



lambda Sci-fi

DC Area Gaylaxians

(202) 232-3141 – Issue # 368 – November 2020

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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 round-table discussions of works by significant F&SF authors.

Before the COVID-19 shut-down orders, the LSF Book Discussion Group usually met 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. Now, book discussions are held virtually (same "4th Thursday" schedule). The next book discussion will be held on December 3rd (via Zoom).

Here are the details for the next several discussions:

Dec. 3 (combined Nov/Dec discussion) – *The Affair of the Mysterious Letter* by Alexis Hall (moderator: Carl).

Jan. 28, 2021 – *Circe* by Madeline Miller (moderator: Konrad).

Feb. 25, 2021 – *The Glass Hotel* by Emily St. John Mandel (moderator: Zena).

March 25, 2021 – *Enter the Aardvark* by Jessica Anthony (mod: Konrad). $\Lambda\Psi\Phi$

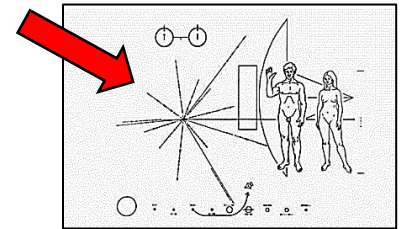


Updated Map on How to Locate Earth

info passed along by Carl
(from an article in the October 2020 issue of *National Geographic*)

I'm pretty sure you've seen it. Back in December 1971, NASA agreed to Carl Sagan's idea to include a "greeting from humanity" aboard the Pioneer 10 spacecraft, which (after its historic Jupiter fly-by) would become the first human-made object destined to leave the Solar System. Sagan contacted his friend and fellow astronomer Frank Drake to help him design the "greeting". They accomplished this in time for it to be loaded aboard for Pioneer 10's 1972 flight. (See image above right.) It was also loaded into Pioneer 11 for its 1973 Saturn fly-by, after which it too would eventually exit the Solar System. In 1977, the "greeting" was also etched into the cover of the "golden record" that was carried into space in both Voyager 1 and Voyager 2. (Yes, as in "V-ger" from *Star Trek: The Motion Picture*.)

The "greeting" included a map that would allow an advanced alien race to locate Earth in the less-than-likely event that said aliens actually came across one of our tiny (and inactive) spacecraft. (The "map" is that weird asterisk-like diagram indicated by the red arrow above). At the center of the asterisk is Earth; and each of



the "arms" connects Earth to a pulsar. The hatchmarks on the arms are binary numbers that indicate each pulsar's rotation rate, while the lengths of the arms are roughly proportional to distance.

Unfortunately, the Sagan-Drake map has an "expiration date". Pulsars slow down over time; and the pulsars that Drake chose for the map (from the few known at the time) will fade and disappear within several million years.

Now, Drake's daughter Nadia and her husband Scott Ransome (a pulsar astronomer) have devised an update. Instead of more "ordinary" pulsars, the new map relies on "millisecond" pulsars – they spin faster, last longer, and are accompanied by dead orbital companions. The orbital period of these binary systems won't change over billions of years – leaving more time for intelligent aliens to run across one of the maps. Unfortunately, there are no plans for any Voyager-like projects anytime soon – but the updated map is ready to go. $\Lambda\Psi\Phi$

<< November 2020 LSF Meeting TO BE HELD VIRTUALLY >

Due to Coronavirus concerns, we plan to hold the November 8th LSF meeting virtually. Anyone who would like to participate can contact Rob for virtual meeting information at robatesdc@gmail.com. Hope to "see" you there!



What's Inside?

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Minutes of the October LSF Meeting

taken by Scott
(conducted via Zoom)

Ben was wearing a T-shirt featuring Rictor and Shattershot (from the X-men).

Television News: Carl likes the current season of *Fargo*, which is full of quirky characters. The new season of *Star Trek: Discovery* starts this week; meanwhile, CBS (regular TV station) has been airing Season One of the series. Rob is less than thrilled over *Star Trek: Lower Decks*. Consensus seems to be that *The Boys* is too cynical and that *The Umbrella Academy* is much more enjoyable. Teresa is enjoying *Lovecraft Country* and *Raised by Wolves*. HBO has announced a new *Green Lantern* series, which will feature the gay retcon version of Alan Scott (the Green Lantern of Earth-2). Rob said that a new animated *Star Trek* series is coming to Nickelodeon – *Star Trek: Prodigy* will feature the voice of Kate Mulgrew (formerly Captain Janeway). (“*Prodigy* follows a group of teenagers who use an abandoned starship to search for adventure.”) There was an extensive discussion about *The Good Place* – clearly, a popular series! Ron is watching *Monsterland*, a horror anthology on Hulu. Season 2 of *The Mandalorian* is coming soon to Disney Plus. Wayne has just finished watching *Dark*, a German TV series – Rob says he’s going to give it a try. There was some discussion of the Amazon Prime four-episode British series *The City and the City*, a police procedural with genre elements. (It was noted that the LSF book discussion group has read the novel upon which it’s based, authored by China Mieville.)

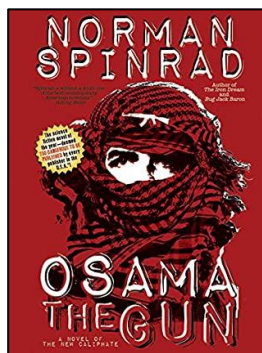
Movie News: The release of *No Time to Die*, the new “James Bond” movie, has now been delayed until Spring 2021. Will *Wonder Woman 1984* open via streaming? It’s not likely to open in December 2020 (the previous release announcement). *New Mutants* will be available via video-on-demand in November. It seems that Dr. Strange might appear in the upcoming third *Spiderman* movie.

Book News: Carl described a new anthology, *And the Last Trump Shall*

Islam on the Rise

book reviews by Carl

One of the traditional roles of science fiction has been to answer the question “What if?” SF authors often use that question to explore the current socio-political situation: “Here is the way things are,” they say. “But what might happen if I make *this* change?” And their answers help to tell us more about ourselves by showing us what *might* have been or what *might* happen. Since the events of 9/11, one ripe area for SF speculation has been that of exploring the relationship between the West and Islam.



Osama the Gun by Norman Spinrad
(Wildside Press, 2016)

Leave it to Norman Spinrad to tackle a controversial topic head-on. He’s been writing SF for over 50 years now and has sometimes had trouble finding publishers for his works. Two of his novels – *Bug Jack Barron* (1969) and *The Iron Dream* (1972) – were even banned for a while (one in Britain, the other in Germany). Reactions to Spinrad’s works by fellow SF authors have been all over the map: from “depraved, cynical, utterly re-

Sound; it contains three connected novellas by James Morrow, Harry Turtledove, and Cat Rambo that take place in a dystopian USA during a Pence presidency following a disastrous and prolonged Trump presidency. (Speculative fiction, not horror?) Teresa is currently reading *The Rook*. The next two LSF book discussions will feature: *The Night Circus* by Erin Morgenstern (October) and *The Affair of the Mysterious Letter* by Alexis Hall (combined Nov/Dec).

As a special treat, Ben committed to bringing a home-made cake to the next *in-person* LSF book discussion. Yum!

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pulsive” (Donald Wolheim) to “delightfully bonkers” (Thomas Disch) to “extraordinary” (Ursula Le Guin). I think Isaac Asimov said it best when he noted that Spinrad “constantly displays the courage to be different.”

Thus, it’s no surprise to me that *Osama the Gun* has had “mixed” responses. Spinrad couldn’t find an American publisher for it in 2007; he ended up self-publishing an e-book. It fell to Wildside Press to finally publish it in 2016. “Why all the fuss?” you ask. Well, let’s see...

Says Spinrad: “I wanted the reader to hate the sin, but love the sinner, because I felt it had to be done, and since no one else seemed to be willing to do it, I had to try to do it myself, come what may. Because Islam was being confused with its radical Middle Eastern *jihadhists*, and Arabs in general with terrorists, and it seemed to me that the alien *jihadhists* consciousness had to be experienced from within and empathetically understood. Which was why *Osama the Gun* had to be written, and why, as one foaming at the mouth rejection letter predicted, no American publisher would touch this book.”

Osama the Gun is set in an unspecified near-future time when the “Sons” of Osama (yes, as in “bin Laden”) have seized power in Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. Using Pakistani nuclear weapons and Saudi oil money, they have established a powerful new Islamic Caliphate. The (unnamed) first-person narrator of the novel is a young man growing up in that Caliphate. He’s naïve, sincere, and idealistic; and he wants to become a secret agent of the Caliphate so that he can escape its restrictive society and see the world. He’s eventually sent to Africa as part of a mercenary unit fighting against an American-backed invasion into oil-rich Nigeria; and it’s there that, due to various circumstances, he reluctantly becomes “Osama the Gun”, a hero of the Caliphate and an internationally-notorious terrorist.

It’s a fascinating story – with a number of parallels to the biographies of Che Guevara and Malcolm X. Oddly enough, part of Spinrad’s novel reminded me of the 1939 MGM comedy

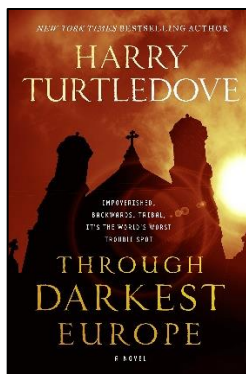
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Islam on the Rise

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Ninotchka (starring Greta Garbo in the title role). Both Osama and Ninotchka spend time in France, where they meet fellow members of the local terrorist (or, in the case of Ninotchka, Soviet) organization who seem less interested in furthering the ends of their political masters than they are in sampling “the good life” in Paris.

As with so many of Norman Spinrad’s other novels, I quite enjoyed *Osama the Gun*. The novel’s ending certainly came as a surprise. Once again, leave it to Spinrad!



Through Darkest Europe by Harry Turtledove

(Tor/Tom Doherty Associates, 2018)

Harry Turtledove is an acknowledged master of alternate history SF; and I’m a big fan.

Unlike many alternate histories, *Through Darkest Europe* doesn’t rely on warfare (“the Nazis won WW2”) or major political events (“Lincoln survived the assassination attempt”) as its branching-off point. The premise of *Through Darkest Europe* is based on a religious-philosophical shift. What if Saint Thomas Aquinas (1225 – 1274) and the Muslim philosopher al-Ghazali (1058 – 1111) had reversed their conclusions on the relationship between faith and science? What if Aquinas – in his massive *Summa Theologica* – convincingly declared that scientific study corrupted faith in God’s omnipotence and omniscience? And what if al-Ghazali – in his greatest work, *The Revival of the Science of Religion* – had convinced the Muslim world that “Muhammad and Aristotle can be reconciled”? (This is, of course, exactly the opposite of what hap-

pened in our timeline.) As a result, reason and science continued to advance in the Islamic world, while Christendom stagnated for centuries.

Fast-forward to modern times... (No dates are ever mentioned in the novel, but it’s clearly meant to be a contemporary 20th/21st Century setting.) Senior Investigator Khalid al-Zarzisi and his Jewish assistant, Investigator Dawud ibn Musa, have been sent to Rome by the Sultanate of Tunis at the request of Cosimo III, Grand Duke of Italy. Khalid and Dawud are to serve as security consultants for both the Grand Duke and for His Holiness, Marcellus IX, in the face of a rising tide of radical Christian terrorism against the progressive Italian government and the moderate Holy See. The Tunisian government fears that the untimely deaths of the Grand Duke and the Pope could result in massive political and social instability that could easily slop over into neighboring Islamic countries. Radical Christians are already bandying the archaic word “crusade” around; and the death of Marcellus IX, for example, would almost surely lead to the election of a more radical Aquinist as Pope.

As the third-person narrator, Khalid serves as the reader’s guide through the European socio-religious situation. As an example, Khalid notes to himself: “Christians still kept reacting to what their more inventive, more creative neighbors did. They lost war after war. They lost chunks of land and bigger chunks of pride. Now still in the name of religion, they were looking for new ways to hit back...”

Within days of Khalid and Dawud being introduced to the Grand Duke and the Pope, Cosimo III is killed by a terrorist bomb at a celebratory banquet in his own palace; and a terrorist attack at his funeral services in the Roman Pantheon wounds or kills several royal European visitors. Grand Duke Lorenzo (Cosimo’s son) pretty much declares war on the Christian extremists: “All members of the so-called Aquinist Order who do not renounce their vows at once are subject to arrest and imprisonment and interrogation. Resistance will be punished by death without trial.”

And there’s ample evidence that other European extremist groups are already sneaking “Crusaders” across the Alps to support their radical Italian bro-

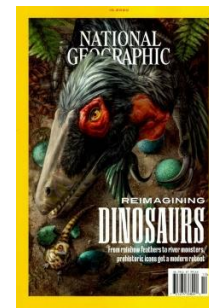
thers. Amidst all the rising tensions, Khalid and Dawud are finding their assignment very difficult indeed!

By “turning the tables”, Turtledove affords his readers a fascinating and perhaps clearer picture of the complexity and confusion of the Middle East situation in our own timeline. But don’t expect *Through Darkest Europe* to offer any easy solution to it all.

I certainly found Turtledove’s novel to be a sobering read.

(series to be continued)

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National Geographic Dinosaurs info passed along by Carl

If – like me! – you’re a big fan of “dinosaur stuff”, then I highly recommend getting your hands on a copy of the October 2020 issue of *National Geographic*. The featured article (cover story) is titled “Reimagining Dinosaurs: From rainbow feathers to river monsters, prehistoric icons get a modern reboot”.

The article provides a fascinating summary of all the latest discoveries: from the latest theories on the probable riverine lifestyle of the gigantic predator Spinosaurus to the latest discoveries on the color of dinosaur eggs and the distribution of feathers among non-theropod dinosaurs. The article discusses how the application of modern science – from CT scanners to chemical analysis, from computer simulations to particle accelerators – have led to fascinating (and often surprising) discoveries in the field of paleontology. There are sections on such topics as “How They Moved”, “How They Hatched”, “How They Grew”, “How They Looked”, and “How They Socialized”. As is always the case with *National Geographic*, the article (authored by Michael Greshko) is filled with stunning photographs (Paolo Verzone), paintings (Davide Bonadonna), and illustrations (Gabriel Ugueto). A treat for the eyes as well as the mind!

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

Lambda Sci-Fi: DC Area Gaylaxians (LSF) is an organization for gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, and trans-gendered (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 copy of this monthly newsletter and a membership directory. Newsletter submissions are always welcome.

Meetings are usually held on the second Sunday of each month at a private residence. Due to Coronavirus concerns, the Lambda Sci-Fi meeting for Sunday, Nov. 8th, will be held virtually. We'll keep you informed of the status of future meetings.

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 (with help from Bob Angell)

Nov. 27-29, 2020 **CHESSIECON 2020**. "Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Chessiecon 2020 will be online only. The Lord Baltimore Hotel has been postponing room reservations to November 2021. Official announcement forthcoming. Do you have a Discord account? We have an official Chessiecon server where you can keep up with friends, ask questions, and get announcements straight from the staff! Contact videogames@chessiecon.org for the invite link!"

Website: <http://chessiecon.org/> Info at: info@chessiecon.org

Dec. 11-13, 2020 **AWESOME CON** (delayed from May 2020). Walter E. Washington Convention Center (Washington, DC). Guests include: Mario Lopez, Mark-Paul Gosselaar, & Elizabeth Berkley (*Saved by the Bell*); Ron Perlman (*Hellboy*). Includes "Pride Alley, a celebration of queer creators and fans curated by GeeksOUT." Membership: 3-day passes = \$80; 1-day passes = \$40-\$55 (depending on the day). Various selected "add-ons". Limited tickets – on-line purchase advised via their Tickets Page.

Website: <https://awesome-con.com/>

April 16-18, 2021 **RAVENCON 15**. Virginia Crossings Tapestry Collection by Hilton (Glen Allen, VA – just north of Richmond). Guests of Honor: Terry Brooks (Author), Rhiannon's Lark (Music). Membership: \$35 before 12/31/2020; \$40 before 3/27/2021; \$50 at the door.

Website: <https://www.ravencon.com/>

July 9-11, 2021 **SHORE LEAVE 42** (rescheduled from July 2020). Delta Hotels Marriott Baltimore Hunt Valley (Hunt Valley MD). Actor GoH: Denis Lawson (*Star Wars* "Wedge Antilles"); Brandon Routh (Superman & The Atom); Robert Duncan McNeill (Lt. Tom Paris); Brent Spiner (Data); Alex Kingston (River Song). Membership: \$105 for the weekend (\$120 at the door); daily rates available. Printable registration forms & on-line registration available through the Registration Page.

Website: <https://www.shore-leave.com/info/update-2020-04-25.htm>



**From the
Addams Family
to the
LSF Family:**

**Happy
Thanksgiving!**