DOTTY'S DIMENSIONS

by Dorothy M. Kurtz

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Hello everybody. I'm glad to see things returning to somewhat normal after the events of September 11, 2001; anyhow, let's never become too complacent!

Notice the *Star Trek* (ST) Star Fleet insignia for this issue? Leonard Nimoy wore this insignia when he played Commander Spock on the original ST series. All Star Fleet ship officers in the science division wore this insignia. This is in keeping with my 25th anniversary celebrating my introduction to science fiction (SF) fandom when I attended my first SF convention (con).

Back in Volume 1, Issue 3, on my essay about the Franklin Institute Science Museum (FI), I complained about the FI removing a very impressive section about space science because they wanted to use that area to display exhibits that were more seasonal. Nevertheless, due in part to a $1.4 million grant from NASA, a new exhibit area about space exploration called Space Command is opening on October 25, 2002. Judging from the description in my FI newsletter, it sounds as though it will be in a space-station setting adjacent to the Fels Planetarium. The FI is renovating this planetarium, and it is due to re-open at the same time as Space Command. I hope to visit the FI and this exhibit area in the fall.

I am still receiving an occasional letter from some of you asking about my overseas trips, so I would recommend checking out DOTTY'S DIMENSIONS: OVERSEAS. This publication covers 64 of my favorite overseas attractions on 14 pages. You can read it online or order a paper copy for $2 (in North America) or $3 (overseas in USA funds) to the address in the title box. (Please write cheques or money orders out to DIMENSIONAL PRESS.)

For this issue, I have two SF con reports: JerseyDevilCon in New Jersey and Balticon in Maryland as well as some weekends spent in Philadelphia.

If you would like to receive more information about JerseyDevilCon, send a self-addressed stamped envelope to JERSEYDEVILCON, PO Box 403, Metuchen, New Jersey, 08840. I also bought an interesting guide to Philadelphia: *Frommer's Philadelphia & the Amish Country*, ISBN 076-452-7576, published by Hungry Minds, Inc.

JERSEYDEVILCON 2002

Friday, April 5, 2002, I arrived at the Raritan Center Sheraton, Edison, New Jersey, to attend a three-day regional-SF con called JerseyDevilCon 2.

Upon receiving my program book, I noticed that compared to last year's JerseyDevilCon, the programming looked much better. This con had three tracks of programming and other con events. There were more things to do at this con on Friday night than at Lunacon. (1) The first panel that I attended was Genetically Engineered Food. This panel talked about the pros and possible cons that may result from eating this kind of food. (Pros: not at the mercy of insects and other pests, so no need for pesticides. Cons: some people could be allergic to this new food, and the nutritional value might be taken out; this could be a possible weapon by some countries and terrorists groups.) (2) The History of Space Flight panel had the guest of honor, Dr. Jerry Pournelle (SF author), mention some of the events that happened during the space race in the 1960s and why these things happened the way they did back then for better or worse. (3) At Been There, Done That, Both Times, the panel wondered why the studios remade some SF and fantasy films, and what SF and fantasy books could make a good film. (4) For the final panel that night, How Does a Cover Read?, a panel of artists said that cover art paid more than other kinds of art. Nevertheless, tight deadlines, the need for an income, and Internet piracy might put pressure on an artist.

Saturday, April 6, (1) I visited the Dealers' Room and noticed that this con was shaping up like other regional SF cons in regard to the Dealers' Room: about 50% of the dealers sold reading material (books, magazines, and fanzines), and the rest sold other merchandise (costumes, buttons, jewelry, posters, and other things). (2) Next, I looked at the Art Show. Like other SF cons, roughly 90% of the displayed art medium showed paintings and drawings, and the rest displayed other mediums: quilts, jewelry, sculptures, clothing, and other objects. Fantasy dominated the art themes by about 90% while the remaining art themes covered media SF and space art. (3) At the first panel that I attended, Talifans, the panel asked if some SF fans took SF, or what they defined as a real SF fan, too

seriously. (I myself saw how some literary SF fans looked down on fans of other kinds of SF: media, costuming, and fans who took part in other fringe SF activities. I still felt that there has been room enough for everybody.) (4) Then, I watched a Color Pencil Demo. As he drew a picture of a woman in a black tight-fitting SF costume, the artist mentioned the good and bad points about working with color pencils. (On the one hand, the colors won't run or become air-bound; on the other hand, the artist must use repetitive motions and constantly re-sharpen his or her pencils.)

After I changed and had dinner on Saturday night, (5) I witnessed an Oil Painting Demo. As they painted their SF and fantasy paintings, the artists explained what brushes worked best for which paint job, what references they used for their basic sketches, and other oil-painting topics. (6) At Costuming From Your Closet, the panel described how fans could modify regular clothes into costumes and the best way to present themselves on stage at a masquerade. (Short & funny presentations are best; but one point the panel agreed on--surprise the audience but don't surprise the masquerade director.) (7) In What Was Your Intro to Genre Fiction, the panel and some of the audience told the rest of us what first book, film, or TV show sparked their interest in SF. (8) Similar to last year, this year's con didn't have a ballroom to hold a masquerade contest, so the con organized a Masquerade Ball. The costumers danced or stood around the room as the judges looked at their costumes. After a few hours, the judges awarded prizes to the best costumes. I saw about a dozen (mostly fantasy) costumes, but none of them stood out in my mind very well.

Sunday, April 7, (1) I listened to the following panel: Care and Framing of Your Collectible Art. This panel explained the best matting, frames, glass, and storage for various kinds of art. (2) In the next panel, How To Design Your Studies for a Career in Space, the panel gave some advice on how to fit different jobs, careers, and college majors to best suit a future job in space: on a space station (such as the L5 Station), a moon colony, or Mars colony. (The employment options in space will no longer be limited to just piloting, science, and engineering; health care, the legal professions, and even jobs in the arts will be needed. Anyhow, we aren't at that point yet.) (3) At the Importance of Small Press Publications, the panel remarked on how the Internet had prompted an increase in the number of small-press companies. These companies ranged from some that published a personal diary to those who published professional-style books, which the big press companies may have found too controversial. (4) Before going home, I heard one more panel, Artemis Awaits. The panel moderator told the audience what the Artemis Society was about: creating a lunar colony by commercial means (not government money). Nevertheless, Jerry Pournelle pointed out that the Artemis Society needed lots of money, and most companies would only be interested in gaining their own immediate profits. Dr. Pournelle also mentioned that the Artemis Society needed to find a company with a cathedral mentality. In other words, as most cathedral designers seldom lived to see their cathedrals completed, most company executives would never live to see the finished results of their space-project investments.

After this, I headed home and summed up the con: I became very impressed at the way the con was going! I'm looking forward to attending in 2003.

BALTICON 2002

On the weekend of May 24-27, 2002, I attended my favorite SF con (so far), Balticon, at the Wyndham Inner Harbor hotel in downtown Baltimore, Maryland.

Friday, May 24, after I received my program book and pocket program, I sat in on my first panel (1) Balticon 101: A New Fan's Guide to Our Con! Although this was definitely not my first Balticon, the panelists' explanations about what went on at a typical Balticon kept me just as interested as somebody else who attended his or her first Balticon. Some of the topics included the programming, parties, and the need for volunteers. (2) Next, I stepped into the Dealers' Room. Like any other past Balticon, about half of the dealers sold reading material in the form of SF books, magazines, and fanzines. The other dealers sold other merchandise: jewelry, buttons, costumes, videos, sculptures, and other items. (3) During the next hour, I visited the Con Suite where I could eat snacks, have a soft drink or two, and converse with other SF fans. (4) For my final Friday night activity, I looked at the Art Room. Roughly, 75% of the displayed art included paintings and drawings, and the rest of the art showed other mediums: jewelry, sculptures, costumes, boxes, and so on. About 90% of all of the artworks displayed fantasy themes (including a sizeable number of nudes of both sexes), and the remaining artwork exhibited SF and space themes.

Saturday, May 25, became the busiest day. Balticon had great programs in its science and costuming tracks. Nevertheless, because I've attended many events and panels in both tracks at past Balticons and other cons, for this year, I mainly visited panels in other tracks. (1) Is It Soup Yet? became the first of those other-track panels that I attended. At this panel and demonstration in the art track, the artist showed and explained the advantages and disadvantages of working with acrylic paints. I especially liked her demo on string art. (2) Then, After the Fire, Art had to do with charcoal drawing. The artist for this talk and demo drew his charcoal drawings and mentioned the pros & cons of drawing with charcoal versus pencil. (The artist can brush away his or her mistake easier on a charcoal drawing than on a pencil drawing, but charcoal sketches do smear easier than pencil sketches.) (3) As I walked in the main corridor, I stopped for a second to look at some photo stills from some old Ed Wood films. Then, the person behind the table noticed my press badge and introduced himself as Conrad Brooks. Mr. Brooks acted in several of Ed Wood's films, and he now appears at SF, film, and media cons around the country. I

bought an autographed picture of him and took some more pictures of him with my own camera. (This time was one of the few times an actor ever approached me for press coverage. Usually, I had to get prior permission from the actor's manager, agent, or publicist.) (4) For a change of pace from the art panels, How Do Movies Get Into the Theaters? had the panel moderator telling the audience how films got distributed into theaters and onto videos. Other topics covered why the studios do so many remakes of films, sequels to films, and other Hollywood logic or illogic. (5) Back in the art track, Dueling Easels did not become a duel at all because the second artist never showed up for the demo. Thus, the artist who showed up drew pictures from audience suggestions. (6) The Artist Guest of Honor, Phil Foglio, took part in the next panel, Graphic Graphites. Mr. Foglio pointed out the good and bad parts of drawing with pencils (both mechanical and the wooden number-two pencils), especially when drawing for comic books. (Mechanical pencils are good for drawing outline sketches, and they never need re-sharpening; number-two pencils are good for shading.)

After taking a break for dinner and changing for the evening, I attended the first event for Saturday night, (7) Slide Show on Space Art. Here, I saw slides illustrating different SF space operas from stories by Jules Vern and H. G. Wells to many newer space-related SF stories of the late-20th century. (8) In Arranging the Happy Accident or Jumpstarting the Muse, a panel of artists explained how they got their ideas from artistic accidents. Some of the artists mentioned inkblot art and art that resulted from spilled paint. (9) Then came Masquerade time. Out of about 22 entries, I estimated that two-thirds of the costumers wore fantasy costumes, and the remaining contestants wore SF costumes. "Alice in Wonderbra" was one of the funniest entries. (10) Finally, I attended a party held by the Baltimore Chapter of the National Space Society. They served snack foods and soft drinks, and I listened to conversations that mostly had to do with the state of both the space program and the aerospace industry.

Sunday, May 26, proved almost as active as Saturday, and I listened to the following discussion (1) A Code of Honor for Women. SF authors Wen Spencer and Blessing Bird talked about how they featured strong and liberated women in their stories. Blessing Bird also included part of her Native-American heritage in her stories. (Of course, they also covered the portrayal of women in SF, both good and bad.) (2) In Turning from Amateur to Professional (writer), a panel of SF authors explained how they sold their first story or book. Another topic included how to deal with publishers and literary agents. (3) At Modern Gadgets from SF stories from the Past, the panel mentioned what SF gadgets are in use at present (computers, cell-phones, lasers, and so on) and what hasn't come about for popular use (videophones, flying cars, robots, and other things). (4) The Baltimore-Washington Secret Masters of Fandom (BWSMOF) panel informed the audience about what SF-fandom activities have been going on in the Baltimore-Washington, DC, area: fan clubs, fanzines, cons, and so forth.

On Sunday night (again, after I had supper and changed for the evening), I listened to the following (5) Running a Small Con. The panel (all former and current staff of different SF cons, both large and small) mentioned the advantages and disadvantages of running a small con versus a large con. This panel also talked at length about hotel contracts and financing for a con. (No, I don't plan to run a con.) (6) Fen Genealogy: How Have We Evolved? covered the history of SF fandom from the 1930s to the present and how fandom had changed through the years. (Most of the cons nowadays have more people attending and more tracks of programming; there are also more female fans than in the past.)

Monday, May 27, things started winding down, and I attended a panel about (1) Dead SF Writers. The panel and audience wondered which SF authors and books future SF fans will remember 50 to 100 years from now. (2) For the next hour, I stepped into the Art Show room and saw a Mini Art Exhibit: Private Collectors Display Their Favorite Art. Except for three sculptures, these collectors showed paintings and drawings; about 75% of the artworks displayed fantasy themes, and the rest covered SF and space art. (3) I sat in on some space-science events, and at the first one, *Hubble's* Service Mission, Inge Heyer showed slides of the March 2002 shuttle mission servicing the *Hubble Space Telescope* (HST). Here, I saw slides showing preparations for the shuttle flight, repairs to the HST, the mission itself, and the day-to-day life on board a shuttle mission. (4) At my final event at this con, a talk about Space Activism in Wartime (Post 9/11/2001), the panel mentioned that the changes in space activism haven't been as drastic as they thought it might have been. Nevertheless, voluntary contributions to space organizations went down as well as membership renewal to those same organizations; of course, the changing economy didn't help.

Unlike last year, when I had my civilized dinner before the start of Balticon, this year, I had my civilized dinner after the con was over. Monday night, I changed for the evening and walked to the Radisson hotel, located next door to the Wyndham hotel. Built in 1928 as the Lord Baltimore hotel, the Hilton chain bought this French-Renaissance-styled building in the 1990s. Then, a few years ago, the Radisson hotel chain bought it. I noticed an Art-Deco style inside the hotel's restaurant, the Lord Baltimore Grill (410-539-8400). Although the menu prices were high, the food was good in both quality and quantity. Again, like last year, I had a full meal by just ordering a soup and salad.

Tuesday, May 28, I walked down to the Inner Harbor area and visited the Maryland Science Center, 601 Light St. (410-685-5225). Because I'm a member of the Franklin Institute Science Museum in Philadelphia, and they have a reciprocal agreement with the Maryland Science Center, I didn't have to pay to enter here. I bought tickets for the 3-D IMAX film, *Space*

Station 3-D. Although, I've seen 3-D films before, they were not as good as this film. As I viewed the day-to-day life on board the *International Space Station* (ISS), I saw objects floating in zero gravity that seemed to come right toward me. (I even noticed some of the children in the audience trying to grab those floating objects.) In the rest of the museum, I toured three floors of exhibits. To my delight and surprise, the whole second floor displayed exhibits dealing with space from astronomy to space exploration. Other exhibit areas covered the laws of physics, paleontology, the natural history of the Chesapeake Bay, and mathematics. This also became a very active museum containing plenty of hands-on exhibits. Throughout the day, museum employees took part in different science demonstrations. I definitely enjoyed my time here.

Thus, to sum up the con -- Balticon provided many tracks of programming. I'm looking forward to attending the 2003 con: same time of year and same place!

SUMMER IN THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA

For the first two weekends of June 2002, I visited the City of Brotherly Love, Philadelphia.

Saturday, June 1, I started out by entering the former location of the Franklin Institute Science Museum; nowadays, however, it has been the Atwater-Kent Museum, 15 S. 7th St. (215-685-4830), covering the history of Philadelphia. I viewed two floors of pictures, mementos, exhibits, and text revealing Philly's political past, social past, and its effects on the city's residents. Many of the exhibit themes changed seasonally, and when I was there I saw four different exhibit-theme areas: Quaker Influence in the City's Early History, Manufacturing in Philadelphia, the 1876 Centennial celebration, and the methods used in Archeology in Philadelphia. This place gave a more comprehensive story about Philly from its founding in 1682 to the present times than any other attraction in the city, including the new Visitor Center!

Sunday, June 2, I walked along the Ben Franklin Parkway before stopping into an interesting bar & restaurant, Mace's Crossing, 1714 Cherry St. (215-564-5203).

The Ben Franklin Parkway became Philly's answer to Paris's Champs-Elysees because it resembled a wide tree-lined boulevard (built for the Sesquicentennial celebration in 1926). My biggest problem had been finding a place to eat on the Parkway that was better than fast food but not costing top dollar; Mace's Crossing seemed to fit my needs. Located in a 140-year-old redbrick building (formerly used as a carriage house), this place served very good and filling pub-style foods (sandwiches, salads, soups, and so on) for reasonable prices. (Few items on the menu exceeded $10.) I enjoyed sitting here and relaxing after walking along the Parkway.

Saturday, June 8, on the following weekend, I took the bus out to the University City neighborhood.

The University of Pennsylvania, the oldest institute of higher learning to earn university status in the USA, dominated this area. (Harvard may have been the oldest institute of higher education in the USA, but Pennsylvania College, founded in 1740 by Ben Franklin, became a university in 1779.) For that day, I visited my favorite place in the neighborhood, the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, 33rd & Spruce Sts. (215-898-4000). With three floors of exhibits, I studied the history and cultures of several past and present societies: Ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, Israel, Greece, and Rome. In addition to this, the museum also presented exhibits dealing with several societies in Asia, Africa, Polynesia, and Native American societies from both North and South America. On the ground floor, video screens displayed the latest work by the University's students and faculty on assignment in places around the world in the fields of archaeology and anthropology. Many of the museum's exhibits included artifacts, videos, text, and hands-on items. In this redbrick Romanesque-style building, the marble stairways and the mosaic-inlay designs in the walls enhanced the exhibit areas. According to *Discover Magazine*, this place rated as one of the "10 Great Science Museums."

Sunday, June 9, I went to the cinema.

The problem with the multiplex cinemas in the suburbs was that they lacked different films. By different I mean several kinds of films: Hollywood blockbusters, independent films, foreign films, and revival films. Most of the suburban cinemas only show a few different Hollywood blockbusters on several of their screens. I usually have to travel to Philadelphia or New York to see those other films. Thus, I went to the Ritz Five cinema at 2nd & Walnut Sts. in Philadelphia and saw an independent film called *CQ* ("seek you" in short-wave radio code). Set in Paris in 1969 and '70, the leading character, an American filmmaker, directed a SF film. This filmwithin-a-film titled *Dragonfly* took place in the future year of 2000. The leading lady who played *Dragonfly* (hence the film's name) played her character as a sexy secret agent on a mission to a rebel moon base. If you thought that this sounded like a thinly veiled version of *Barbarella*, you were right. In this version, however, the director of *Dragonfly* started getting obsessive about the leading lady playing *Dragonfly* to the point that the *Dragonfly* film almost had no ending. Many interesting sets and costumes added some eye candy to the film as well. Anyway, I had a feeling that *CQ* looked more interesting to me than the current top-five box-office films.

For the next issue (Volume #3, Issue #3), I'll most likely have some essays about different brief trips that I will be taking before October: Washington, DC; New Jersey; Pennsylvania; Long Island and the Hudson Valley in New York; Delaware; and Maryland. I also plan to attend my favorite media-SF con, Shore Leave in Maryland.

In the meantime, have a good summer; I'll be back in the fall. Farewell for now!