



Lambda Sci-Fi DC Area Gaylaxians



PO Box 656, Washington, DC 20044



(202) 232-3141 - Issue #231 - June 2009

E-MAIL: info@lambdasf.org WEBSITE: http://www.lambdasf.org/



The LSF Book Discussion Group

If you're interested in lively discussions of F&SF books (with an emphasis on elements of interest to the LGBT community), we invite you to join the LSF Book Discussion Group. Each month, we conduct fascinating roundtable discussions of works by significant F&SF authors.

The LSF Book Discussion Group *generally* meets on the 4th Thursday of every month, starting at 7:00 PM, at Peter & Rob's home: 1425 "S" St., NW - for directions or more details, call 202-483-6369. The next meeting will be held on June 25th.

Here are the details on the next several discussion meetings:

June 25th - *A Companion to Wolves*, by Sarah Monette & Elizabeth Bear; moderator: TBA.

July 23rd - *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*, by Jane Austin & Seth Grahame-Smith; moderator: Rob.

Aug. 27th - *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, by Junot Diaz; moderator: TBA.

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Upcoming LSF Events

announced by Peter Knapp

June 13 (Saturday) Video/Gaming Party and DC Pride Parade



A casual get-together for gaming and watching videos, including a viewing of the annual Capital Pride Parade.

Time: Doors open at 2:00 PM; short LSF meeting begins at 2:30 PM; gaming/videos begin approx. 3:00 PM (with a break to watch the Pride Parade and get dinner). Party will end about Midnight or so.

Location: Rob and Peter's home: 1425 "S" Street NW, Washington, DC 20009-3819 (Directions at: <http://lambdasf.org/lsf/club/PeterRob.html>.) We'll walk down 14th Street NW to see the parade between "N" and "P" Streets NW.

What to Bring: (1) Bring science fiction, fantasy, and horror DVDs and videos to watch; (2) bring games to



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June 14 (Sunday) DC Capital Pride Festival

A street festival celebrating gay pride. LSF will staff a booth at the festival to promote LSF and Gaylaxicon 2009.

Time: 11:00 AM - 6:00 PM

Where: Pennsylvania Avenue, between 4th and 7th Streets NW, Washington, DC

For more information go to:

<http://www.capitalpride.org>

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June LSF Meeting (and Party!!)



The next LSF meeting will be held on the **Saturday, June 13th**, preceding the annual LSF Pre-Pride Video/Gaming Party. The meeting and party will be held at Peter-and-Rob's home (1425 "S" St., NW), near Dupont Circle. The business meeting will begin (as usual) at 2:30 PM; and the Video/Gaming Party will begin by 3:00 PM.

For details about the party, see the related article. See you there! Λ Ψ Φ

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Upcoming LSF Events

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June 13 (Saturday) Video/Gaming Party and DC Pride Parade

play; and (3) bring snacks and non-alcoholic drinks to share.

For more information, please send email to Peter at:

PeterKnapp@wavelengthsonline.com
or call Rob and Peter at 202-483-6369.

June 20 (Saturday) Post-Pride Video/Potluck Party



A science fiction/fantasy/horror video and potluck party. Bring DVDs and videos to view. We will watch the movies that receive the most votes.

Time: 3:30 PM - 11:30 PM

Where: The home of Julian, 2462 Tunlaw Road, NW, Washington, DC 20007-1839 (Directions at: <http://lambdasf.org/lsf/club/Julian.html>)

What to Bring: Bring science fiction, fantasy, and horror DVDs and videos to watch and snacks, dinner food, and/or non-alcoholic drinks to share.

For more information, please contact Peter at:

PeterKnapp@wavelengthsonline.com
or call him at 202-483-6369.

On the day of the party, call 202-306-1497.

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October 9 - 11, 2009

Location:

Doubletree Hotel Minneapolis-Park
Place (Minneapolis, MN)

<http://www.gaylaxicon2009.org>

Two Different LSF Views of *Star Trek* (the new movie)



Star Trek

a mini review
by Peter Knapp

Have you seen the book, *The Nitpicker's Guide for Classic Trekkers*? It's all about the contradictions and inconsistencies seen in *Star Trek*. I think it's a bit silly.

Franchises need to adapt and change in order to survive. The *Doctor Who* of 2009 is a very different show from the *Doctor Who* of 1963. It has to be. Otherwise, it'd be unwatchable. The essence of what makes *Doctor Who* special survives. I think the same is true with *Star Trek*.

When I watched Vulcan blow up, I thought by the end of the movie the great reset button would be hit. I'm really glad it wasn't. The biggest complaints I've heard about the movie are that it's straying from canon. So what? The last *Star Trek* TV series (*Enterprise*) was pretty bad. The last to *Next Generation* movies were sleepers. Something had to change. I personally think this movie shows a *Star Trek* in a slightly different universe from that of the *Star Trek* of old. I don't think that makes it less relevant. Just different. In some ways, the previous 40 years of *Star Trek* have been put to rest.

By the way, I loved the movie. By changing some of the canon, Paramount is free to go in new directions that are not restricted by the old series. The cast is good, the effects are top-notch (Industrial Light and Magic and Digital Domain, two of the best domestic effect houses, did a lot of the effects), and I really liked the music. *Star Trek* breathes new life into an anemic franchise; and hopefully it will satisfy both old Trekkers like me and non-fans alike. (By the way, *Star Trek* grossed \$79.2 million over its extended three-and-a-half-day debut, according to BoxOfficeGuru.com. That's a very promising sign!) Λ Ψ Φ



Star Trek:

A Contrarian Review

by Jim Williams

J.J. Abrams's long-awaited *Star Trek* reboot is finally in theaters and by all measures it is a huge success. But is it any good? *Star Trek* is, without doubt, a fun and entertaining film, a typical summer action flick. But is it good "*Star Trek*," or even a good film? My answer is no, it is not good *Star Trek*, nor is it a particularly good film. In what follows, I go into detail about why I don't like this new *Star Trek* very much and why I think it's a poor film. Plot details are discussed at length. You have been warned!

I have been looking forward to the new *Star Trek* film for over a year. I am a lofelong *Star Trek* fan. I can still remember seeing the very first episode broadcast in the Fall of 1966. I was nine, young enough that I still liked *Lost in Space* about as well as I liked *Star Trek*, but even then I could tell it was something special. I've seen nearly every episode of every series and all of the movies. I've also been following some of the fan-produced series, such as *Phase II* (nee *New Voyages*) and *Hidden Frontiers*. The point is, I feel like I'm pretty well qualified to comment on *Star Trek*.

I really wanted to love this movie. Clearly, *Trek* needed a reboot. The last film, *Nemesis*, was very disappointing, and *Star Trek: Enterprise* was good only in its final season. I was hoping that J.J. Abrams would bring some fresh blood and new ideas to *Trek*, while keeping true to the spirit of *Trek*. For me, that spirit includes an optimistic view of humanity and its future, embodied in entertaining stories that respect the audience. The new *Star Trek* feature did not deliver on that promise. Yes, it's entertaining, but for *Star Trek* that's not enough. The story needs to make sense, and that's where this movie fails.

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Star Trek: A Contrarian Review

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In what follows, I refer to the Classic *Trek* characters as the Prime characters. Leonard Nimoy is credited in the film as Spock Prime, so I'm following their lead here.



The Characters

I generally liked the new actors and their interpretations of the classic *Trek* characters. They had an impossible task, and for the most part they pulled it off. Zachary Quinto was a joy to watch as Spock, capturing enough of Nimoy's mannerisms to be familiar, but not so much as to be a caricature. Many have commented on his voice being not right, but Leonard Nimoy has a very distinctive voice and it was unlikely that any replacement could match it.

Chris Pine's Kirk was acceptable, given that his past is not the past of Kirk Prime. I was disappointed in the *Kobayashi Maru* scenes, where he comes off as a jerk when he should seem exceptionally clever. And I really did not like the way he opens fire on the *Narada* as it is being consumed in the final battle. Kirk Prime would not do that. He would try to rescue the survivors. Maybe this is supposed to be a post-9/11 Kirk. I don't like him as much as I liked Kirk Prime.

Karl Urban's Dr. McCoy has some fun moments, but it's not obvious that he'll have quite the same relationship to Kirk as he had in the original series. McCoy Prime often ended up as Kirk's conscience, helping him to find his moral compass. It's not clear this new McCoy will be playing that role, and that would be a shame.

Of the major characters, Scotty seems the most different from the Prime version. Simon Pegg's characterization is fine, and very funny, but not really much like Doohan's. And who or what was that "familiar" that followed him onto the *Enterprise*? Uhura is given more depth (and a first name!) but spends too much time pining over her new boyfriend. Speaking of which, the romance between Uhura and Spock works better than I would have guessed. Sadly, Chekov is still a clown, although Yelchin at least has an authentic Russian accent. Bruce Greenwood's Pike, practically the only adult in the film, is excellent.

Production Design

The film looks beautiful, and the effects work is first-rate. I didn't much like the new *Enterprise* from the stills I saw before seeing the movie, and I still don't think it's as good as it could be. I don't like the nacelles, and the secondary hull is too small. But in the film, in motion, it actually looks pretty good. The amount of detail in the model is amazing.

The *Enterprise* interiors are nice and shiny, except for that crazy stupid Engineering Section. What were they thinking? It is in such jarring contrast to the rest of the ship and so clearly out of place that it took me out of the story. The bridge took some getting used to as well, but that mostly had to do with the out-of-control lighting effects.

My favorite single effects shot is the *Enterprise* rising out of the atmosphere of Titan, with Saturn and its rings in the background. You can't actually see the rings like that from Titan (they would be edge-on and all but invisible), but I don't care. I want that shot for my desktop wallpaper.

I am really over shaky-cam cinematography. Really, really over it. What was once a new and innovative technique, meant to give the audience a sense of presence, is now just annoying and self-conscious.

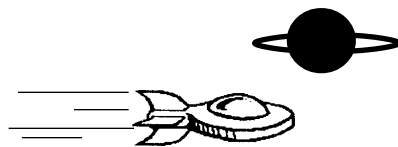


The Story

Here's where things get ugly. The story, by Roberto Orci and Alex Kurtzman, is by far the film's weakest element. Now, let me state right up front that I have read the prequel comic, *Countdown*, and I've read some discussions about scenes and subplots that were cut from the final film. Those sources do explain, more or less, some of the shortcomings and flaws in the storyline. However, that should not be necessary! When I put down my \$10 at the box office, I should in return get a complete, comprehensible story. If, later, I get to see a director's cut that adds some depth, or throws in a subplot that doesn't affect the main storyline, fine. But tell me a complete, consistent story while I'm in the theater, please.

There is a basic theme running through the story that is very deliberate and which is its greatest flaw. That is the theme of inescapable destiny. These characters were meant to be together, on the *Enterprise*. The "damage" to the timeline caused by Nero is insufficient to keep them apart, because it is where they were meant to be. It is their destiny. This isn't my idea; I'm paraphrasing the writers here! This is their explanation for why the *Enterprise* just happens to end up being built in Kirk's backyard (and not in orbit, as well all know it was). And why Kirk just happens to meet Captain Pike at just the right moment to set him on his path. And why Kirk just happens to be marooned on the same planet at Spock Prime (and a huge monster with poor hunting skills). And why they both just happen to be within walking distance of Scotty, who just happens to have the arbitrary bit of super science they need to keep the plot moving.

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Star Trek: A Contrarian Review

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What a bunch of metaphysical crap! This idea belongs in a fantasy, like *Lord of the Rings*, maybe, but not in *Star Trek*. In a proper science fiction story, mystical bull like this just comes across as bad writing. And the writers, Orci and Kurtzman, have the gall to claim that all of this is justified by quantum mechanics!

But absurd coincidences aside, the characters themselves don't make much sense. We are expected to believe that Kirk, whose entire life has been changed by Nero, will grow up to be the same superb starship captain he had been in the Prime Universe. The ultimate triumph of nature over nurture. But wait, nurture doesn't matter, because it's his destiny. He's a puppet to it, and nothing that he himself does matters. The Universe needs James T. Kirk, the one and only, as captain of the *Enterprise*; and it will bend logic, reason, and probability as necessary to achieve that goal.

Now let's move on to the villain, Nero. His basic motivation, his desire for revenge over the destruction of Romulus, makes no sense once he's traveled into the past. In the timeframe of the film, Romulus is still there! He could have taken the *Narada* (after his escape from Rura Penthe, as shown in deleted scenes) to Romulus, warned them about the Hobus super-duper-nova, and helped them build a fleet of *Naradas* with which to conquer the Federation. Is he so overcome with rage and grief that it simply never occurred to him?

And how did Nero know when Spock Prime would come through the time warp? How did he even know Spock Prime had survived the effort to destroy the Hobus super-duper-nova?

I have no reason to believe that Orci and Kurtzman analyzed their own story at this depth – or would even agree that such analysis is important.

The Science

From the beginning, Roddenberry wanted *Star Trek* to respect science. That's why he took so much time thinking about what a starship



might really be like, how it would be powered, how it would be laid out, etc. Yes, to get the story going, you make some assumptions that may seem at odds with current knowledge; but you should always strive to keep those to a minimum. The new film throws all that away, sinking to the level of the average summer blockbuster, like say *Armageddon* or *The Day After Tomorrow*.

The Hobus supernova, which starts the whole thing off, is a crock. Supernovas simply can't do what that one is shown to do. They could have come up with something better, such as a Gamma Ray Burst, as suggested by Phil Plait, of BadAstronomy.com. And a black hole is not a wormhole into the past or to anywhere. Yes, I know that they've been used that way in *Star Trek (V'GER)* and other stories; but that doesn't make it right. Black holes destroy things. Period.

In the original series, there was a planet called Delta Vega. It is the planet in "Where No Man Has Gone Before" where the *Enterprise* goes for spare parts after being damaged while attempting to leave the galaxy. They planned to maroon Gary Mitchell there, before he could finish turning into an Evil Superbeing. The Delta Vega in the present film, where Kirk hooks up with Spock Prime and Scotty, *can't* be that planet – so using that name is just pandering to the fans. The Delta Vega in the movie is so close to Vulcan that Spock Prime is able to see Vulcan implode from there. That's *very* close! It would have to be a moon or a sister planet of Vulcan. Neither of those explanations works. Vulcan has no moon, in

spire of an effects error in *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* (later fixed in the Director's Cut), which seemed to show a moon or sister planet in the Vulcan sky. If Delta Vega is a sister planet to Vulcan, why were there no Vulcans there?

Transwarp beaming? If the writers really expect us to believe that future Scotty Prime has invented a way to teleport people light years away, into a starship traveling at warp, then they truly have no respect for science, *Trek*, or the audience. Such an invention would obsolete starships! It's a *huge* leap in technological capability for the Federation. And it will be forgotten by the next movie, since it's only a plot device dreamed up by lazy writers. Earlier in the film, Chekov has trouble locking on to the falling Kirk and Sulu because they are moving too fast. Yet the *Enterprise* routinely beams up persons from the surface while in orbit, moving at orbital speeds far greater than that of a falling body. You just cannot, in the same story, have a teleporter technology that has trouble with falling heroes and then later show that same technology, McGyvered in minutes, beaming the heroes across the Galaxy!

Directing

Aside from J.J. Abrams's overfondness for lens flare and shaky-cam, I don't have much to say about his directing. I do think he seriously underplayed the destruction of Vulcan. The audience I was with was more upset by that than the characters in the film are. What should be a moment of awful tragedy, a moment where the young cadets need to become adults too soon, is over too fast. The destruction of Krypton in the 1978 *Superman*, with its hundreds of bodies falling helplessly into the abyss, is more effective.

The opening space battle between the *Kelvin* and the *Narada* is great, balancing the excitement of the battle with the pathos of George Kirk's sacrifice. To Abrams's credit, there are some very fine space scenes with little or no sound effects. Finally! Someone learned the lessons of *Firefly*. Space can be silent and exciting.

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Star Trek A Contrarian Review

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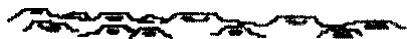
Implications

I was surprised that Spock Prime lived to the end. I expected him to die (again) helping to save the *Enterprise* (again). Having him survive raises interesting questions. Before he heads off to New Vulcan (Mintaka III, maybe?), will he send a memo to Federation HQ with sections entitled “Talos IV,” “Doomsday Machine,” “NOMAD,” “V’GER,” and “Borg”? How can he not? It wouldn’t be polluting the timeline, as it’s already wrecked. Spock can save billions with a word. Surely he will...

It’s preposterous that a bunch of inexperienced cadets can save the planet and, as a reward, get to keep the best starship in the fleet. Kirk, Spock, McCoy, Scotty, and the lot ended up on the original *Enterprise* because they *earned* it, through skill, talent, hard work, the wisdom of experience, and a little luck. In this film, fate hands the ship on a platter to a bunch of kids.

I understand why J.J. Abrams wanted a clean slate. He can now tell stories using the original series characters, but without feeling constrained by the existing *Star Trek* canon. Telling the origin story of how the *Enterprise* crew comes together is a good way to get off to a new start. Unfortunately, Abrams, or Paramount, decided they wanted a younger crew, which meant throwing logic, reason, and forty years of *Trek* history out the window. None of this was necessary. The divergence of the timelines could occur shortly before or after Kirk is given command of the *Enterprise* in the Prime universe. This would keep the basic personalities and backgrounds of the major characters intact, while still freeing up Abrams to tell new stories unencumbered by the know history of *Trek*. But Abrams wanted a younger crew; and as a result we’re left with NCC-90210. What could have been a great film is reduced to a transiently entertaining summer diversion. An opportunity has been squandered.

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River Rats (Magic Carpet Books, 1996) by Caroline Stevermer a short review by Carl

I’ve been a fan of Caroline Stevermer for some time now. I’ve enjoyed her various YA (young adult) fantasy novels: her Victorian/Edwardian fantasies (*A College of Magics*, *A Scholar of Magics*) and the Regency-style fantasies she co-authored with Patricia Wrede (*Sorcery and Cecelia*, *The Grand Tour*, and *The Mislaid Magician*). Then I ran across a YA science-fiction novel by Ms. Stevermer: *River Rats*. And what a distinguished novel it is, too. It won both the Golden Duck Award for Best Young Adult Science Fiction and the ALA (American Library Association) Best Book for Young Adults.

Stevermer’s *River Rats* is sort of a cross between Twain’s *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and Golding’s *Lord of the Flies*. It’s about fifteen years after “the Flash” (an unspecified nuclear or biological holocaust of some sort). The Mississippi River is toxic, but it’s also still a major communication and trade highway for what’s left of civilization between New Orleans and St. Louis. The *River Rat* is an old-but-sturdy paddle wheel steamboat – before the Flash it was maintained as a riverside museum; immediately after the Flash, it became an orphanage/school. Then, one day, in the face of an approaching megastorm, the school’s adult supervisors evacuate the *River Rat* for higher ground – but about a dozen very enterprising teenagers are left behind. Under the leadership of Toby and Esteban, the two oldest, they fire up the boilers and head forty miles upriver to rescue their home and avoid the worst of the gale. Thus begins the saga of “the River Rats” as they travel up and down the Mississippi.

In exchange for food, fuel and, supplies, the young crew of the *River Rat* delivers mail and other necessary items up and down the river, as well as providing impromptu riverside post-apocalyptic rock-and-roll concerts at various stops along the way. Toby is



Captain, and it’s up to her to enforce the rules, one of the most stringent of which is “No Passengers.” But the River Rats do eventually violate this rule, rescuing an old man who desperately jumps into the river to escape a pack of pursuing roughnecks – and, as the cynical old saying goes, “No good deed goes unpunished.” It seems that “Mr. King” (the old man) knows a secret that various folks are quite willing to kill for: the location of The Pharaoh’s Tomb, a hidden cache of pre-Flash technology, supplies, and riches stockpiled by a fabulously wealthy rock star, known as Pharaoh, just before the apocalypse. And now, believing that King has shared his secret with the River Rats, the same red-necks who were after Mr. King are now in pursuit of the *River Rat*.

Perils and dangers along the Mississippi, and a treasure hunt in a ruined city inhabited by feral Lost Boys – I found *River Rats* to be a very enjoyable and entertaining read.

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**Travel is fatal to
prejudice, bigotry, and
narrow-mindedness,
and many of our people
need it sorely
on these accounts.
Broad, wholesome,
charitable views
of men and things
cannot be acquired by
vegetating
in one little corner of the
earth all one’s lifetime.**

-- Innocents Abroad --

excerpted from
The Wit and Wisdom of Mark Twain,
edited by Aaron John Loeb
(Barnes & Noble Books, 1996)

****INFORMATION ABOUT LAMBDA SCI-FI: DC AREA GAYLAXIANS****

Lambda Sci-Fi: DC Area Gaylaxians (LSF) is an organization for gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgendered (GLBT) people, and their friends who are interested in science fiction, fantasy, horror and related genres in all forms (SF/F/H). LSF's primary goals are to have fun, to provide a community, and to:

- promote SF/F/H, with particular attention to materials of interest to GLBT people and their friends;
- provide forums for GLBT people and their friends to share their interest in SF/F/H;
- promote the presence of GLBT elements within SF/F/H and within fandom; and
- promote SF/F/H within the GLBT community.

Annual membership fees are \$10, for which you will receive an e-mailed this monthly newsletter and a membership directory. (Hard copies of the newsletter cost an additional \$15 per year.) Newsletter submissions are always welcome.

Meetings are usually held on the second Sunday of each month at a private residence. The next Lambda Sci-Fi meeting will be held on **Saturday, June 13th**, along with the Pre-Pride Day Video/Gaming Party, at Rob and Peter's home: 1425 "S" Street NW, Washington, DC 20009-3819, near Dupont Circle. The business meeting will begin at 2:30 PM; and the party will begin at about 3:00 PM. Please bring some munchies or soft drinks, if you can. Hope to see you there!

Lambda Sci-Fi: DC Area Gaylaxians is an affiliate of **the Gaylactic Network**, an international organization for gay people and their friends who are interested in science-fiction and fantasy.



Con Calendar

by Carl



July 10-12, 2009 **SHORE LEAVE 31**. Marriott's Hunt Valley Inn (Hunt Valley, MD). Guests: TBA. Membership: \$70 for the weekend; daily rates available. (Deadline for pre-registration: 6/15/2009.) Make checks payable to "Shore Leave" and send to: Shore Leave 31, PO Box 6809, Towson, MD 21285-6809.

E-mail: information@shore-leave.com

Website: <http://www.shore-leave.com>

October 9-11, 2009 **GAYLAXICON 2009**. Doubletree Hotel Minneapolis - Park Place (Minneapolis, MN). GoHs: Margaret Weis, Andy Mangels, Lawrence Schimel. Membership: \$70 until 10/01/2009; \$80 at the door. Make checks payable to "Gaylaxicon 2009" and send to: Gaylaxicon 2009, P.O. Box 2412, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55402

Website: www.gaylaxicon2009

Register on-line at: <http://www.gaylaxicon2009.org/index.php/registration>

October 16-18, 2009 **CAPCLAVE 2009**. Hilton Washington DC/Rockville (Rockville, MD). GoHs: Harry Turtledove (author), Sheila Williams (*Asimov's* editor). Membership: \$45 until July 1; \$55 from July 1 to Oct. 1; \$60 at the door. Make checks payable to "Capclave 2009" and send to: Capclave 2009 Registration, c/o Barry Newton, PO Box 53, Ashton, MD 20861

Website: www.capclave.org

November 20-22, 2009 **PHILCON 2009**. The Crowne Plaza Hotel (Cherry Hill, NJ). Principal Speaker: Catherine Asaro; Artist GoH: Frank Wu; Special Guest: L.A. Banks. Membership: \$50 until Aug. 31; \$55 from Sept. 1 to Oct. 31; \$60 at the door. "If you are able to, please use online registration, even if you're mailing in a check. Just select 'Other Payment Options,' then click on 'Pay by Check' when you've completed the form."

Website: <http://2009.philcon.org>

November 27-29, 2009 **DARKOVER GRAND COUNCIL MEETING XXXII**. The Crowne Plaza Baltimore (Timonium, MD). GoHs: Emma Bull and Will Shetterly; Special Guest: Katherine Kurtz; Musical GoH: Clam Chowder. Membership: \$45 until Nov. 1; \$50 thereafter and at the door. Make checks payable to "Armida Council" and send to: Armida Council, PO Box 7203, Silver Spring MD 20907

Website: <http://www.darkover.org>

