts years in advance of the films’ actual release dates.)*

**What are some of the most memorable films for you personally that you’ve brought to Comic-Con?**

My favorite campaigns have more to do with people and relationships than the films themselves. Getting to know Bob Kane was like discovering a new uncle. Francis Coppola was incredibly memorable. Hanging with Dave Stevens during the making of *The Rocketeer* was, too. Visiting a skeptical Philip K. Dick during *Blade Runner* and introducing him to Ridley Scott was one of the great highlights of my career. Working on Sam Raimi’s films from *Darkman* through his *Spider-Man* trilogy was great. So was getting to introduce Wolverine creator Len Wein to Hugh Jackman and getting to know true legends like Julie Schwartz, Jack Kirby, Stan Lee, Jim Steranko, Dave Stevens, and even [Superman creators] Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster. Working for Amblin’ during those years was virtually magical, and working with Steven Spielberg and Frank Marshall was an honor.

**Why Comic-Con? What convinced the studios to—for the most part—zero in on this one event to focus their genre-based promotion?**

There are many reasons why Comic-Con grew to become the juggernaut of popular culture it is now. These are also the same reasons that Hollywood’s presence and participation grew from what were originally underground campaigns for fans only to the star-studded panels of today.

The two most important factors are that Comic-Con has always provided the biggest tent and welcomed diverse fans of all stripes and has always been a nonprofit organization, dedicated to putting on a convention that would be a great experience for both pros and fans.

None of this happened in a vacuum though. The programming and logistical teams at Comic-Con have been indispensable over the years. Mike Pasqua, Barry Bard, Gary Sassaman, David Glanzer, Fae Desmond, Maija Gates, and Eddie Ibrahim, among others, and all the staff and volunteers have been nothing short of amazing and always willing to go the extra mile to make things work out for everyone, especially the attendees.

**How has Hollywood affected Comic-Con?**

If you look at the box office, viewership, and quality of genre films and TV shows over the last 20 years, I’d argue that what has happened during all this time was not the Hollywood-ization of Comic-Con, but far more like the Comic-Con-ization of Hollywood.