

DOTTY'S DIMENSIONS: THE COLUMN Issue #2

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Welcome to the second issue of my new column! If my column convinces you to want to visit the places that I've mentioned or the events that I have attended—especially science fiction conventions (SF cons) or both, then this column has served its purpose.

Each year, I visit 12 attractions in a different county in New Jersey. For the last two years, I've been to Sussex and Morris Counties; for 2012, I am visiting Warren County. If you would like more information, phone the Warren County Convention & Visitors Bureau (866-927-6282 or www.visitwarren.com).

Saturday, September 1, 2012: On Labor Day Weekend, most people have picnics, BBQs, or go to the Shore; I chose to go to New York City and look at Himalayan religious art. The Rubin Museum of Art, 150 W.17th St., between 6th and 7th Aves. (212-620-5000 or www.rmanyc.org) opened in 2004 and located itself in a former Barney's Department Store. Therefore, the first thing I noticed was the Art Deco interior and the steel spiral staircase connecting seven floors. This museum held the largest Western collection of religious art from the Himalayas. Two of the floors comprised the permanent collection, and four other floors displayed temporary exhibits. When I was there, the Rubin Museum presented the following temporary exhibit themes: Modernist Art from India and Sculptures from the Nyingjei Lam Collection as well as Illuminated: The Art of Sacred Books and photos that Indian photo-journalist Homai Vyarawalla took in India of many famous people from the 1920s through the 1960s. As for the permanent collection, the first place the public should visit would be Gateway to Himalayan Art. Here, via statues, pictures, religious items, and texts, I learned more about whom, what, and why the artists painted and carved certain images in pictures and statues. The texts explained why these deities and humans displayed certain postures and gestures, why they used certain implements, and why the artists placed them in certain places on the

pictures. I also saw a Buddhist altar containing many gold-colored statues. The second permanent exhibit area, Masterworks: Jewels of the Collection, displayed more scroll paintings, statues, and other items. In this section, the museum showed the differences between the diverse cultures in the Himalayan region and their different Buddhist beliefs: Nepal, Tibet, and Bhutan as well as parts of India, Mongolia, and China. I've seen this kind of art in other museums, but not in this quantity under one roof, and no other museum that I knew of in the Western world explained so much about the how and why of this kind of Buddhist religious art. Overall, I experienced a very colorful and enlightening day at the Rubin Museum of Art!

Friday, September 7: The late Dr. Carl Sagan once said in an episode of the TV series *Cosmos*, "We need the plants more than they need us." After visiting the Well-Sweep Herb Farm, 205 Mt. Bethel Road, Port Murray, NJ (908-852-5390 or <http://www.wellsweep.com/>), I understood better what he meant. Our guide, the founder of Well-Sweep, Cyrus Hyde, took us on a tour through the various herb, plant, and perennial gardens. While showing the plethora of different herbs and plants, Mr. Hyde would hand a leaf or stem for us to smell or taste. Meanwhile, I learned about plant leaves that tasted 100 to 300 times sweeter than sugar—with little or no calories! In addition, Mr. Hyde introduced me to many kinds of herbs and plants that either people could use in cooking or for medicinal purposes—even a common weed found on lawns could help heal cuts and burns. Other plants repelled insects and other pests, added fragrance to our homes, and so forth. Overall, Mr. Hyde gave me more information than I could remember, but I needn't worry because the gift shop sold books about plants, herbs, and other related subjects as well as other merchandise: oils, gardening tools, dried herbs, plants, soaps, etc. They also offered a mail-order catalog selling most of the items found in the gift shop. After a picnic lunch, I walked around the grounds of this farm myself and saw the many varieties of plants: herb plants, flowers, crops, and so on as well as livestock, including sheep, rabbits, and especially chickens. One of the gardens that I remembered the most had plants mentioned in the Bible, some of which, Mr. Hyde brought back from Israel, and the other was an Elizabethan knot-garden. This farm has been located in a rural part of Warren County. So keep a good map nearby, especially Map Quest <http://classic.mapquest.com/maps/>, and be aware that directional signs could be scarce here. However, your quest will be worth it.

Saturday, September 8: Belvidere, NJ, has been an interesting town to see on any day. This Warren County seat contained many Victorian-styled buildings in brick and wood as well as some buildings erected in the early 20th century containing retail stores, restaurants, other businesses, and private homes. On the other hand, visiting during Belvidere Victorian Days (908-475-4124), on the weekend after Labor Day, was like adding icing to the cake. The festivities started in Garrett D. Wall Park in the center of town where many vendors sold their wares of Victorian clothing, jewelry, and crafts as well as antiques, collectables, and food. Other display tents promoted special interest groups and different local & county government departments. Meanwhile, plenty of antique and classic cars also parked along this square. In addition, every once in a while, somebody wearing Victorian clothes would put on a performance. I noticed a man playing the role of a town crier. He rang a bell and then told some humorous antidotes. In fact, I saw many people in Victorian clothing. Nearby, I caught part of a picnic auction where the public bid on their favorite picnic baskets for charity, and I heard a street organ playing different tunes. For an additional cost, the organizers offered horse-drawn carriage rides, historic cemetery tours, and historic house tours. I paid in advance for the latter and briefly toured five homes dating from the 1800s through 1929. What I found interesting about these private homes were how the

residents could blend Victorian and early 20th-century interiors, furniture, and other items with 21st-century technology. Once again, Belvidere at any time of the year was worth a visit to see a real Victorian-Edwardian-looking downtown; this wasn't a theme park Main Street.

Sunday, September 9: Once again, I visited another historical town, Hope, NJ, only this time, the history of this town was older. The story really began in an area of Europe that has now been the Czech Republic. About 60 years before Martin Luther started his break from the Roman Catholic Church, a group of people following the teachings of religious reformer John Huss broke away from the Catholic Church and called their sect the United Brotherhood, and later, the Moravian Church. In time, this denomination spread to parts of what have now been the Slovak Republic, Poland, and Germany—despite persecutions from the established churches and governments. By 1735, with the help of a German nobleman, Count Nicholas Von Zinzendorf (1700-1760), groups of Moravians arrived in North America and into Pennsylvania by 1740. In PA, they founded the towns of Bethlehem and Nazareth. Then, in 1768, Moravians from Bethlehem founded the town of Hope, NJ. Here they build up the town, but despite their best efforts, the town never became self-sufficient, and in 1808, they sold the land and moved back to PA. Nevertheless, other people moved into Hope afterward and added some more buildings, including other churches: Episcopal and Methodist. Because the railroad bypassed Hope, it stayed a small, rural town. Then, after Interstate 80 opened nearby in the 1960s, weekenders and day-trippers discovered the quaint charm of Hope. I, too, found this very small town charming as I parked in the parking lot (car park) for the Methodist Church, and walked around on my own to look at the buildings that dated from the 1700s and 1800s. The main street, called High Street, included some shops, especially antique shops where I browsed around in, and other businesses, including a deli where I stopped for lunch. After lunch, I visited the small museum in town, Hope Historical Society (908-459-9177). Inside, the guide showed me a brief video presentation covering the history of Hope, and later, in the two rooms of this museum, I saw pictures, texts, and exhibit items getting into more details about this town's history. Anyway, this day was a much quieter day than the day before, but the town was interesting just the same.

Saturday, September 22: I've been to other state capitals, to NYC, and to other parts of New York state, but until the date above, I have never been to the state capital of NY in Albany. The place that I wanted to see the most was the NY State Museum, Cultural Education Center, 222 Madison Ave. (518-474-5877). Inside this sleek, modern-styled building, I spent four or five hours—counting a break for lunch at a restaurant nearby—learning about the natural and human history of the Empire State. Thus, in the first section that I entered in this museum, I became acquainted with the natural life of NY State, especially the Adirondacks: animal, vegetable, and mineral via pictures, texts, and videos as well as exhibit items, hands-on computers, and plenty of tableaux. Here, I saw re-created wilderness scenes displaying trees, rocks, and plants as well as moose, elk, deer, bears, birds, reptiles, etc. In another wing of the museum, I noticed displays about the Native People of NY, including an Iroquois longhouse and an Algonquin wigwam; Ancient Life in NY included a re-creation of a woolly mammoth and a mastodon skeleton. Also in this wing were two temporary exhibit rooms presenting a photography gallery and a main temporary exhibit area. When I was there, I observed photos from the late 19th and early 20th centuries of people vacationing in the Adirondacks. Then, in the other room, I looked at exhibit items, pictures, texts, and tableaux having to do with the American Civil War, and in particular, NY's role in this conflict. After lunch, I entered a complete wing of this museum that presented NYC. Again, I noticed pictures, texts, videos, items, and tableaux, but this time

they exhibited different subjects having to do with the Big Apple: the history of NYC from the early Dutch settlers through the current times. If you have never been to NYC, this section covered NYC like no other museum. Therefore, I glanced at the following areas: tenement life, 5th Ave., and the South St. Seaport as well as Harlem in the 1920s, skyscrapers, and parklands. Other areas in this wing included a re-created Sesame Street set, public transit—including a walk-in subway train, fire engines, and a special section about the World Trade Center during 9/11/2001. On the upper floor, I saw some great views of the French-Empire-styled NY Capitol Building, and inside, this level of the museum displayed some air, water, and land vehicles as well as a tavern, plow, and whale skull. The main attraction—at least for children—was the antique carousel. Although this place took up a good portion of my day, it was well worth it!

Friday, October 5: Once again, I found myself traveling on a twisty, hilly road in Warren County, NJ! My final destination was the Merrill Creek Reservoir Environmental Preserve, 34 Merrill Creek Rd., Washington Twp. (908-454-1213 or www.merrillcreek.com/vc.html). At the Visitor Center, I looked at exhibits of mounted animals, plants, and minerals as well as Native-American artifacts, pictures, and texts. In addition, the very informative staff offered free maps of the area and plenty of advice. Once outside, I noticed some great views of the surrounding wooded area. Nearby, the public could freely walk on a few different trails that ranged from an easy walk to more challenging hikes. Overall, the main purpose of the reservoir was to store up water pumped from the Delaware River and release it back into the river at times of low flow. For the casual visitor, it was a chance to look at some lovely scenery and learn more about the local flora and fauna of this area.

Saturday, October 6: I had nothing special planned on this day; I just wanted to see the largest city in Warren County: Phillipsburg. Because this town or small city was once a hub for different railroads, the biggest attraction for most visitors has been the Delaware River Steam Train Excursion, 100 Elizabeth Street (908-454-4433 or www.trainride.com). Here the public could ride in vintage passenger cars behind the only steam locomotive in NJ. Therefore, throughout the year, this company offered different theme train rides along the Delaware: winery train, pumpkin train, and corn maze train as well as a polar express with Santa Clause, Easter Bunny train ride, and other train rides. Nevertheless, I wasn't planning on riding the train, but I still got a view of two trains: a modern freight train passing through town and the above-mentioned Delaware River Steam Train. Then I walked along the town's main street. Phillipsburg reminded me a bit like the Manniyunk section of Philadelphia before the fancy shops and restaurants took over. In other words, Phillipsburg has been a work-in-progress. Along one section of South Main Street, I stopped into a few antique/collectable stores and some thrift shops along another section of the same street. In addition to shops and stores, I noticed the different architectural styles of the buildings from the 1800s to Art Deco—more of the former than the latter. Of course, I also glanced at the Delaware River and at Easton, PA, across the river. As I said before, Phillipsburg has been a work-in-progress, but I hope as it progresses along its main street, it doesn't become too much like Manniyunk. I would like to see the thrift shops and reasonable restaurants remain as the area gains boutiques and art galleries as well as fancy restaurants and cafés.

Sunday, October 7: During my last day in Warren County, I learned about what was once one of the biggest industries in the area, iron manufacturing. I also learned about the different owners of the following place: Shippen Manor, 8 Belvidere Ave., Oxford (908-453-4381 or www.wcchc.org). As I entered a building with two-foot thick stone walls, dating back to 1754, a woman wearing 1700s-styled clothing took me on a guided tour of the rooms. The staff

decorated each room for a different time in history from the 1700s to the Victorian times. Meanwhile, my tour guide told me about the different owners of this house through the years, how they lived, conducted their business, and so forth. Then on the lower level, a very enthusiastic staff member, also wearing 18th-century-styled clothing, demonstrated cooking while using 1700s-styled cooking equipment, and she explained the purpose of many of the displayed items in the kitchen. I also found out about the different foods served to the family versus the servants as well as the conditions for the workers living there. This house also included some interesting views of the nearby town of Oxford and the hills in the distance. Throughout the year, Shippen Manor also offered concerts and other events on certain Sundays.

Friday, October 12: It has been seven years since I've been to Capclave, the Washington, DC, regional SF con. Unlike the other three regional SF cons that I have attended, Lunacon, Balticon, and Philcon, Capclave has been a much smaller con. Many years ago, the Washington, DC, SF Association (WSFA), used to call it Disclave, and it was a bigger convention then. Something happened in 1997, and I heard the rumors, but I won't go into them because I got the information by second or third sources, so I'm not sure of the veracity of the rumors, but the committee stopped having Disclave. Then, a few years later, the WSFS ran a smaller SF con called Capclave. I first attended Capclave in 2003, and I attended the 2004 and '05 Capclave cons. The first thing I noticed when I saw the programming grid was that there was more on the program compared to 2005. On the other hand, this con was still small compared to the three other cons I attended, but I expected that. Although this con mainly covered literary talks and panels, they also included some panels in a few other subjects such as media SF, science, and computers. In addition, Capclave provided writing workshops, gaming, and author readings as well as the con (hospitality) suite, dealers' room, and room parties. For 2012, the con committee played host to Capclave at the Hilton Washington, DC, North, Gaithersburg, Maryland, and the first event I went to at this con was a talk on 1) the Fall TV Roundtable Discussion. Here, the moderator and the rest of us mentioned different SF, fantasy, and horror TV shows. Someone also brought up the problems with scriptwriters and producers who never read SF but thought that they had an original idea for a story--except that a SF writer had the same idea earlier in a novel or shorter literary work. Another SF fan complained about too much "made-up" science in some TV shows. Then others talked about the TV show, *The Big Bang Theory* (TBBT). In the opinion of one of the SF fans, TBBT was a love letter to the SF, fantasy, and comic-book fans, and the science was more accurate than in some of the SF TV shows. 2) So You Want to Be a Writer was the first panel that I listened in on. First, the panel asked for a show of hands on who wanted to be a writer and who was already a writer. Then they gave advice in the following: Don't quit your day job! The average income for a writer has been about \$10,000 a year, and this was averaging out the payment between a best-selling author and a newspaper-filler writer. Besides knowing the rules of grammar and style, writers have to be able to take criticism. Then the panel covered the business of writing: dealing with agents, publishing companies, and query letters as well as promotions, contracts, and the Internet. Before heading back to my room, I sat in on one more panel, 3) Small Press: Ebook Perspective. Besides competing with big publishing companies, this panel also explained how the publishing industry had changed because of the Internet, especially the pros & cons of having books online. According to the panel members, a big advantage to online publishing has been the cost compared to hard-copy printing. As for how to attract new readers to their books, the panel agreed that the book needed good cover art, recommendations by other authors, and maybe publish a small part of the book for free--a chapter or two.

Saturday, October 13: For the most active day at this con, I started out

by going to a panel on 4) Online Presence where the panel asked why an online presence was needed, especially for writers. The problem has been editors who pressured writers to make so much more of a presence online with a webpage and blog as well as in different social networks, that the writer had less time to write his or her novel or shorter work. What the panel also suggested was that a writer should not be boring or self-centered, and if a writer got into an online fight, then the writer should defend him or herself in a unique way or just get away from that person. The worst people online have been those looking for a fight with the writer, and when the writer wanted to back away, then the troublemaker accused the writer of not accepting another opinion. Next, 5) *Unsung Author*, was about the life and writings of Robert Sheckley (1928-2005). This mainly SF-comedic writer had a very unassuming and low-key personality according to one of the members of the panel who met Sheckley. The other panel members said that some of Sheckley's stories suggested either that people have been only one-step away from their violent past or Sheckley was warning the readers against becoming violent. He had his first story published in 1951, his first book (an anthology) published in 1954, and his first novel published in the late 1950s. Some members of the audience mentioned that his stories reminded them of stories from the *Twilight Zone* TV series. Then, he lived for a while in Europe and seemed to have burned out. He was still satirizing ideas from the 1950s, but the 50s moved on. Later, he wrote some media tie-in books to pay his bills. Overall, the panel wondered if a younger generation would remember him and read his writings in future years. Before going to supper, 6) the Not Rocket Science panel discussed authors who used other sciences for their stories: biology, computer science, social sciences, and so forth. This panel wondered if these stories were also hard-SF stories such as those stories that used rocket science and physics. Most of the panel said yes. (Hard SF stories need science to keep the plot together, and without it, the story falls apart. Most editors only allow for one or two "made-up" rules of science in a hard SF story, and the rest of the science must be accurate.)

That evening, I went to the following panel: 7) FTL (Faster than Light)-What the Hell? Thereupon, this panel mentioned the different forms of FTL propulsion that writers used in SF stories: warp drive, wormholes, transit points, and so forth as well as how credible these methods were to the story. Other questions the panel had involved how FTL would affect the Human body and issues about time travel. Anyway, the panel agreed that what we know about science currently was different from what we knew in the 19th and 20th centuries. More than a century from the present, it will most likely be even more different. The next panel, 8) RIP Bookstores or Not Dead Yet?, talked about the closing of several bookstores and bookstore chains, especially Borders. Who could compete against Amazon and Barnes & Noble? Most of the panel and audience agreed that bookstores selling small-press publications and used books as well as offering other stuff (snacks, beverages, and entertainment) could survive. Consequently, those bookstores that served as social gathering places in the neighborhood would have the best chance of surviving in these days of ebooks and online ordering. Meanwhile, Barnes & Noble also sold games and toys in addition to books; they too, have a café and entertainment on certain evenings. Another big advantage was that bookstores take cash as well as credit cards. Finally, before retiring for the night, I went to a round-table talk about 9) What is the WSFA Small Press Award? Here was what I learned: A committee of five read different short stories published by small press companies. Only the story was visible to the committee; they had no idea who the author was. Then they picked the nominees, and later, the winners. The goal was to have the story judged strictly by its merit. According to the people at this table, some very famous writers didn't make the nominees list. This was the sixth year that Capclave has been giving out these awards.

Sunday, October 14: On my final day here, I went to the last panel for me:

10) The Future of Reading. With bookstores disappearing, and ebooks becoming more common, the panel and audience wondered if it also affected what people read, especially what children read. Many surveys showed that more people have been reading non-fiction than fiction. Epublishing has been cheaper than print publishing, and it has been available to more people worldwide. In the next generation, most publishers predict that around 75% of the market will be ebooks. Meanwhile, publishers would be able to track who has been reading what and where they left off. Then, I spent the next hour in 11) the Con Suite. In a large meeting-room setting, there were plenty of round tables, snack foods, soft drinks, and chances to talk with other SF fans. Finally before going home, I stepped into 12) the Dealers' Room. Capclave may be smaller than other nearby SF cons, but in the Dealers' Room, like the bigger regional cons, about half of the dealers sold reading materials of books, magazines, and semi-pro-zines. The other half sold other merchandise: t-shirts, tote bags, and jewelry as well as costumes, games, pen sets, etc.

Friday, October 26: Since 9/11/01, the powers-to-be closed the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) to the public. Nevertheless, the next best thing could be a tour of the Museum of American Finance, 48 Wall Street (and William Street) in the Financial District of New York City (212-908-4110 or www.moaf.org). Housed in the former Bank of New York building (1928), the interior of this place impressed me very much with its polished marble walls, floors, and bannisters as well as the lighting, the iron rails, and especially the murals showing scenes of the early days of NYC's history from the 1600s, 1700s, and 1800s. Then, there was the museum itself: Here, via texts, pictures and exhibits as well as videos and touch-screen computers, I learned quite a bit about the world of money! Among the subjects covered at this museum were the History of Money, Alexander Hamilton's Legacy, and Banking as well as the ins & outs of Stocks, Commodities, and Bonds. Other exhibit areas displayed technology used in the past by the stock market, the role USA presidents took in finance, and when I was there, the temporary exhibit area explained the current credit crises. Also included in this museum was a small cinema presenting a brief video about the history of the NYSE. Overall, I think the public would most likely learn more about the world of money and finance here than anywhere else in the neighborhood that used to be opened to the public.

Friday, November 9: If I went to no other SF con, I definitely attended Philcon or the Philadelphia SF Conference, and I did the same for 2012 at the Crown Plaza Hotel, Cherry Hill, NJ. The Philadelphia SF Society (PSFS) has been running Philcon since 1936. (Some people say that the 1936 event wasn't a real SF con in the fandom sense of the word. However, that's for other people to debate at another time.) Anyway, the first place I headed to was 1) the Con Suite. In a living room setting with large windows overlooking Route 70, I ate some snack foods, drank soft drinks, chatted with a few other SF fans, and had a chance to read my program book and pocket program. Next, I sat in on my first panel that night: 2) Red Rover, Red Rover: *Curiosity* on Mars. Thus, Frank O'Brien, Yoji Kondo (pen name Eric Kotani), and the president of the local chapter of the National Space Society/Philadelphia Area Space Alliance (NSS/PASA), Earl Bennett, talked about the precise landing of the *Curiosity* rover on Mars, the rover looking for traces of water, and maybe finding traces of past life as we know it. So far, this and past rovers have found much evidence of water that was once on Mars, vistas that looked similar to the Grand Canyon (only Mars's canyon is much larger), and soil that bore a similarity to the volcanic soil from Hawaii. At the next panel, 3) Cosmology and It's Discontents, John Ashmead, Paul Haldern, Dr. H. Paul Shuch, and Robert Kauffmann discussed the Standard Cosmology Model of the history of the universe or how it started around 13.7 billion years ago: Big Bang, Cosmic Expansion,

Inflation, and so forth. Then they covered some alternative ideas: something before the Big Bang, multi-universes, super string theory, different dimensions, etc. Finally, the last event that night for me was 4) An Unofficial History of Fandom. Here, Michael Walsh mentioned the early World SF cons or Worldcons from the first in 1939, to the Worldcons having a tighter organized structure in the 1950s, and when the Worldcons started increasing exponentially in attendance starting in the 1970s. He also talked about fan feuds and certain books about the history of SF fandom.

Saturday, November 10: Being somewhat bright-eyed and not so bushy-tailed, I started this day by entering 5) the Art Show room. Here, I noticed that fantasy has taken over on the art themes by about 90%, and the rest of the art showed SF and space themes. Around 80% of the art medium displayed paintings and drawings, and the rest exhibited other mediums: sculptures, jewelry, pottery, and so forth. I also looked at different Lego displays of a spaceport, a *Star Wars* theme, and other Lego exhibits. After this, I attended 6) The Higgs Boson talk. By way of his laptop, Paul Halpern explained more about the July 4, 2012 discovery of the Higgs Boson particle and what this meant for the origin of the universe. He also covered what the different particles were and why they were important, the four different kinds of forces, the Large Hadron Collider, and other related subjects. Then, he also mentioned that while the energy for smashing those particles was high by "particle standards," by Human standards, the energy required was the equivalent to a pack of sugar. Therefore, there was no need to worry about the energy of those particles causing a black hole and sucking in the Earth! It was a more somber talk that I listened to at the next event: 7) Ray Bradbury Tribute Panel. Susan Casper, Marilyn "Mattie" Brahen, Marvin Kaye, Steve Vertlieb, and Michael Swanwick talked about their personal memories about the late author, Ray Bradbury (1920-2012). Some of the panel members never met him but felt that they knew him by reading his writings, and others who did meet him said that Bradbury encouraged new writers to keep on working at their craft. He was even a mentor to Mattie Brahen, and they corresponded for 27 years. The panel also mentioned Bradbury's many books, the problems with putting his stories into films and TV, and that he designed the American Pavilion at the 1964 NY World's Fair. Somebody also said that Bradbury loved playing tennis, loved talking to crowds of fans, and loved life in general. Next, I sat in on the following: 8) Private Space Development. Inge Heyer, Frank O'Brien, Tobias Cabral, Yoji Kondo (or Eric Kotani), and the vice-president of NSS/PASA, Mitchell Gordon, discussed many of the industries in space that private companies would most likely be operating: space tourism, mining the asteroids, and so on. Meanwhile, the government would most likely keep on doing scientific missions in space. Other topics included Virgin Galactic's plan to send passengers to space in 2013 and Bigelow Aerospace planning its first space hotel. On the other hand, Inge Heyer mentioned that it should be communicators, such as teachers and journalists, and not strictly scientists, going into space in order to communicate the wonders of space to others on Earth. At first, private spaceflight would prove expensive, but in time, the hope would be that the cost of spaceflight should become cheaper and more available to more people. (This was similar to what happened to air travel.)

After supper, I attended another memorial talk, but this time it was about 9) Neil Armstrong: Remembering the First Man on the Moon (1930-2012). The panel included Frank O'Brien, Mark Wolverton, Mitchell Gordon, Lee Gilliland, and Yoji Kondo (Eric Kotani) remembering where they were on that moment when Neil Armstrong first stepped on the Moon. Then they discussed different aspects of Armstrong's life and career. First, Armstrong was an engineering pilot and not a fighting pilot, even though he was in the Navy. Second, because he didn't talk to the news media much or do too much public outreach for space--like Buzz Aldrin did--the rumors started about his being reclusive. Nevertheless,

according to people who knew him, that wasn't true. Third, Armstrong took an interest in flying as a boy and earned his first pilot license before learning to drive. In addition, I learned several other tidbits about his life and realized that it was a life well lived for one of America's heroes. Later that night, I watched 10) the Masquerade. Out of twelve costume entries, eight were fantasy, and four were SF. My two favorites were Iron Man who wore what looked like red armor and a Cyber man who wore a silver outfit made from aluminum foil. Because of the sale of *Star Wars* to Disney Studios, there was a funny skit about Cinderella dating Darth Vader. Then during the Masquerade and for halftime, the emcee, a comedian who called himself Uncle Yo, told fandom related jokes or jokes about life in fandom. Most of the jokes were funny, but other parts of his routine needed polishing. (Who knows? Maybe someday I'll see him on Letterman's show.)

Sunday, November 11: This winding down day found me sitting in on the following panel: 11) Con Running 101-So You Really Want to Run a Con...? Anyway, the panel of experienced con staff included Hugh Casey, Kristyn Souder, Carl Fink, Gil Cnaan, James Harknell, and Jeff Mach. Here, I learned that the three most important people to have on your con committee were a good lawyer, a tax person, and a hotel liaison. Then the panel got into more details about liability concerning problems at the con, coming up with the money to afford the con, and having good relations with the hotel. Somebody on the panel said that it was better for a con committee to have a good relation with a bad hotel than a bad relation with a good hotel. The panel also agreed that the best way for anybody to learn about running cons was to volunteer at different cons and learn about what went on behind the scenes. Finally, before going home, I toured 12) the Dealers' Room. Accordingly, I noticed that about half of the dealers sold reading materials of books, magazines, and comic books. The other dealers sold different kinds of merchandise: jewelry, games, and buttons as well as costumes, t-shirts, and other stuff. In addition to dealers, this room also included special interest groups promoting their causes: committees of other cons selling memberships and organizations, including the table I spent a few hours at: the NSS and the Philly chapter, PASA.

I can't close this column without mentioning Hurricane Sandy; I was very lucky because I didn't lose power. On the other hand, many people are worse off than I am! Therefore, many people have been donating to a charity of their choice for the victims of Sandy. Meanwhile, we should hold the victims in the light. I hope the upcoming holidays are better for all of us. Goodbye for now.