

**Anticipation (Worldcon 2009)**  
**A convention report by Evelyn C. Leeper**  
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This is a brief report on Anticipation, the Worldcon held in Montreal August 6-10, 2009. My full report will also include panel descriptions, but will probably not appear for some time (though I hope before the next Worldcon!).

### **Hotel**

We were staying in what was supposed to be a quiet hotel (the Hyatt). The only problem was that there was an outdoor rock concert going on across the street from our room from the time we checked in on Wednesday through Sunday night. This is probably not the convention's fault, but it was an omen of things to come.

(Well, actually, another problem was that the reception staff seemed very snooty. On the other hand, we were able to check in at 10AM, which was great.)

Parking seemed cheaper than what the convention web page said; maybe they were talking about valet parking. It cost us C\$110 for six days (143 hours). We found a space very close to the elevators, but the layout was such that we had to take one elevator to the lobby, walk up a half-dozen stairs, then take another elevator to our room!

### **Convention Centre**

The convention centre was about a quarter of a mile away, and reachable without ever going outside. The programming seemed very spread out, but that is just the nature of how these centres are built.

The convention provided free WiFi in the main hall, where the Dealers Room, Art Show, displays, etc. were. One problem was that it did not open until 10AM and programming started at 9AM, so one saw lines of people sitting on the floor against the room's walls trying to get connected and read their mail early.

Someone complained that there wasn't free WiFi throughout the convention centre. He wanted people to be able to "set up a Twitter backchannel" at panels, and even thought that having a screen \*behind\* the panelists where audience members could post comments that the panelists could not see was a good idea. The day that happens, I stop being a panelist. A panel presumes the panelists know more than the audience, and so does "privilege" the panelists. A discussion group makes everyone equal. But this suggestion privileges the audience over the panel, and basically allows them to carry on long exchanges that distract everyone while the panelists are talking. It is even worse than cell phones.

Some rooms had microphones and some not. In general, they got it right, but one small room had a panel with a very soft-spoken panelist who desperately needed a microphone.

There were complicated recycling bins throughout the centre, but there was also bottled water provided for the panelists. This seems inconsistent, but I am sure the bins are mandated by law and pitchers rather than bottles are not.

### **Registration**

Registration went quickly at noon on Wednesday, but there were problems. There were no programme grids (which apparently took the place of pocket programmes) or restaurant guides in the registration packets. (These did show up later, and I suppose that this is just one of the downsides of

early registration.) The change sheets were also not in the packets--more on this later.

There were only small generic plastic bags to hold the materials. This is not the convention's fault--I guess with the new economy, publishers and stores are less willing to donate fancy printed bags to conventions as advertising. Oh, well, we still have a supply from previous conventions (lightweight shoulder bags from ConFiction, heavy cloth tote bags from LaCon some-number-or-other, and so on).

In the bag there was a copy of what appeared to be a book of French fantasy (in translation) from Bragelonne but was actually a sampler. However, it seemed to include several complete stories in addition to an excerpt from a novel, so it was more like a "real" book.

One freebie that appeared on the "Freebie Table" was a book I had been looking for: Nick Mamatas's *Move Under Ground*. Other freebies included Rich Horton's *Science Fiction: The Best of the Year 2006*, Frank Ludlow and Roelof Goudriaan's *Emerald Eye*, and a 2009 Robert Jordan calendar (well, it will be accurate again when 2014 rolls around). There were also various books that members dropped off, including a lot of Stephen King in French. (I tend to drop off old science fiction on convention freebie tables rather than the local thrift shop, since there is definitely an audience for them.)

I have no idea who (if anyone) was in charge of putting publishers' freebies out on the table. I do know that the Horton did not appear until Saturday (though the boxes were there under the tables from the start), and then seemed a glut on the market. If they had started appearing earlier, this might not have been true.

### **Publications**

There was a souvenir book, a programme book, a programme grid, and a restaurant guide. The biographies that programme participants sent in appeared in none of these. The programme grid was too big for a pocket programme and also poorly designed (each day was the back of one sheet and the front of the next instead of the front and back of a single sheet). However, the real problem was that the programme book and grid were grossly inaccurate; see my comments under programming.

Typos abounded--the best on the grid was "Editiing" for "Editing" on a panel about editing! (And, no, it was not intentional, as elsewhere it was spelled correctly.) At the Hugo Ceremony, in the necrology they misspelled Philip José Farmer's name as "Phillip".

Speaking of which, the Hugo Awards Program was printed back-to-back in both English and French, like an Ace Double, but very poorly assembled. It was done on regular-size paper, then stapled midway and folded in half, but the sheets were not "squared up" very well before stapling.

Newsletters came out late (for example, I generally did not see the evening editions with the list of parties until the next morning), and were not well distributed. The rack next to the Voodoo and Party Boards was frequently empty of \*any\* issues of the newsletter, and one would often see (for example) only issues 1, 3, 7, and 11 in a rack at one end of the hall, and only issues 6, 8, and 10 in a rack at the other.

(There was also a problem with the Voodoo Board which turned out beneficial for the members. When the sheets were first printed, there was a problem, so they reprinted them while the boards to hold them were set up. When the second printing was done, it was discovered that the font size had been enlarged, so more boards were needed. However, this made it a lot easier for members to find names on it!)

### **Restaurant Guide**

The restaurant guide was almost useless. Admittedly there are so many restaurants in downtown Montreal that they cannot all be listed, but the ones that were had insufficient information. There were no hours listed, so the fact that that all the cheaper restaurants on Rue de Notre Dame closed by 6PM came as a surprise after we walked over there. Nor was there any indication of which served breakfast, or when. And though addresses and a map were given, the restaurants were not located on the map. You might know that a restaurant was on Rue de Notre Dame, but you had no idea which block it was in.

They also did not list the food court in the nearby Complexe de Desjardins at all, and probably missed a few others I was unaware of.

The one saving point of all this was that Chinatown was literally just outside the convention centre and one could rely on getting good food there--even breakfast at a couple of places! And one could always find fans wandering this area looking for food (and dinner companions--one morning we had breakfast with Jean Lorrain and talking about our respective trips to India).

(Tip for choosing the best Chinese restaurants: they are the ones with primarily Chinese patrons, or those where the tables are preset with chopsticks rather than forks.)

Ever since the Minicon Restaurant Guide got nominated for a Hugo a few years ago, people seem to have decided to get creative with their convention's restaurant guide. This is a mistake. Yes, there are those who will enjoy the clever writing and the descriptions of distant, expensive restaurants. But most fans, I think, prefer a straightforward list of the restaurants closest to the convention centers and hotels with the categories, price range, hours, and special details (wheelchair-accessible, serves family-style, or whatever). If possible a short list of breakfast places and late-night places is useful (though the hours should help there). Any restaurants further away that are listed should be there for a reason (kosher, best in town for smoked meat, serves its meals in a ferris wheel, etc.).

These are not new complaints. In 2000, I wrote that the Chicon "Dining Guide", while a good restaurant guide for someone visiting Chicago, was not as good for people attending a science fiction convention in Chicago. The restaurants included were too widely distributed geographically, and more heavily weighted towards more expensive restaurants. And the main flaw in the guide was the lack of geography, or map.

The next year, Millennium Philcon did such a good job that I used the guide for several years following. But then in 2002, at ConJose the restaurant guide was a triumph of style over substance. Oh, the descriptions were fine, but there were no hours listed for restaurants, and NO MAP!! Yes, they had addresses, but you couldn't figure out \*where\* on West San Carlos number 140 was. (We think, alas, it was actually in a site then under construction.)

What ConJose overlooked was that the primary purpose of a restaurant guide should be to give people useful, complete, current information on where they can eat during the convention rather than a fancy book with cover art by the Guest of Honor and great write-ups of restaurants no longer there or three thousand miles away. (I'm not making this up.)

For example, ConJose listed only three restaurants as both "short walk" and "breakfast." This included the aforementioned defunct restaurant, but did not include Express Deli (listed as lunch and dinner but no breakfast) or McDonald's (not listed at all, though you passed it one block before the Jack-in-the-Box that was listed).

Let me re-iterate my main point: The purpose of a convention restaurant guide is to guide people to restaurants. Anything that gets in the way of doing this, or supersedes it, is a bad thing.

Or most specifically, here are my requirements for a convention restaurant guide:

Regardless of how long, detailed, or elaborate the full guide is, there must be a single sheet (two sides) that has a list of all restaurants nearest the hotel or convention center (two blocks, three blocks, whatever radius fits) with description of what they serve, price range (in typical cost, such as "entrees \$15-\$20," not "\$" to "\$\$\$\$\$"), and hours. The hours should be the hours for the weekend of the convention--this is critical for conventions over holiday weekends. It should include all fast-food restaurants and grocery stores. And there should be a map with all the restaurants on it. People who want to go farther afield can use the full guide, which should also have a map for the closest ones, directions for the rest, and distances for all.

### **Dealers Room**

This was smaller than usual for a Worldcon, perhaps because crossing the border and dealing with customs was a real hassle for United States dealers--so hardly any came. An additional complication was the bilingual nature of the convention. The result was while half of the dealers were selling books, half of them were selling books in French. Ironically, everyone I talked to about the lack of English-language used books in the Dealers Room said the same thing: "Just as well, because the last thing I need is more books."

### **Art Show**

The art show was similarly small, probably for the same reason. In Europe, the show is small but at least one sees a wide variety of cultural influences. (I still remember some of the Czech and Dutch artwork from ConFiction in The Hague.) Here there were mostly the same artists, or at least styles, that one always sees.

### **Programming**

The programming itself was fine, but the organization of it left something to be desired. The participants were sent their draft schedules about one month before the convention--at the same time as the programme book and grid went to the printer! This meant that there were a \*lot\* of changes to the printed programme that could have been avoided if the drafts had been sent out even a week or two earlier. So there were \*seven\* pink pages of changes before the convention even started. In addition, the grids had been laid out incorrectly, and starting times were often off by a half-hour. Signs soon appeared throughout the convention centre (in English and French) saying that the grids were incorrect and to use the pink sheets. But the pink sheets had only the changes; the unchanged items were not listed there at all, so one needed to reference the grids as well.

One really major example: the conversation between Nobel Laureate Paul Krugman and author Charles Stross was listed for three different times and two different rooms, depending on which piece of paper you looked at.

In addition, the film programme was not listed anywhere (nor were the hours for the Dealers Room). The film programme was also supposedly grossly wrong.

"Plokteur" (the hoax newsletter) was not far off the mark when it said, "The Pocket Programme Convention Guide is the definitive source for programme items that were added to the programme database on Tuesdays or on Friday mornings, and the first edition of the Moose-Baiting and Franglais-Language programme streams, while the daily pink sheets will let you find items that have been relocated to an alternative space-time continuum, that other newsletter that doesn't exist will include all the programme changes that are now too late to be any use, the second edition of the programme grid is 23.2% more accurate than the first edition, and the bits of paper stuck to the walls will tell you how to avoid the filk, children's and WSFS programming."

There were also other problems. For example, Mark was supposed to be on an item where the

convention would show the film *Primer* and then the panel would discuss it. When he walked in, someone from the back of the room by the DVD player asked him, "Do you have the film?" To make a long story short, no one on the committee had thought to arrange for the film. Now it turned out that when Mark heard he was on this item (only two days before we left New Jersey), he put the DVD in his luggage to watch on the trip. So he was able to say that if the audience could wait a half-hour while he ran back to the hotel room, he could provide the film. What are the chances of that?! (Slim--the other two similar items with other films were canceled.)

He also had the problem that whoever wrote up his origami workshops said that Mark would be teaching specific figures, but never discussed this with him. Additionally, when he asked before the convention who was supplying the paper, they sent him email asking him to buy it and they would reimburse him, this email arriving while we were in Newfoundland. Luckily, Michael's had branches in several towns we were going through later in the trip. (At the convention, no one seemed to know how to reimburse him.)

I heard that the Regency Dance had no sound system provided, and was given a room still set up for panels, so they had to move all the chairs out of the way themselves.

Now, I heard from someone that one entire department of programming quit fairly late in the game, and I know that programme planning started late, because one person told me when he was given names and panels and asked to start matching them up (late June, if I recall). Panelists who did not have or provide an email address sometimes found themselves left out in the cold regarding panel placement and so on. (One said that even a letter or phone call explaining that it was too difficult to try to work without an email address and could they try to get one would have been better.)

### **Green Room**

Whether the committee's convention centre liaison was inexperienced, or Canada is stricter, I don't know, but the Green Room had very little in the way of refreshment, probably because all of it was provided by the convention centre at inflated prices. There was coffee (usually) and tea, with some muffins and bagels in the morning, and a couple of small cheese and veggie platters during the day. There were no cold beverages (other than water), no chips, etc., and when there was food, it disappeared very quickly.

There was no clock. I doubt the convention centre would have insisted they pay a corkage fee if they had put one in. (Someone else claimed there was a clock. All I can say is that I did not see one, and I did look for it.)

The convention seemed to think all the people in the room were there for the next panel, and that all the panelists would show up. Announcements of changes in the "5-minute-warning" system were posted in the Green Room but nowhere else. Moderators, as usual, seemed ill-formed about the actual length of the panels.

This is the last part of my brief report on Anticipation, the Worldcon held in Montreal August 6-10, 2009. My full report will also include panel descriptions, but will probably not appear for some time (though I hope before the next Worldcon!).

### **Parties**

The parties (and the Con Suite) were in the Delta, which was about a kilometer away from our hotel (and it was an uphill walk to our hotel). We went to the Reno party on Wednesday night, and it was very crowded, with a long walk back afterwards. So we decided to skip the parties after that, and this was probably a wise decision. One night the Delta shut down at least one party, and there were reports of people having to stand in line in the lobby waiting for people to \*leave\* the party floor

before they could go up.

I also heard that while the Con Suite had a lot of good food (including Montreal smoked meat), it was open only in the evenings. This could well be true, given how far it was from programming (a half a kilometer)--it was not possible to just "drop in" for a while during programming breaks. (The woman who seemed to be running the Green Room whenever I was there commented on how often I dropped in there. Well, if there had been a Con Suite, or even more chairs in the display hall, I might have used those instead. There were a few sofas scattered around the centre, but they were usually occupied.)

(After I posted this, several people told me that the Con Suite was open all day as well.)

### **Miscellaneous**

The Gaiman autographing could have been handled better. There were two sessions, each in an afternoon slot, but you had to stand in line for tickets which were given out at 9AM those mornings, and then again for the autographs. And although they knew how many tickets they had to give out, no one bothered to count the ticket line and tell people past a certain point that they would almost definitely not be getting tickets.

The major events were in a ballroom with flat seating (rather than raked or stadium seating), which meant that a lot of people could see things on the stage only on the screens. As a result we decided to skip the masquerade, which seems to have been a wise decision. First, there were more prizes given out than there were costumes. And many people reported that most of the costumes/presentations were recreations that depended on your being familiar with the originals in anime or wherever.

At one point, I thought I had lost something, so went to Program Ops to ask about it. They said that lost-and-found was in the Delta! Well, it was not quite that bad--things were taken to the Delta at the end of the day. Still, having the lost-and-found a half a kilometer away from where items were lost makes no sense.

We met a lot of old (and new) friends, of course, including J. J. Pierce, the son of the Bell Labs science fiction author J. R. Pierce, who also wrote as J. J. Coupling. And a big thank- you to Robert Anstett, who helped me figure out why my netbook was not finding any wireless networks on day.

There were about 3000 pre-registered members; the actual attendance was about 3921. The economy undoubtedly played a part, and high airfares kept some away. (Dan Kimmel said that in the spring when he checked airfares from Boston, they were in the \$500-\$700 range. He took the bus, which was \$68 round-trip!)