DOTTY'S DIMENSIONS CONTINUES

by Dorothy M. Kurtz
#2 Winter 2006/7



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Greetings! I hope you enjoy this second issue of my twice-yearly publication. As I've said in Issue #1, the odd-numbered issues will cover my New York City extended weekends and Balticon. The even-numbered issues will include my reports on other weekends in NYC, weekends in Philadelphia, and Philcon. Therefore, if you order enough Dimensional Press publications, please write cheques or money orders (in USA funds) out to DOROTHY M. KURTZ, not DIMENSIONAL PRESS. If you have any questions, please write to me at the address in the title box, e-mail me, or use my blog.

Well, I'm glad to see the space shuttles back in service. I hope that someday the next step for human-space missions will be a return to the moon and then on to Mars and beyond.

I know the picture above is a bit hard to figure out, but it's a picture of two posters; the first poster is advertising the Off-Off-Broadway show that I saw, *Having It Almost.* The other is an advertisement for the third-annual New York Musical Theater Festival. As for the best source on finding out about events going on in NYC, I recommend subscribing to *Time Out New York* (TONY), PO Box 385, Mt. Morris, IL 61054-8475. A yearly subscription for this weekly magazine (in USA funds) costs $39.95 in the USA, $89.00 in Canada, and $150.00 elsewhere. TONY's Off-Off-Broadway Show Listing alone is worth the price.

Meanwhile, the Philadelphia Science Fiction Conference (Philcon) has now moved back to November (17-19) and to a new location: Sheraton Center City Hotel (formerly the Wyndham Franklin Plaza), 17th St. and Race St., Philadelphia. This science fiction convention (SF con) has been around since the 1930s. Thus, like Balticon, it has something for almost everybody in its multi-track programming: science (including space exploration), costuming, and science fiction (SF) writing as well as art, videos, gaming, fantasy, and other stuff.

Saturday, September 16: A few hours after I arrived in NYC, I watched an Off-Off-Broadway show, *Having It Almost.* This show at the New World Stages was part of the third-annual NY Musical Theater Festival. In this musical comedy, five women in their 40s, while waiting for their delayed flights at JFK Airport, described their lives and the choices they made during their lives via dialog and songs (about 16 songs altogether). Through it all, they learned that if they couldn't have it all, at least they could make the best with what they have. Those five women included (1) a housewife and mother of two children, (2) a career woman, and (3) a struggling writer as well as (4) a married lady from Indiana and (5) a yoga instructor. I found the show enlightening and much of it true on the choices for today's women.

Sunday, September 17: After a long bus ride from Midtown Manhattan to Uptown (above Washington Heights), I entered what looked like a medieval monastery. In reality, The Cloisters, Fort Tryon Park (212-923-3700), has been opened to the public since 1938; the basic building dated from that time, but inside, this museum contained European artwork from the Middle Ages (circa 1000 to around 1500). Here, in styles ranging from Romanesque to Late Gothic, I looked at art in the forms of church archways, frescoes, and wood sculptures as well as stone sculptures, stained-glass windows, and tapestries. Other sections of this museum, part of the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Medieval Art Department, also displayed furniture, recreated chapels, and panel paintings as well as jewelry, other items, and especially the cloister gardens. Outside, the views of the Hudson River and the New Jersey Palisades looked as impressive as the artworks inside The Cloisters!

Saturday, September 23: For this weekend, I visited Philadelphia and watched an IMAX film at the Tuttleman Omniverse Theater (at the Franklin Institute Science Museum) called *Roving Mars*. This half-hour IMAX film presented the mission of the two Mars Rovers that landed on the red planet in 2004: *Spirit* and *Opportunity*. In addition, I watched as the Jet Propulsion Laboratory tested the rovers and later, as NASA got the rovers ready for launching and a safe landing on Mars. Finally, this film showed what those rovers discovered in the Martian soils. Meanwhile, the IMAX effects made me feel as though I were traveling around Mars myself!

Sunday, September 24: Although I've been to Independence Hall, Chestnut St., between 5th St. and 6th St. (215-965-2305), several times in my life, this was the first time I visited this place since September 11, 2001. Thus, I had to go to the Visitor Center at 6th St. and Market St. to pick up my timed tickets. (You can either call in advance for tickets or arrive early to receive tickets for a certain time to tour Independence Hall. I especially recommend ordering tickets in advance during the busy summer months.) After I received my tickets, I walked over to the Old City Hall (5th St. and Market St., next to Independence Hall) where the National Park Service (NPS) rangers led me inside. Here, I had to go through airport-styled security. Next, I sat in the East Wing of Independence Hall and awaited my tour. When it was time for the tour, the NPS ranger/tour guide explained for about 15 minutes the history of this 1753 building and the feelings of the colonists in the 18th century. Once inside the main building of Independence Hall, the tour guide spent another 15 minutes in the old courtroom and described what a typical 18th-century trial was like. Finally, on the other side of this floor, in the room where the Continental Congress met, the guide talked for around 15 minutes about the events that led to the delegates voting in favor of independence from Great Britain. In addition, he also mentioned the 1787 Constitutional Congress and the pros & cons that those delegates debated over: a strong central government vs. state's rights. Even though visitors have to go through much tighter security nowadays to enter here, I still feel that Independence Hall should be the first attraction one should see when visiting Philly.

Friday, November 17: For my first night at Philcon, I listened to the following panel: (1) Did Roddenberry Change the Universe? Gene Roddenberry (1921-1991), creator and producer of *Star Trek* (ST), introduced many ideas on the original ST series that many of us take for granted nowadays. The panel also talked about the many young people who grew up watching ST and who later became engineers, scientists, or worked in aerospace. Some even became SF writers. At the next panel, (2) Computer/Internet Security, the panel covered identity thief and the new electronic voting machines as well as e-mail spamming and computer viruses. Nevertheless, I got the impression that the people on this panel were Mac users due to their Windows and Microsoft bashing. Finally, I entered (3) the Con Suite. Here, the con committee offered the usual snack foods, soft drinks, and chances to talk with other SF fans in a living-room setting. Meanwhile, I viewed the Ben Franklin Parkway in Philadelphia from a big window in this room.

Saturday, November 18: I started this day by attending (4) Philcon 101. Thus, members of the con committee discussed what Philcon offered to SF fans as well as some basic rules a SF fan should follow at a con: the 6-2-1 rule. Get at least six hours of sleep a night; eat two meals a day (Con Suite snack food doesn't count.); and take a bath, shower, or clean up at the sink once a day. During the next event, (5) If it's Tuesday, This Must Be Jupiter: A Tour of the Solar System, the monitor's laptop computer wasn't working. Therefore, he and the rest of the panel talked about the composition of each planet in the solar system and the composition of the different moons in the solar system. At the next talk, (6) If I Ran the Space Program, the panelists discussed what space missions they would like to see NASA conduct if money and politics were no object. Among the subjects mentioned were robot missions to the planets and beyond as well as human missions to the moon and Mars. Afterward, I toured the (7) Art Show. I've noticed that this year's Art Show had fewer art entries in it than in previous years. Around two-thirds of the art showed fantasy themes, and the rest displayed SF and space themes. Meanwhile, about two-thirds of the art medium exhibited paintings and drawings, and the rest presented other mediums: jewelry, sculptures, and pottery as well as dolls, masks, costume accessories, needlepoint, and so on. Then, before going to dinner, I listened to a panel about (8) The Future of Mars Exploration. Here, the panel showed pictures of Mars via a laptop computer while they explained about the composition of Mars, especially the Victoria Crater. In addition, the panel covered what the Mars rovers, *Spirit* and *Opportunity,* found out about the red planet, and they discussed future Mars missions, both non-human and human.

That night, I watched (9) the Masquerade. Again, like a few years ago, only nine contestants entered the contest. Seven of them wore fantasy costumes, and the remaining two wore SF costumes. Unlike a few years ago, however, the audience didn't fill the ballroom seats to see this event. Instead, the ballroom was only between one-forth to one-third filled. (Maybe Philcon should go back to Masquerade parties--at least until they get more costumers entering the Masquerade.)

Sunday, November 19: On my final day here, the (10) Single Stage to Orbit: State of the Art panel talked about why such a vehicle hasn't been a success. One of the panel members said that if a single stage to orbit (SSTO) vehicle proved too expensive, having the technology to operate a SSTO doesn't matter. Somebody else also mentioned the current space shuttles being more re-buildable than re-useable, and the only successful SSTO was the *Lunar Lander.* Next, I entered (11) the Dealers' Room. Even the Dealers' Room for 2006 seemed smaller than in the last few years, but the ratio of dealers selling certain merchandise remained the same. About half sold reading materials of books, magazines, and some fanzines; the rest sold other stuff: jewelry, games, and toys as well as t-shirts, metal ware, costumes, buttons, bumper stickers, etc.

I ended up buying a book called *Eye of Argon*. This was supposed to be one of the worst stories written, and many SF cons, including Philcon, have midnight readings of this story, sometimes with the readers using funny voices! (In all fairness, the author was only 16 when he wrote it in 1970, and he wrote it for a fanzine.) After this, before going home, I sat in on the following panel: (12) SF Preparing Society for Social Change. Here, the panel covered space exploration in addition to other subjects. They also explained that many people have also become aware of space travel being more dangerous than they thought in the past. Nevertheless, the panel concluded that SF readers seemed more prepared for changes than other people have.

In addition to putting out DOTTY'S DIMENSIONS CONTINUES twice a year, I also write a yearly column about my twice-a-year Washington, DC, trips called "My Capital Time." Check my web site for more information.

Another yearly column I write is called "The State I'm In" about places I've visited in New Jersey once a month. This column should be out in February or March 2007. Again, check my web site for the latest news.

I also write other things from time to time. In December, I should have a paragraph in my photo album blog about a recent weekend trip I took to the Brooklyn Historical Society.

Until you hear from me again, have a happy winter solstice (or summer solstice--depending on what part of the world you live in!).