DOTTY'S DIMENSIONS

by Dorothy M. Kurtz

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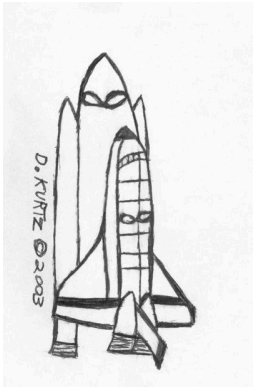

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Hello! I hope everybody is having a good summer (or winter, for any of my readers in the Southern Hemisphere).

It's not the late Space Shuttle *Columbia*, but this issue's illustration is my abstract version of a space shuttle ready for takeoff. In the meantime, I hope NASA finds the exact cause of the Space Shuttle *Columbia* disaster.

Way back in Volume #1, Issue #1, of DOTTY'S DIMENSIONS, I recommended ordering the *Fandom Directory* for its huge worldwide listings of science fiction (SF) publications, conventions (cons), clubs, and so forth. Nowadays, *Fandom Directory* only publishes online and only lists e-mail addresses and web sites for the above catagories. Check them out at <http://www.fandomdirectory.com>

Also, back in Volume #1, Issue #1, I recommended *Con-Temporal* as one of the best sources for its listings of SF cons. Well, the latest news is that Pegasus Publishing sold *Con-Temporal* to a new publisher, Laurel & Marcus King. Monthly subscriptions to *Con-Temporal* are available for $40 a year (USA) or $60(outside of the USA) from Titan Games, 637 Capital Ave. SW, Battle Creek, Michigan 49015.

Anyway, back to my publication--in this issue, I've included two SF-con reports: JerseyDevilCon and Balticon. I also wrote about some weekends spent in Philadelphia this past June.

As for my recommendations in this issue--(1) If I could only afford to go to one regional-SF con a year, it would be Balticon, c/o the Baltimore Science Fiction Society, PO Box 686, Baltimore, Maryland 21203-0686 (410-563-2737). (2) Even though it's impossible for any one guidebook to cover every nook & cranny in the USA, *Frommer's USA*, Frommer Publishing, ISBN 0764567330, covers a lot of territory.

JERSEYDEVILCON 2003

During the weekend of April 25, 26, and 27, I attended JerseyDevilCon at the Raritan Center Sheraton, Edison, New Jersey.

Friday, April 25, not all went so well at registration because my name wasn't in the pre-registration file. If I hadn't brought a copy of the cashed cheque, I'd have to pay the full at-the-door registration rate. (Let this be a lesson to anybody reading this: No matter what kind of letter, card, or receipt you receive from the con committee of any SF con, always bring a copy of the cashed cheque. This is not the first time that a copy of the cashed cheque saved me from paying the full registration rate at a SF con.) Anyhow, I did get my con badge and program book, and I promptly volunteered to help out at the con. Thus, I went to the second floor and spent four hours doing badge check. I made sure that only registered con members went down either hallway on either side of where I sat. (The main Dealers' Rooms were at the one end of the hallway, and Dealers' Row and the Con Suite were at the other end.) Because I also sat at a location near the Con Operations room, the room showing anime videos, and two overflow dealers' tables, I did manage to eavesdrop on some interesting conversations from time-to-time.

Saturday, April 26, found me doing badge check again. This time, however, I sat in front of the Art Show room and made sure that only registered con members entered the Art Show. A few times, I had to advise some people to register with the con before they could enter the Art Show, but the very close proximity of the registration table made my task easier. I didn't run into any trouble with anybody while I was on duty. After this, I walked through the Art Show room. Here, I noticed that about 75% of the artists showed paintings and drawings, and the remaining art mediums presented jewelry and sculptures. Most artists (about 75%) favored exhibiting fantasy art, and the rest favored displaying SF and space art.

That night, I watched the Time Travel Dance/Masquerade Ball. Altogether, about 18 persons showed up for this ball, and about half were in costumes. Aside from two SF costumes, the rest of the costumers wore fantasy costumes. The dancing styles ranged from a 1570s Elizabethan dance to the 1970s Time Warp dance (via *Rocky Horror Picture Show*). After a few hours, the judges gave prizes for the best costumes. Afterward, I visited Dealers' Row; here, certain dealers rented a series of bedrooms to sell their merchandise. Because Dealers' Row was not part of the group of main

Dealers' Rooms, these dealers could stay opened for business 24 hours if they wished. Most of the dealers sold jewelry, fabrics, fur, and games. At the end of this corridor, I entered the Con Suite where the con committee provided some snack foods, soft drinks, and a chance to meet and talk to other SF fans. Finally, I attended a party that the Philcon committee organized. Again, as in the Con Suite, they had snack foods, soft drinks, and other SF fans to talk with.

Sunday, April 27, I saw the two main Dealers' Rooms. Looking similar to several other regional-SF cons (except that these two rooms were smaller), I noticed that the dealers were about evenly divided between those dealers who sold reading materials (books and magazines) and the rest who sold other stuff: videos, jewelry, t-shirts, and so on. The one panel that I listened to, Collaboration Over the Internet, talked about writers who've worked together on a story over the Internet. (Some of these writers have never met in person.) Then, much of the talk led to the pros and cons of working over the Internet.

When the panel was over, I went home and summarized the con: It was OK, but looking at the pocket-program book, I noticed that there was nothing on the program having to do with space exploration. I hope that next year they could add space exploration to their science-track program, have a regular Masquerade (even a small-staged contest will do), and take care of their pre-registration listing better.

BALTICON 2003

For the long weekend of May 23-27, 2003, I stayed at the Wyndham Baltimore Inner Harbor Hotel, Baltimore, Maryland, to attend Balticon, my favorite regional-SF con.

Friday, May 23, after I registered at the con, I signed up for volunteer work. Thus, I spent four hours on Friday night in the Art Show checking in the artists. Because Balticon had a bigger Art Show compared to other regional-SF cons, I sometimes kept myself quite busy. I even recognized many of the same artists from Lunacon. Nevertheless, except for the size of the Art Show room, Balticon's percentage of art mediums (about 75% paintings and drawings, 25% other mediums: sculptures, jewelry, and other items) and its proportion of art themes (about 75% fantasy art, 25% SF and space art) were similar to Lunacon's Art Show.

Saturday, May 24, I worked again in the Art Show, but this time, I did four hours of badge check and made sure that con members put any bags larger than a handbag and other bulky items next to me. In time, the bags piled up so high that some SF fans referred to me as the "bag lady." Anyhow, almost everybody who entered the Art Show room treated me politely, and I noticed that although a few SF fans wore costumes, most persons entering the Art Show wore everyday clothes. During that time, some people asked me questions; the most popular questions had to do with what the time was, how should they bid for artwork, where nearby restaurants were, and a few other con-related questions.

Saturday night found me in the Green Room serving as a den mother to a small group of adult costumers (three to be exact) for the Masquerade. Two costumers were experienced on a journeyman level, and the third costumer was a novice. This third costumer, a lady who dressed and made herself up to look like an Andorian woman recreated from the original *Star Trek* (ST) TV series, only intended to wear this costume as a hall costume. However, Balticon had so few Masquerade entries this year (13 altogether, and only three costumers wore SF costumes; the rest wore fantasy costumes), that somebody talked her into entering the Masquerade. I did the usual den mother duties for her: convinced her not to be nervous on stage, saw that she had something to eat and drink, made sure she got her picture taken by the official photographer, and convinced her to get her costume judged by the workmanship judge. I, for my part, hoped that I could remember which way the service hallways led to backstage left. Next, I guided my group to the stage, and I also met them on the other side of the stage (backstage right) after they did their stage presentations. Finally, my group of costumers followed me to the fan-photography area before I finished for the night.

Sunday, May 25, I was back in the Art Show again doing badge check, but this time, I stayed on duty for three hours. Because this was the day of the Art Auction, the con members had their last chance to put bids on their favorite artworks. As it got closer to the 1:00 pm closing time for write-in bids, I saw a frenzy of con members rush into the Art Show room and drop their bags and other stuff near me (enough to make a sizable pile of stuff). Just as quickly, they made their bids and grabbed their stuff. By the time I went off duty at 1:00 pm, there were only three bags remaining near me. Once off duty, I decided to go see the Dealers' Room. As in the case of most other regional-SF cons, about 50% of the dealers sold reading material: books, magazines, semi-prozines, and fanzines; the rest of the dealers sold other merchandise: jewelry, artworks, sculptures, t-shirts, buttons, bumper stickers, and other things.

During Sunday night, I stayed in the Con Suite to help out for four hours. Unlike badge check and artist check-in, the Con Suite duties involved more physical labor. Some of my duties included emptying the thawed ice from the bucket into the ladies room toilet and getting more ice from the hotel's giant ice machine, making sure that there was enough food on the trays, and having enough of other things: cups, napkins, and so on. I also did some badge checking here because only Balticon members could help themselves to the refreshments. (One of the signs outside of the Con Suite read, "If you don't know what Balticon means, you can't enter here!") We didn't want other hotel guests crashing the Con Suite, especially a certain lacrosse team. (Thank goodness, everything went OK.)

Monday, May 26, became the last day of the con; I spent three hours on duty in the Con Suite doing similar tasks as I did the night before, except that I also set out some

breakfast foods and drinks: orange juice, coffee, hot water for tea, some pastries, as well as the regular snack foods and soft drinks. I also saw that Andorian woman from the Masquerade; she informed me that she won a workmanship prize for her makeup, and she won best recreation in the novice category. After my three hours of duty were up, I reported to the con operations. Because I put in 20 hours of work altogether at this con, I received a free Balticon t-shirt and a free membership for Balticon 2004. During my last two hours at this con, I sat in on two panels. In the one panel room, I listened to a talk about extra-solar planets and what methods astronomers used to discover those planets. In the other panel room, the panel talked about con scheduling and what circumstances caused some con committees to schedule certain events at certain times.

On Monday night, I took a taxi to the Inner Harbor and entered the Light Street Pavilion (upper floor); I ate my civilized dinner at City Lights Seafood restaurant (410-244-8811). To quote one of their ads: "Come for the food . . . stay for the view." Although the entrees were a bit pricey (between $10 to $25), the quality and quantity of the food made it worth the price. In addition to the food, the service was prompt and friendly, and most tables provided a great view of the Inner Harbor. (This is a Baltimorean-owned restaurant.)

Tuesday, May 27, I visited the American Museum of Visionary Art, 800 Key Highway (410-244-1900). Even though this museum officially called itself a "national museum, repository, and education center for the best in original, self-taught artistry," upon seeing all seven of the museum's galleries, my impressions of this place were "colorful," "avant-garde," and "somewhat educational." People from all walks of life used most kinds of mediums for the artworks displayed here: glass, fabrics, metal, household items, electronic parts, matchsticks, rocks, stones, paper, pen, pencil, crayons, paints, and several other things that most people may or may not associate with art. One gallery showed the museum's permanent artworks, and the other six galleries exhibited temporary art. When I was there, I saw artworks of pictures, paintings, and sculptures that former drug addicts made. Many of those works revealed the feelings of the artists during and after their addictions.

Afterward, I headed home and summed up the con: As always, I enjoyed Balticon even when I hadn't seen most of the programming. Judging from the pocket-program book, this con had several tracks of programming (including space exploration) that kept most everybody in fandom entertained and informed. I'm looking forward to attending next year and not because I received a free membership!

MY PHILADELPHIA STORY

For the month of June, I spent a few weekends in Philadelphia taking in the culture and sights.

Sunday, June 1, I went to the Forrest Theater to see *Mamma Mia!* Using the hit songs that the pop group Abba sang, *Mamma Mia!* began with Donna, a single mother and a former member of a singing group--as well as a story about her daughter Sophie. On the night before her wedding, Sophie wanted to meet her father; thus, without letting her mother know, Sophie invited three of Donna's former lovers to the wedding (while Sophie assumed that she would be able to spot her father among those three men). Throughout the show, the cast sang several of Abba's hit songs, danced, and wore enough flashy 70s-style clothes to bring fond memories to those of us who remember that decade. The show ended with a mini-concert where the cast sang more Abba hits and encouraged the audience to stand up and sing along. This happy musical show gave me a warm feeling inside. (It might have to do with my coming of age in the 1970s.)

The following weekend, June 7 and 8, I visited Philadelphia in the pursuit of art.

Saturday, June 7, although a normal June day in the Rittenhouse Square neighborhood of Philly was usually sunny with temperatures in the 80s (Fahrenheit), that day produced heavy rain with temperatures in the 60s. Despite the weather, I had lunch at Marathon on the Square, 1839 Spruce St. (215-731-0800). As I sat at a window-side seat, I viewed the lighter-than-usual traffic of pedestrians along 19th St. Meanwhile, the food proved to be both reasonable (most entrees are between $5 to $15) and good. Most of the menu consisted of soups, salads, sandwiches, and burgers. In fact, *Philadelphia Magazine* gave this restaurant a Best of Philly Award. Afterward, I walked over to Rittenhouse Sq. and saw the few artists who were brave enough to display their art in the rain at the Rittenhouse Square Fine Arts Annual. (For the first two weeks of June, both professional and student artists exhibited their artworks under display tents that surrounded Rittenhouse Sq. Park.) Much to my surprise, about 75% of the artists showed up that day and presented their many art displays, using many art mediums: drawings, paintings, sculptures, crafts, and other kinds of artworks. The styles of art ranged from traditional portraits and landscapes to abstract -color, -shape, or -line arrangements.

Sunday, June 8, the rain eased up, but the sky stayed cloudy as I pursued my quest to see more art.

The Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts (PAFA), 118 N. Broad St. (215-972-7600), located two blocks north of City Hall, has been in a building that a famous 19th-century architect, Frank Furness, built in 1876. (Now, the building is a National Historical Landmark.) Inside, the walls sparkled in red, blue, and gold; then, there was the art. The permanent galleries displayed pictures and sculptures dating from the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries, produced by several famous and not-so-famous American artists. Some of the art themes showed scenes from The Bible, Greek and Roman myths, portraits, landscapes, city scenes, and other subjects. Temporary galleries made up the rest of the museum; a few time a year, the PAFA presented different diverse subjects in art from the Annual Academy Art

School Exhibition to artworks covering a certain theme or presenting the works of a certain artist. (The PAFA, founded in 1805, is also the oldest art school in the USA.)

Before the days of supermarkets, shopping malls, and shopping via the Internet, many people in South Philadelphia bought their food and dry goods at the Italian Market. The world's largest outdoor market, dating back to the 1870s, has been located on 9th St., between Christian and Wharton Sts. I've been visiting this market ever since my parents took me here as a child.

Saturday, June 14, I visited the Italian Market once more. Along these blocks in this section of 9th St., shop owners have been selling (both in their shops and on the sidewalk) many kinds of imported and domestic products: pastas, cheeses, spices, meats, produce, baked goods, and non-food merchandise, especially kitchenware and clothing. Then, on the corner of 9th St. & Passyunk Ave., diagonally across from each other, face two famous steak-sandwich stands: Pat's and Geno's. Many people in the Philly area debated over whether Pat's or Geno's had the better steak sandwich. As for myself, I like them both. Thus, I ate a Pat's steak sandwich at lunch; then later, I ordered a Geno's steak sandwich to take home for supper. Pat's has been the older of the two steak-sandwich stands and the birthplace of the Philly-steak sandwich (dating back to 1930). Geno's opened in 1966, and both places still operate for business 24 hours a day, seven days a week. As for the shops, my favorite, Fante's Gourmet and Kitchen Wares Shop, 1006 S. 9th St. (215-922-5557), opened for business in 1906. This shop has been selling almost everything in cookware, and even professional chefs shop here. (I've bought a few cookware items here that I couldn't find anywhere else in the Philadelphia area.) That shop alone was worth the trip to South Philadelphia's Italian Market.

In the next issue, I'll be reporting on two SF cons: Shore Leave and a con near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; finally, I plan to write about my main vacation to Canada. This year, I'm booking a trip to New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island for September.

Meanwhile, I'll be back in touch in October. Keep looking towards the future!