

Philcon 2011 Summary

This is a brief report on Philcon 2011, held November 18-20, 2011, in Cherry Hill, New Jersey. I hope a more complete report, with panel descriptions, will eventually appear.

This was the 75th Philcon, and it clearly has changed a lot. There seemed to be fewer literary programming items than in previous years, and most of what there was seemed to be in the evenings. I suppose that this may be to let younger convention goers have more items that interest them during the day, but for those of us old enough to have problems staying up until midnight, it is a problem. The other problem is that this puts all the literary items opposite each other while leaving gaps earlier.

To compensate for fewer literary items, there are more items on television, anime, gaming, comics, costuming, and so on. Oddly, movie items per se seem to have declined as well.

I also did not recognize most of the names of panelists, even for familiar topics. There were hardly any New York publishers or editors. (One person confirmed my suspicion that this was because it was not very easy to get to the Cherry Hill hotel via public transit. One can take the train to downtown Philadelphia, but then one needs to take a suburban train and a taxi, or a bus. The end result is that when the convention is in Philadelphia there are more New Yorkers, but fewer "suburbanites" who have to drive to the convention and find driving and parking in the city troublesome, and finding places to eat difficult. (I think most professionals eat in the hotel because it is a business expense, while fans prefer something cheaper.)

Apparently next year it will not be in Cherry Hill (at least at the same hotel), because they have already sold the function space to someone else. It might move back to Philadelphia, but then it would probably have to be in December because that is when the hotels are affordable, and no one really likes the December timeframe.

I have mixed feelings about this. I like the hotel, although their shift to those "K-cup" coffee makers means they provide less coffee, they no longer provide tea, and it is much harder to heat enough water to make instant ramen for breakfast. The elevators are very efficient, and the hotel provides a curtain clip to keep out the morning sun. But the lack of publishing professionals seems to have hurt the programming--or is that a deliberate attempt to attract a younger membership?

Our schedules were sparse--only one panel each. This is because although we filled in the questionnaires, Philcon lost them, and did not contact us until only a few days before the convention. As a result, Mark did not do his usual origami workshop (although he did end up doing an unscheduled demonstration in the Con Suite at one point). They also scheduled us during the dinner time, which we had asked them not to, but since the afternoon was so empty of program items interesting us, we ended up eating then. (We kept our tradition of eating at Red Hot & Blue on Saturday and Pho Barclay on Sunday.)

There was some confusion about a few panels, with their being listed at one time and place in the on-line schedule, and another in the printed schedule. Another glitch was that the on-line plain text schedule truncated in the middle of a Sunday panel description.

There was an information desk near registration, but it was so far as I could tell, never staffed. The result was that it was very difficult to find out what the actual schedule was, etc. There was also no voodoo board--it's possible they thought the convention small enough that it did not need one.

As with all conventions, there was a freebie table, but this was basically the rack of flyers. I had brought quite a few books and tapes which I put out, but unlike previous years, hardly anyone else

did the same. (Some years it had seemed like a major book swap was going on!) Again, I don't know if this indicates fewer book fans, or that book fans are now selling their books rather giving them away.

There were no microphones in the panel rooms, and this was often a problem. I always sit in the front row, and often I had problems hearing the panelists. In addition, the laptop projector set-up was delivered to at least one panel without an extension cord to connect it to an outlet.

The badges were vertical rather than horizontal, which was a problem for two reasons. First, they decided to print the names sideways to avoid having to make them a much smaller font in order to fit across the shorter edge. The font they chose was not the most readable sideways, having the lines of the letters a bit too fat. A leaner font might have been better, but frankly, trying to read names printed sideways, particularly if you are standing on the wrong side of the lettering, is difficult. The vertical orientation also gave people less space to attach ribbons to the bottom.

Someone was talking about being charged for a badge lanyard, but I do not know if that was at Philcon, or at another convention.