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NY ComicCon: 'Walking Dead,' 'The Thing' and M. Night Shyamalan's pain

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Michael Giltz was our man on the ground this past weekend at [New York ComicCon](#) and here's his round-up report.

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"The Walking Dead" (AMC)

New York ComicCon continues to grow by leaps and bounds and that was apparent this past weekend — especially Saturday — when you couldn't find enough personal space at the **Jacob K. Javits Convention Center** to safely swing a lightsaber. On Friday, the venue on the far west side of midtown Manhattan was relatively navigable, but the next day saw a massive line for badge pick-up and a crush of humanity (and possibly some extraterrestrials) that made it difficult to get your geek on.

There remains one crucial difference between New York and the more famous San Diego expo with the similar name — the movie and TV talent level hasn't reached critical mass yet at the East

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Coast edition; the emphasis remains on comics. That meant that the fans who did show up for the show-biz panels generally had good access. True, AMC's panel for "The Walking Dead" was bursting at the seams, but that was the last big event on the last day and, hey, it's zombies.

Here's a rundown of impressions and info after a weekend immersed in ComicCon.



A scene from "Monsters" (Magnolia)

"MONSTERS" INC.: Writer-director **Gareth Edwards** charmed the audience while showing clips from and discussing his new film "**Monsters**," about a photojournalist and companion trapped in an alien-infected section of Mexico, which is frequently being described as "this year's **'District 9.'**" He said financing a genre flick like "**Monsters**" *wasn't* difficult. "Look at this," Edwards said, pointing to the room filled with fans as proof of sci-fi, fantasy and horror's enduring popularity. "You don't have drama conventions in New York, do you?"

BUT DID YOU LIKE 'IRON MAN'?: After a screening of the pilot for a new BBC-PBS "**Sherlock Holmes**" reboot set in contemporary times, one fan was overheard loudly proclaiming, "It was better than the [freaking] movie," referring, of course, to **Guy Ritchie's** take on the legendary sleuth that starred **Robert Downey Jr.** and **Jude Law**. "Sherlock" debuts on **Masterpiece Mystery** on Oct. 24 and was co-created by "Doctor Who" stalwart **Steven Moffat** and **Mark Gatiss**, whose names were cheered during the credits more loudly than anyone in the cast.

IF IT'S NOT ONE "THING" IT'S ANOTHER...: Universal's sneak peek of footage from "**The Thing**" was fun for fans...but not for fans of **Howard Hawks**. Though Hawks was name-checked (and drew applause), whenever anyone on the panel referenced the "original" classic, they generally meant **John Carpenter's** 1982 remake, not the *original*-original from 1951. The upcoming movie from first-timer **Matthijs van Heijningen Jr.**, a

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friend of newly crowned “**Superman**” director **Zack Snyder** and the son of a successful film producer, is actually a prequel of sorts to Carpenter’s picture: It takes place during the three days right before the 1982 film begins. Heijningen drew applause by saying he insisted on a practical monster (rather than CGI) whenever possible because, he said, even a guy in a rubber suit can elicit a better performance from the other actors than a tennis ball on the end of the stick. “As a tribute to Carpenter and for acting purposes, on set we had a real monster as often as possible,” he said. British actor **Adewale Akinnuoye-Agbaje** (“**G.I. Joe: The Rise Of Cobra**,” “**Lost**”) said fans should enjoy his ex-military character **Derek Jameson** and pointed out that with a cast half-filled with Norwegians and set in the snow, Jameson should stand out. “It’s the only black guy in the movie,” joked Akinnuoye-Agbaje. “You’re not going to miss me.”



Adewale Akinnuoye-Agbaje (Paige Craig Apodaca)

SHYAMALAN’S BREAKING POINT: A panel devoted to the 10th anniversary of **M. Night Shyamalan’s “Unbreakable”** found the director quite open about the difficulty of dealing with wild swings in the opinion of critics and the public. “I want to take risks,” Shyamalan said. “The second half I’m not so good at. Taking the repercussions — I’m not so good at that.” So massive box office and critical praise? Fun. Lambasting? Not so fun. “I’d be in a record store,” said Shyamalan, “and a kid would say, ‘That’s M. Night Shyamalan.’” Shyamalan imitated a sullen teenager buddy saying, “Yeah, but ‘Unbreakable’ SUCKED!” The filmmaker also told a story about one fan who showed up at his office and demanded to see the director because — the guy insisted — he was the real **David Dunn** (the character **Bruce Willis** played in the film) and was ready to join forces with Shyamalan to fight evil. On a more serious note, Shyamalan said he has toyed with more ideas set in the ‘Unbreakable’ universe or even doing a direct sequel, reporting that actors **Willis** and **Samuel L. Jackson** are game. But nothing official is in the works.

SOMETIMES A SIDEKICK ISN’T JUST A SIDEKICK: With gay bashings and suicides dominating headlines, the Con offered some welcoming, positive news for gay fans. *Three* panels addressed gay topics, from writing LGBT characters to the gay mangas that are huge sellers in Japan. One all-star panel Saturday night — which attracted a standing room only crowd — was moderated by **Jeff Krell** (creator of **Jayson**) and featured **Howard Cruse** (the creator of the classic graphic novel “**Stuck Rubber Baby**”), **Abby Denson** (“**High School Confidential**”), **Joan Hilty** (of DC’s **Vertigo**), **Phil Jimenez** (of DC), **Dan Parent** (the man behind the first openly gay teen in the **Archie Comics** universe) and **Tim Fish** (“**Cavalcade Of Boys**”). There was also an auction on Sunday for **Maddie’s Fund**, which supports outreach to gay teens at the LGBT Center of New York. Fish was one of the small-press people who reported that sales were good and that he loves the NYC gathering’s emphasis on comics. Krell

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hinted that an announcement about his ongoing involvement with Archie Comics and the openly gay character **Kevin Keller** would be coming soon. (Krell started drawing his strip “Jayson” in 1983 specifically because he loved Archie Comics but didn’t see himself reflected in the stories.)



Frank Darabont (Kirk McKoy / Los Angeles Times)

ZOMBIES!: AMC’s “The Walking Dead” was the final splashy event at ComicCon. For a change, the NYC audience got *more* than San Diego, six minutes versus the three minutes shown on the West Coast. “Why not show it all?” shouted a fan. (You just can’t please some people.) Producer **Gale Anne Hurd** (“**The Terminator**,” “**Aliens**”) said AMC proved the ideal partner for the production. Hurd described calling a contact at the cable channel behind award-winning dramas “**Mad Men**” and “**Breaking Bad**” to ask if AMC would ever consider doing an adaptation of a graphic novel, like, for example “The Walking Dead?” When the executive on the other line responded, “You mean **Robert Kirkman’s** ‘The Walking Dead?’” Hurd said she was so astonished that she stared at the phone for a moment. After she related the anecdote, Kirkman turned to her and said with astonishment, “I hadn’t heard that. *Really?*” Kirkman wrote the fourth episode of the series, which debuts on Halloween, and said, “It was fun to go back and spend more time with these characters because a lot of them are dead in the comic book.” The audience applauded that the series was being filmed in Super 16 (that’s the format that made the zombies look the coolest, Hurd said) and laughed when director **Frank Darabont** (“**The Shawshank Redemption**,” “**The Mist**”) said he couldn’t believe some of the things they were being allowed to put on the air. (He also casually mentioned having dinner once with **George Romero**, **Stephen King** and **Quentin Tarantino**.) Darabont did have the perfect response to one young woman who complained that she couldn’t persuade her friends to read “The Walking Dead” series because they dismissed it as just “more zombies” and wanted to know what she should say to them. Darabont responded solemnly, “I would execute one of your friends as an example to the others.” The audience roared with laughter.

– Michael Giltz

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