

My Time at Otakon 2013

Posted on August 15, 2013 by Shawn Wilkins



This year, on a whim, I decided to go to Otakon with two of my friends. One of them, Matt, I've known for over a decade. The other, Shirley, a little over a month. The decision was fueled by nothing other than a desire for all of us to hang out. I had no expectations and didn't go in assuming that I'd honestly enjoy the countless hours we'd spend doing practically nothing. Little did I know, it would go down as one of the best times of my life.

The morning of August 9, 2013, Matt and I woke up and headed out to Shirley's place to pick her up (as well as her friend Miranda who was tagging along). When we arrived, Miranda was fully dressed as Touko Fukawa from *Dangan Ronpa*, and she went full out in every possible way. She made her own costume, and since she is an avid fan of the series, she knew all the proper mannerisms and played the part to a T.



This is Miranda on the right. Follow her Tumblr for all sorts of cosplay goodies!

Once we got to the convention center, we waited to get our tickets since we were registering day-of. Simply waiting in line with three friends at Otakon was a type of reality that I couldn't even dream about. There I was standing in normal attire, looking at and naming various characters from anime, manga, games, and cartoons from across the globe. I sat there with friends, in a long line, doing exactly this for a full hour.

Inside the actual con, it was more or less the same thing — walking around with friends and people-watching. We went to the occasional panel, but the majority of the convention was spent marveling at how everyone seemed to live shameless lives. Not a life where shame is disregarded, but rather one where it isn't something that bothers them. Their lives are normally filled with judgement for being nerds, being different, and being somebody who stands out, yet here, **they** are the ones that blend in. I was the one who stood out in a Freddie Mercury v-neck and black skinny jeans. It was amazing to be encompassed by this lifestyle and watch everyone have a truly joyful time.

On the first day, Matt, Miranda, Shirley, and I went to see a series of four films (but could only stay for two) made by animation students in Japan. When thinking about amateur films made in America, you typically think of things that clearly look as if they're homemade and unpolished, but these films were above any standards that we previously held. Animation and story-wise, they were excellent. One was titled *Death Billiards* and the other was named *Mechanical Fairies*. I won't get into the plot of either, but you should definitely spend a few minutes by looking up the both of them.

Afterward, I considered that the reason the Otakon attendees came off as "shameless" (purely for lack of a better word) was because they were truly being the people they yearned to be out in the "real world." By putting on costumes and masks and flaunting the attitudes needed to convey a specific character, they were able to act how they would if judgement wasn't an anvil constantly floating over their heads.

The con-goers were all kind, all understanding, all nice, and they were all one group. Everyone looked at others as if they knew and understood their story. There was no shame in the guy who walked around screaming Billy Mays puns for **three whole days**. There was no shame in the group of *League* players who put on a small performance, pretending to be every character as if it were an actual game of *League of Legends* with quick sudden movements. There was no shame in people being the person they desired to be. This is why I love conventions.

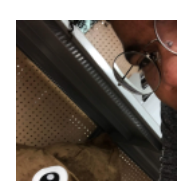
After some time, it became obvious that the cosplayers and convention-goers were surrounded by others that they could quickly call friends because they understood what their lives were like on a level that is hard to come by in the "real world." It took me a while to fully understand and appreciate what I was in the middle of, but once it was established, I felt pure excitement and love for this conventions and its attendees. I couldn't say that anything there was less than amazing if not solely for the people. I spent time with friends, and I was in a place where everyone was considered a friend. The barriers that people put up outside of this convention center were 100% brought down.

Near the end of the con, we got to have some fun in the Dealer's Den and Artist's Alley. Shirley saw some cool art work, and she bought a cute little *Pikmin* charm from a dealer. It was amazing to see her entirely enthralled in this little Olimar with a dangling yellow *Pikmin* off of it. It was also especially amazing to see Matt inspect a series of swords. Not just kid-level "oh, this knife looks cool," but he displayed pure knowledge of these blades. He came out buying an absolutely beautiful knife. The fact that Matt could just buy a knife with no one batting an eyelash or feeling the need to look over their shoulder by fear of attack was incredible. The openness and overall accepting attitude was present throughout the entire convention.

Being able to visit panels for things I love like Studio Ghibli, independent Japanese movies, cult hits from Japan, games that have little to no traction but deserve recognition, and doing all of this in a place that could be viewed as a nerd utopia made everything worthwhile. I didn't expect to fully fall into this world that I knew very little about, but the entire environment eventually made it clear that everyone fit into this ever-growing *otaku* puzzle.

On Saturday night, we sat around for hours. We stood above the second floor and watched people leave and enter a rave for no real reason other than for the excitement of people-watching. It made me finally grasp the fact that my enjoyment stemmed solely from being in this paradise I wish I could know more about. When I think about that night, I think about the time I spent enjoying this world and not the weird guy who pulled out a box of wine (story for a different time). I think about how much fun it was being around someone as bubbly and lovely as Shirley. Someone as knowledgeable as Miranda. Someone like Matt who's more of a brother than a friend to me. I felt an overwhelming sense of love, and I miss that.

Overall, I loved Otakon. I loved being there with Matt, Shirley, and Miranda. I loved visiting the Artist's Alley and the Dealer's Den. I loved seeing Shirley network with a professional illustrator. I loved having dozens (literally dozens) of people come up to us solely to take pictures of Miranda. I loved being there with a very good friend that I've known for longer than any other friend. On top of that, being surrounded by people who can be happy in a place where they're understood was amazing. It says a lot about me, the people I went with, and the ones who were there when the most exciting thing about Otakon was the euphoria felt by just being there. It's an entire three days spent in a giant center that is overflowing with the best kind of people who connect on a level rarely seen outside of convention walls.



About Shawn Wilkins

An enthusiastic writer who values quality over quantity. The abundance of posts shouldn't make the site, but rather, the quality of them. Aiming for perfection is the goal and anything less isn't acceptable. Long walks on the beach are accepted, however.

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