

PO Box 656, Washington, DC 20044 - (202) 232-3141 - Issue #117 - January 1900

E-MAIL: [info@lambdasf.org](mailto:info@lambdasf.org) WEBSITE: <http://www.lambdasf.org/>

### “What’s up with the LSF Book Discussion Group?”

Well, we’ve been at it for over a year now -- and *you* can join us! If you’re interested in lively discussions of F&SF books, with an emphasis on elements of interest to our les/bi/gay/transgendered community, then drop in on one of LSF’s monthly book discussions. Each month we conduct fascinating round-table discussions of another work by a significant F&SF author. Attendees also decide on the books and discussion facilitators for upcoming sessions.

The LSF Book Discussion Group usually meets on the 4<sup>th</sup> Thursday of every month, starting at 7:00 PM. The next meeting will be held on January 27<sup>th</sup>, at the home of Rob and Peter, 1425 “S” St., NW, Washington, DC (within walking distance of the “U” St./Cardozo [Green Line] or the Dupont Circle [Red Line] Metro Stations). For detailed directions, contact Rob at: [klaatu01@aol.com](mailto:klaatu01@aol.com)

Here are the books to be discussed at the next few meetings:

Thurs., Jan. 27 - *Maximum Light*, by Nancy Kress (facilitator: Keith W.)

Thurs., Feb. 24 - *The Golden Compass*, by Philip Pullman (facilitator: Carl)

Thurs., March 23 - *Dark Water’s Embrace*, by Stephen Leigh (facilitator: Rob)

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### Book Exchange at Jan. 9th LSF Meeting



As promised in last month’s newsletter, here’s a short reminder about Lambda Sci-Fi’s *tenth* annual book exchange, which will occur at the upcoming Jan. 9th [Y2K] meeting! All LSF members - and visitors, guests, attendees, etc. - are invited to participate in this “blind book exchange.”

In case you’ve never participated in one of these before (or in case you’ve forgotten), here’s how it works:

(1) Go out and purchase a copy of your “favorite” science fiction, fantasy, or horror book. (Over the years, LSF has expanded the concept of “book” to include comics, videotapes, “books on tape,” etc. If you want - or if you’re feeling particularly wealthy - you can even make it *several* favorite books or whatever.)

(2) Insert a piece of paper (or a bookmark) with your name on it. (That’s so whoever eventually ends up with the item will know who it’s from

and will get to know a little more about you -- at least to know what one of your “favorites” is.)

(3) Wrap up the exchange item, but don’t put any identifying marks or anything on the wrapped package to say who it’s from. (That’s to make sure it’s a “blind” exchange - *i.e.* no one is supposed to know who it’s from at first. And, by the way, all of that leftover Holiday wrapping paper should come in handy here!)

(4) At the meeting, add your wrapped exchange item to the pile with all the others; and you’ll be assigned a number. (Only one exchange item - *i.e.* one package - per person, please!)

(5) When your number is called, you pick one of the packages from the pile. (And when you open it up, you’ll find out who it’s from.)

See how easy? I can hardly wait to see what shows up *this* year!

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### Special "Pre-Meeting" Scheduled on Jan. 9th



A special **Lambda Sci-Fi Organizational Review Brunch is scheduled for Sunday, January 9<sup>th</sup>, beginning at 11:00 AM.** If you are interested in participating in the on-going discussion on the issues of Lambda Sci-Fi’s future structure and organization, you are encouraged to attend. The special meeting will be held at Peter & Rob’s home; and it will end in time for everyone to get over to James Crutchfield’s home in time for the regularly-scheduled January LSF business meeting (beginning at 1:30 PM). If you cannot attend this special meeting, feel free to send along your suggestions and thoughts to Nan and/or Rob. For directions to Peter & Rob’s, see the announcement for the LSF Book Discussion Group.

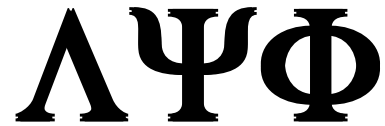
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### WHAT'S INSIDE?

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**The Eleventh-Hour Minutes  
of the December 1999 LSF Meeting**

by Rob



Yes, indeed, with the clock ticking quickly down on the millenium (according to many) and on life, the universe, and everything (according to others) the stalwarts of Lambda Sci-Fi gathered once more in 1999 to stir things up before the world ends.

On the business side of things we handled a number of issues. We quickly **voted to continue our relationship with the Gaylactic Network** - with Gaylaxicon 2000 on our agenda, this was a no-brainer decision. We also **elected a new Network Representative**. Though he has served well, Tim let us know that he did not wish to continue in the role. Three candidates originally stepped forward (or were put forward): Jack Frost, Jen Kuiper, and Kay Cornwell. After some discussion, Jack withdrew his name; and we sent Kay out of the room to talk about the remaining candidates. (Jen was not in attendance, otherwise she would have been sent out too.) Kay returned to the room with many inquiries about the raucous laughter that she had heard through the door in her absence. In a near-unanimous vote, perhaps encouraged by Carl's gleeful vision of turning her loose on the other Network Reps, Kay was elected as LSF's new Network Representative. There was much rejoicing. Kay also asked everyone to help out with Gaylaxicon publicity by letting her know if they were going to conventions or other events or if they belonged to other groups where publicity might be appropriate.

In our business meeting, we also **began our long-awaited Lambda Sci-Fi organizational discussions**. With a soon-to-be influx of money, ten years of success, and a new century to think about, there had been much talk about re-examining who we are and how we do things. The first part of that was to discuss the concept of "membership" as it relates to Lambda Sci-Fi. Everyone had an opportunity to have a say as we wrangled with this often nebulous issue. In general, it seemed that people wanted

to maintain an open-to-all and socially-focused membership structure, but that we also want to maintain a defined difference between those who support the club financially and those who don't. Many felt it particularly important to identify those who have made the personal/financial commitment to the group for purposes of determining how to make important decisions. Though no official language or changes were adopted, the consensus straw poll indicated that as part of our structural changes we need to implement a delineated two-tiered definition of membership. This consensus idea will be used as a foundation on which the overall structural review will be based. Indeed, to keep the structural review process moving without impinging on the fun aspects of our monthly meetings, Rob and Peter have offered their home **fr a pre-meeting Lambda Sci-Fi Organizational Review Brunch on Sunday, January 9<sup>th</sup>, beginning at 11:00 AM**. Anyone interested in continuing to look at the issues of structure and organization for Lambda Sci-Fi is encouraged to attend or, if you cannot attend, to send along your suggestions and thoughts to Nan and/or Rob. Directions to Rob and Peter's place can be found elsewhere in this newsletter (see the LSF Book Discussion Group article on page 1).

With the business discussions settled for the day, we moved on to the **social aspects** of our monthly meeting. A quick name circle was followed by the usual onslaught of chaos. Peter inquired about genre movies from 1999, as he and Rob were beginning to think about Hugo nominations. Carl passed around newsletters from other Gaylaxian chapters, while Kay and Michael regaled us with TV, movie, DVD, and other media news. Tim talked about weird new comics toys that are hitting the market and also mentioned impending Scooby Doo action figures. Kay and Nan talked about their experiences at Philcon, particularly their discovery of a simple

and addictive new collectible game called Button Men. Rumors that Kay has already collected all the Button Men are possibly exaggerated. Kay and Nan also invited people to join them at Evecon, one of DC's local conventions; it focuses mostly on gaming.

Peter and Rob reported a big thumbs-up for *Toy Story 2*, which remarkably, may have lived up to its "better than the original" hype. Of particular note in the film were the theme of "family is what you create, not what you're born with" and a marvelous spoof of *Star Wars*. In addition to the movie itself, among the trailers was a spectacular preview for an completely CG-animated film called *Dinosaurs* - set to open in May, 2000. In other movie news, recommended films included *Dogma* and *Being John Malkovich*.

In **book news**, keep your eyes out for a Pern encyclopedia from Anne McCaffery's son Todd. Also, upcoming in 2000 will be a space opera from Tanya Huff (April, 2000). And in gaming news, Tim reported on the release of the newly revamped DC Heroes Role Playing Game. Apparently the system has been cleaned up, and it's the first new superhero game on the market in quite some time.

In club news and **upcoming events**, Rob reminded everyone about the impending End of the World New Year's Eve Video Party on December 31<sup>st</sup>, the Tenth Annual Book Exchange at our January meeting, and the January session for the Book Discussion Group (*Maximum Light*, by Nancy Kress, on January 27<sup>th</sup>). Rob also gave a quick **treasury report**: the club has about \$900 after current and expected expenses between now and January's meeting. In an effort to make sure that number rose back over \$1000, Carl then proceeded to auction off seven hand-knitted scarves made by his Mom. **The "Carl's Mom Collection"** netted another \$171 for the club, insuring financial solvency for time to come!

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## Writers on Writing

by Carl Cipra

[Author's note: This article has been sitting on the back burner for about a year now; but I recently decided it was high time to dust it off, polish it up, and put it into print.]



Like everyone else, I'm pretty sure you have some favorite authors - authors whose works you admire and delight in reading, whose works you're virtually guaranteed to pick up as soon as you see them. Me too. Imagine my delight then, about a year ago, when I ran across, at right about the same time, books by *three* favorite authors of mine. And, moreover, these weren't just books *by* these three authors - they were books in which these three favorite authors had written *about* writing! What a find! What a wonderful coincidence! Not only was this a chance to again read their oh-so-well-written words; I was given the delectable opportunity of reading what all three of them *think* about the act/craft/art of writing itself! Yowsah!

Now that I've read - and enjoyed! - these three books, I figure it's about time I let all you aspiring (and perspiring!) writers out there know about them. (But please don't think these books are merely of interest to *writers* - I think *anyone* can get a kick out of peeking into the minds of these three very talented people! I did!) The three books I'm bubbling about are:

- *The How to Write a Book Book*, by Robert F. Mager (The Center for Effective Performance, 1991; \$17.95).
- *Steering the Craft*, by Ursula K. LeGuin (The Eighth Mountain Press, 1998; \$14.95).
- *Conceiving the Heavens*, by Melissa Scott (Heinemann, 1997; \$16.95).

There's a certain logic in discussing them in that order - as you'll

see - so that's how I'll structure this article.

### *The How to Write a Book Book* by Robert F. Mager

Robert *who*? OK, so Mager might not be a household word where you come from; but he's certainly well-known in the educational community. In fact, he's one of those "names to conjure by". In my guise as a Government trainer, I've read all his books - *Analyzing Performance Problems*, *Developing Attitude Toward Learning*, *Making Instruction Work* (to name but a few). OK, stop yawning! Mager's books really are little gems. Each one is a no-nonsense, down-to-earth, deceptively simple discussion of some aspect of effective training - *and* (admittedly, an exception in the field of training literature) they're all enjoyable and well-written! Mager is one of those rarities: an acknowledged expert who doesn't bore you to death or try to impress you with his erudition.

Thus, I was really jazzed to see that he's also written a book about *how to write* a book. Of the three books discussed in this article, Mager's is the most general, the most *generic* - it deals with the "simple" act of getting your book written. What book? *Any* book! Although, as a member of the training community, Mager's tacit assumption seems to be that the folks reading this book are interested in writing non-fiction, how-to, or instructional materials, the same general principles would seem to apply no matter *what* you're planning on writing. Primarily, the aim of *The How to Write a Book Book* is to help you get the darn thing written in the first place. Its purpose is nicely summed up in a couple of sentences in Mager's introductory essay: "If you have collected one or more 'reasons' for not writing the book you have wanted to write, or need to write, or know you *should* write, read on. Though the pages that follow won't teach you the mechanics of writing, they



will show you how to skewer the excuses, leap 'round the obstacles, and find joy in the very act of writing."

And, as in all Mager's books, you'll be walked through the process in an enjoyable, no-nonsense, *common* sense, humorous-yet-informative manner.

### *Steering the Craft* by Ursula K. LeGuin

Surely you've heard of *her*! You know: *A Wizard of Earthsea*, *The Left Hand of Darkness*, *The Lathe of Heaven* - yes, *that* LeGuin! Are you interested to see what *she* has to say about writing?

This book is rather more specific than Mager's book - LeGuin

(continued on page 4)

**If it were advertised that a troupe of men of easy virtue were to do a striptease act upon a public stage, the only women who would go to the entertainment would be a few delayed adolescents, a psychopathic old maid or two, and a guard of indignant members of the parish Ladies Aid Society.**

**-- H.L. Mencken --  
from  
*In Defense of Women*  
(1922)**



[Ed. Note: Well, wise old curmudgeon that he was, I guess that even Mencken couldn't be right *all* the time! But, of course, he didn't mention what type of *men* would attend such a performance, did he? Count *me* in, H.L.! Just tell me if I should stand next to the other "delayed adolescents" or alongside my fellow "psychopathic old maids".]

### **A Hidden Weapon of Aggression**

America stands as the citadel of freedom in a world beset by war. German Nazism, Italian Fascism, Japanese Militarism have launched an open brutal attack against us. We see, and our armed services are feeling, the power of their weapons. But there is one sinister, unseen force at work for them inside our own borders.

### **Barometer Warning**

The record of the last 2,000 years of history has provided us with one unmistakable storm warning when human rights are in danger--a campaign against minorities. This has happened so repeatedly that it is high time we profited by the experience.

Persecution of any one group is a danger signal. If it is allowed to continue, it is only a question of time until the civil rights and liberties of everyone will be lost.

### **America's Self-Interest**

The whole of America is definitely concerned with stopping the use of prejudices as a means of creating disunity. Whether the source of the propaganda is foreign or domestic, the result is always the same.

Under the smoke screen of group hatred, unscrupulous elements attain objectives destructive to our common interests.

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excerpted from a pamphlet I found in a used bookstore:

*Footprints of the Trojan Horse: Some methods used  
by Foreign Agents within the United States*

published by

Citizenship Educational Service, copyright 1942

“this special edition printed and distributed by The

Bayer Company, Inc., makers of Bayer Aspirin”

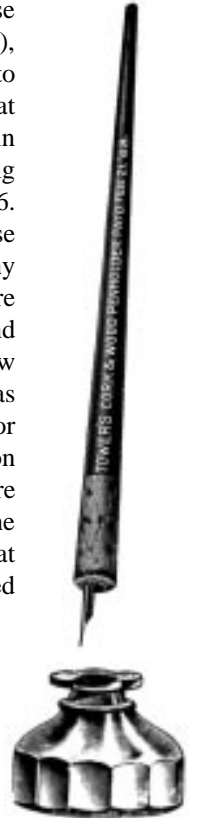
[Gee! I wonder if Mr. Falwell, the Religious Right, and various other intolerant Arch-Conservatives/Reactionaries know about this highly subversive and inflammatory pamphlet. It certainly shows *their* anti-gay campaigns in a less-than-favorable light - as well as uncomfortably pointing out similarities between them and some well-known historical baddies!]

deals with the basic elements of writing narrative prose (either fiction or non-fiction), rather than just trying to motivate you into getting that book written at all. LeGuin based this book on a writing workshop she gave in 1996. (“I offered the course because I’d been meeting a good many workshop writers who were afraid of semicolons and didn’t know a Point of View from a Scenic Vista. It was supposed to be a workshop for people who needed to work on their navigational skills before they took the boat across the Pacific.”) And she turned that workshop into “a self-guided set of discussion topics and exercises for a writer, or a small group of writers, interested in the craft of narrative prose.” Each topic deals with some aspect of writing narrative: the “sound” of language;

how a story is told; how a point of view; how to impart information within the narrative; and even such basic elements as punctuation, syntax, “rules” of grammar, etc. Each topic is linked with an exercise designed to give practice working with - and spark thought about - the information in those topics, followed by suggestions on critiquing and/or discussing the results of the exercise. And the book is *filled* with examples from the most amazing sources (most of them non-F&SF): Gertrude Stein, Rudyard Kipling, Mark Twain, Jane Austin, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Virginia Woolf, Dickens, Tolkien, Thomas Hardy, Charlotte Brontë. (I must admit, the examples she cites were often my first experience of actually reading something by some of these writers.)

*Steering the Craft* is a book on writing by a talented writer who is

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## Writers on Writing

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genuinely interested in encouraging other writers and in helping them develop their skills. And (need I add?) it's a delight to read, too!



### *Conceiving the Heavens*

by Melissa Scott

This book is my "most favorite" of the three - and it's actually the first of the three that I'd read. It's also the most specific, in that Ms. Scott concentrates on (as per the book's subtitle) *Creating the Science Fiction Novel*.

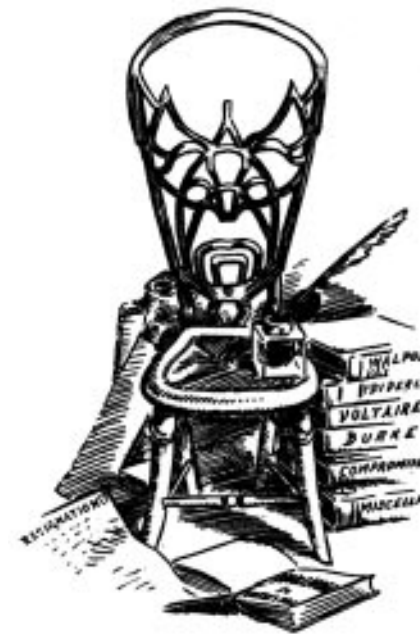
*Conceiving the Heavens* gives the reader a widely-based, well-considered, even-handed discussion of the topic of writing SF. Scott deals with subject in a "soup to nuts" manner, including discussions on virtually all aspects and facets of the subject: world-building; researching; writing a series vs. writing a stand-alone novel; writing short fiction vs. writing novels; the various sub-genres within SF; submitting manuscripts; getting an agent; etc.; etc.; etc. Only occasionally do her personal preferences and prejudices as a writer become obvious. For example, she begins her discussion of writing "series SF" neutrally enough ("the series format is subtly different from a stand-alone novel, and requires different goals and choices"). Eventually, however, she gets to "the final problem with series writing"; and although she does discuss some "solutions" to the problems she enumerates, she never gets around to highlighting any possible "advantages" to series SF. Her training as an historian is very apparent in her discussions of "Social Settings" and "Language and Setting."

Throughout the book, Scott emphasizes that SF writers should *write*

well, not simply write *SF* well. As LeGuin does in her book, Scott includes plenty of advice and examples from outside the genre. A few of the works she cites are: Louis Catron's *Writing, Producing, and Selling Your Play*; Reeves Gabrels' article "Fishing with Architecture" from *Guitar for the Practicing Musician*; Larry Beinhart's *How to Write a Mystery*; Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*; and many, many more. But (unlike LeGuin) she also includes a *wide* range of illustrative examples from the F&SF field (including many of her own works). Occasionally, Ms. Scott even waxes philosophic, as in her "writing matters" discussion on page 140.

When I started reading the book, I was particularly interested to see how Scott would go about quantifying, categorizing, and/or listing (all right-brain activities) how to write *creatively* (what I'd consider an essentially left-brain activity). She even addresses this apparent contradiction herself: "Cultivating serendipity" may seem to be a contradiction - how can you plan to look for something that by definition must be found by accident? - but it's the best way I've found to describe an otherwise nebulous process." Basically, she guides aspiring writers into the realm of creative intelligence via "play", in one form or another. The book includes quite a number of "mind games" and exercises that will allow someone to "play around with" various concepts and ideas. (There's even one she calls "Rob Gates's and Michael Cornett's Title Exercise"! Yep, two LSFers get billing in the book! Ask 'em about it!) Scott pretty much seems to be advocating, in a real-world context, a concept she explores in *Dreaming Metal*, one of her recent novels: intelligence as the result of "play" rather than as the result of science/logic.

Now, I haven't exactly read *tons* of books on the subject of writing fiction; but *Conceiving the Heavens* seems to break new ground by bridging the gap between what I'd call "old-style writing" (doing it longhand or on the typewriter; file folders full of news-



clippings; etc.) and "new-style writing" (via computer and the Net; references to media tie-ins and RPGs; etc.). Scott shows how the profession of writing has been brought into the Computer Age, particularly in the chapter entitled "Research" (researching/browsing the Web; going to computer discussion groups or Internet newsgroups; etc.). This shouldn't come as any surprise, however. When you examine the themes and subject matter of her last half-dozen or so novels, I think you'll see how natural it should be to expect her to emphasize the benefits of modern technology to the profession of writing SF.

All three books in this article are terrific; and I recommend them all. But, frankly, if your budget is (shall we say) "constrained" and you figure you can only afford one of them, then Melissa Scott's *Conceiving the Heavens* is the one to go for.

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In creating,  
the only hard thing's  
to begin.

-- James Russell Lowell --

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

Lambda Sci-Fi is a Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Horror fan club for Gay people and their friends. Annual membership fees are \$20, for which you will receive this monthly newsletter and a membership directory. Newsletter submissions are always welcome.

Meetings are generally held on the second Sunday of each month at a private residence. The next Lambda Sci-Fi meeting will be held Sunday, January 9th, at James Crutchfield's apartment: 1414 17th St., NW, Apt. 413 (near DuPont Circle) - 1:30 PM for business meeting; 2:00 PM for social meeting. 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.

The Gaylactic Network has the following primary goals:

- to promote science-fiction, fantasy, horror and other related genres in all forms, with particular attention to materials of interest to gay males, lesbians, and bisexuals.
- to provide forums for gay males, lesbians, bisexuals and their friends to share their interest in science-fiction, fantasy, horror and other related genres.
- to promote the presence of gay male, lesbian and bisexual elements within science-fiction, fantasy, horror and other related genres and within fandom.
- to promote science-fiction, fantasy, horror and other related genres within the gay male, lesbian and bisexual communities.



## Con Calendar

by Carl, Peter, Rob and James



April 21-23, 2000 **BALTICON 34**. Baltimore Omni Inner Harbor Hotel (Baltimore). GoH: Octavia Butler; Artist GoH: Wendy Pini; Editor GoH: Richard Pini. Membership: \$40 from 1/1 to 3/31/2000; \$45 at the door. Hotel rate: \$114/night + tax (sgl - quad). Make checks payable to "Baltimore Science Fiction Society" and send to: Balticon 34, PO Box 686, Baltimore, MD 21203-0686.

E-mail: [bsfs@balticon.org](mailto:bsfs@balticon.org)

Web: <http://www.balticon.org>

May 26-29, 2000 **COSTUMECON 18**. Sheraton Hartford (Hartford, Conn.). The 18th annual volunteer-run convention for costumers and all who love costumes. Membership \$70 thru 4/23/2000; \$80 thereafter & at the door. Make checks payable to "CostumeCon 18" and send to: CostumeCon 18, 11 Winter St., Amesbury, MA 01913-1515. For more information:

e-mail: [info@cc2000.org](mailto:info@cc2000.org)

website: [www.cc2000.org](http://www.cc2000.org)

June 30 - July 2, 2000 **ANTHROCON 2000**. Hilton Valley Forge Hotel (251 DeKalb Pike, King of Prussia, PA). The East Coast's largest Anthropomorphics Convention. For hotel reservations: 610-337-1200, or 800-TRY-VFPA. Membership: \$30 thru 2/1/00; \$35 thru 6/15/00. Make checks payable to "Anthrocon, Inc." and send to: Anthrocon, Inc., PO Box 270, Devault, PA 19432-0270.

Aug. 31 - Sept. 4, 2000 **CHICON 2000 (the 58th World Science Fiction Convention)**. Hyatt Regency & environs (Chicago). GoH: Ben Bova; Artist GoH: Bob Eggleton; Editor GoH: Jim Baen. Membership (as of 10/1/99): \$150 (& going up?). Make checks payable to "Chicon 2000" and send to: Chicon 2000, PO Box 642057, Chicago, IL 60664. E-mail: [chi2000@chicon.org](mailto:chi2000@chicon.org) Web site: [www.chicon.org](http://www.chicon.org)

Oct. 6-9, 2000 **GAYLAXICON 2000**. Arlington Hilton & Towers (Arlington, VA). GoH: Fiona Patton; Artist GoH: Nan Fredman. Membership: \$45 from 1/1 - 9/8/2000; \$55 at the door. Hotel rate: \$99/night (sgl/dbl), +\$20 for each add'l guest. Make checks payable to "Gaylaxicon 2000" and send to: Gaylaxicon 2000, PO Box 1862, Annandale, VA 22003-9862. Web: <http://www.lambdasf.org/g2k>

