



lambda Sci-fi

DC Area Gaylaxians

(202) 232-3141 – Issue # 371 – February 2021

E-MAIL: info@lambdascifi.org

WEBSITE: www.lambdascifi.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 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 February 25 (via Zoom).

Here are the details for the next several discussions:

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

March 25, 2021 – *Enter the Aardvark* by Jessica Anthony (mod: Konrad).

April 22, 2021 – *They Both Die at the End*, by Adam Silvera (mod: Ben/Rob?).

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Happy
Year of the Ox
to everyone at
Lambda Sci-Fi

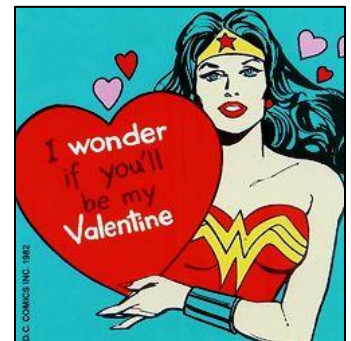


ConFABulous YouTube Videos

info passed along by
Don Kaiser and Carl

Back on Oct. 10, 2020, North Country Gaylaxians hosted a one-day virtual ConFABulous. Don Kaiser, the con chair, has shared a link to YouTube recordings of the event. There's a really cool short introductory music video and recordings of six discussion panels. Use the following link to check 'em out:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCnOg0p8NZYbCELhAHcoYNBg>



<< February 2021 LSF Meeting TO BE HELD VIRTUALLY >>

Due to Coronavirus concerns, we plan to hold the February 14th LSF meeting virtually. Anyone who would like to participate can contact Rob for virtual meeting information at robgatesdc@gmail.com. Hope to "see" you there!



What's Inside?

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Dancing Robots from Boston Dynamics info passed along by Carl



Back in the October 2019 issue of the newsletter, I first passed along information about the incredible robots developed by Boston Dynamics. The article included links to videos of “Atlas” demonstrating amazing gymnastic skills based on a combination of multi-part agility and complex programming. Now, the robots are back and displaying even more impressive moves!

On December 29th, Boston Dynamics posted a video of its robots – Atlas (humanoid), Spot (dog-like), and Handle (wheeled) – dancing to the classic Contours hit song “Do You Love Me”. The video description says: “Our whole crew got together to celebrate the start of what we hope will be a happier year: Happy New Year from all of us at Boston Dynamics.” Very impressive moves, says I.

When not demonstrating their ability to perform complex dance moves, these robots can also climb rough terrain, navigate through complex obstacle courses, help doctors, and remind humans to maintain social distancing in public parks. In previous videos, Atlas demonstrated its ability to perform jumps, twists, somersaults, and handstands. Handle is best known for its ability to load boxes (weighing up to 30 pounds) onto pallets in warehouses. Spot has shown that it can open doors, herd sheep, and carry heavy loads.

The new video is certainly entertaining, but it also demonstrates their incredible capabilities. (And, incidentally, the programming behind all those moves must be mind-boggling!) Here’s a link to the 3-minute YouTube video:

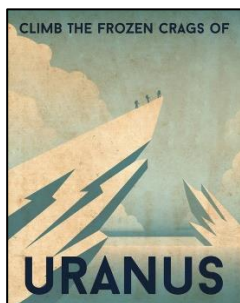
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fn3KWM1kuAw&feature=youtu.be>

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Minutes of the January LSF Meeting taken by Scott

The meeting kicked off with a lively discussion about H.P. Lovecraft’s extreme racist positions that appear in many of his stories (for example: “The Horror at Red Hook”). He was exceptionally racist in comparison to the “regular-old racism” of Edgar Rice Burroughs. Did you know that Lovecraft maintained a correspondence relationship with Robert E. Howard, author of the “Conan” titles?

There was a sidebar discussion on the proper pronunciation of “Uranus”.



Rob reminded everyone about the LSF book discussion on Thursday (Jan. 28); the discussion will center on *Circe* by Madeline Miller.

TV News

New CW genre shows: *Trickster* (from Canada); *Batwoman* with a new actor playing the superhero; *Riverdale*; *Nancy Drew*; *Legacies*; *Charmed* (returns); *Black Lightning*; *Superman and Lois* (new show); no premiere date for *Supergirl*. On Disney Plus: *WandaVision*, *Falcon and the Winter Soldier*, *Loki*. (In the comics, Loki has been both genders.) On Starz: *American Gods* returns tonight – note that Bilquis is a character whose vagina eats people; and Marilyn Manson, Blythe Danner, and Julia Sweeney will have guest appearances in Season 3. Amazon’s *Expanses* Season 5 is much better than Season 4. The latest season of *The Mandalorian* just ended. On SyFy: Alan Tudyk stars in the new series *Resident Alien*, in which he plays a doctor in small-town Colorado – and is an actual alien. The DC streaming service is gone; and the media content has moved over to HBO Max.

Star Trek: Discovery just completed Season 3. Rumor has it that in the next season other characters may be able

to see the character Gray in addition to Adira. David admires Admiral Vance actor Oded Fehr. Rob commented on the return of capitalism in the *Discovery* future, at least as presented by Osira. Wayne described the BBC’s *The Watch*, based upon Terry Pratchett’s “Disc-World” books; Pratchett’s daughter disavows the movie. Wayne likes the *Star Trek Continues* series. Peter did not care for the latest *Dr. Who Christmas Special*. (The next companion has been identified.)

Film News

Peter liked *The Dead Don’t Die*, with Tilda Swinson as an alien. He also spoke unenthusiastically about *Midnight Sky*, with George Clooney. Peter and Rob enjoyed *Wonder Woman 84* and loved Pixar’s *Soul*. Bob liked that all of the souls in *Soul* were the same. Jim W. liked Netflix’s *Jingle Jangle* (steampunk with magic). Bob watched *Wandering Earth* but felt the continuity was weak; Jim said that the visuals were stunning. Netflix was developing a movie version of *The Three Body Problem*; but news reports indicate there has been a suspected murder attempt on one of the executive directors. The next “James Bond” film might get pushed back from April 2020. *Black Widow* is slated for release in May.

David likes the actor Kristoffer Polaha, who was identified in the credits of *WW84* as “Handsome Man.” It was noted that one scene inside the Metrorail station showed a Metro map that included the Silver Line, which did not exist in 1984. *Wonder Woman* movie #3 will occur in the current time period.

Jim reminisced about the 1970 film *Colossus: The Forbin Project*. He is not eager to watch *Matrix IV*. Peter enthusiastically promoted the documentary *Chesley Bonestell: A Brush With the Future*.

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Saturn Viewed from Titan
by Chesley Bonestell

2020 Genre Mini Movie Reviews

by Peter Knapp

This was a strange year for movies. I saw two in movie theaters (before the COVID-19 shut-downs) and the rest on TV streaming services, either because they were intended for streaming services or the pandemic forced the studios to release them via streaming services.



My absolute favorite movie of the year was Pixar's *Soul*, the story that follows a middle school music teacher who accidentally dies just before his big break as a jazz musician. He refuses to go to the afterlife and ends up in the "before-life," an amazing place of discovery run by soul counselors—all named Jerry—who prepare unborn souls for life on Earth. The movie ponders the meaning of life, what spark drives people, and what is a person's purpose. It's probably the most adult Pixar movie I've ever seen. The animation in the "before-life" is just stunning and reminds me of a mashup of Alexander Calder wire sculptures and Picasso paintings. Jazz also plays a huge role in the movie. The combination of great story telling, beautiful visuals, and a great soundtrack make this movie a must see!

Here are the movies I saw and my reactions.

GREAT

Soul – A+ (See above.)

FUN

Birds of Prey – DC did a great job making a fun, oh-so-politically-in-correct superhero movie.

Onward – Pixar again yanked on my heart strings as two teen-age elf brothers try to spend one more day with their dead dad. (The dead dad is funny, not gross.)

Wonder Woman 1984 – DC did a great job making a fun, oh-so-80's superhero movie.



OKAY

Bill and Ted Face the Music – Dude, what's the point of a third chapter of Bill and Ted stumbling through life? Their wives plucked from the Middle Ages were more interesting.

Mulan – This live-action version was not a musical and had no Mushu. ☹ Unlike the original animated version, where Mulan struggled to become a warrior, the live-action Mulan was a closeted superhero who was guided by a witch throughout the movie on how to defeat the villain. Yawn.

New Mutants – It was better than I thought it was going to be. The lesbian love story was nice, but the movie paled against the source comic book series I read as a kid.

The Midnight Sky – Why release such a pessimistic movie on Christmas Eve? I had trouble empathizing with the characters, and the story was very predictable.

FORGETTABLE

Artemis Fowl – Rob had to remind me that I watched this movie earlier this year. It left that little of an impression on me.

Bloodshot – With Marvel churning out great superhero movies in the MCU, Vin Diesel didn't stand a chance in this corny comic book adaptation.

Tenet – Christopher Nolan is one of my favorite directors, but he failed me in this muddled mess of a movie that spent too much time being "clever." When a scientist explaining "time inversion" tells the protagonist not to think about the way "time inversion" works, I knew the movie wasn't going to make sense.

Underwater – A predictable underwater-base-under-siege-from-a-monster movie.

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Arecibo Telescope Collapse info passed along by Carl

On December 1, 2020, the Arecibo Observatory suffered a catastrophic structural collapse; and the receiver platform crashed down into the reflector dish, collapsing the telescope. The observatory's radio telescope, LIDAR facility, and visitor's center are all expected to remain operational, following an assessment of the damage caused by the main telescope's collapse.

Arecibo Observatory – aka the National Astronomy and Ionosphere Center (NAIC) is located in Arecibo, Puerto Rico, and is owned by the US National Science Foundation (NSF). The structure was completed in 1963 and was (for about half a century) the world's largest single-aperture telescope.

The observatory's main instrument was its large radio telescope, a 1,000-foot circular concave reflector dish built into a natural karst sinkhole, with a cable-mounted steerable receiver and several radar transmitters for emitting signals mounted almost 500 feet above the dish.

Two cable breaks – one in August 2020 and the second in November 2020 – threatened the structural integrity of the support structure for the suspended receiver platform and damaged the dish. For safety reasons, the NSF determined that it would be safer to decommission the telescope rather than try to repair it. Before a controlled demolition could be carried out, the remaining support cables from one tower failed on December 1st and caused the receiver platform to fall into the dish.

If you're a James Bond fan, you have seen the *simulated* destruction of the Arecibo Observatory in the film *GoldenEye* (1995, starring Pierce Brosnan as James Bond). There are a number of Internet sites where you can watch the *actual* collapse (based on footage captured by observatory security cameras). Here are a couple of them:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ssHkMWcGat4>

<https://www.cnn.com/videos/travel/2020/12/03/arecibo-puerto-rico-telescope-collapse-orig-dp.cnn/video/playlists/top-news-videos/>

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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, February 14th, 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

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: \$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>

Mass Market Best Sellers

info passed along by Wayne #1

The American Booksellers Association reports that the Top Ten Mass Market Best Sellers for the week ending 12-13-2020 were:

1. *Dune* by Frank Herbert (1965)
2. *1984* by George Orwell (1949)
3. *The Way of Kings* by Brandon Sanderson (2010)
4. *The Name of the Wind* by Patrick Rothfuss (2007)
5. *Good Omens* by Neil Gaiman & Terry Pratchett (1990)
6. *Dune Messiah* by Frank Herbert (1969)
7. *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* by Alex Haley & Malcolm X (1964)
8. *Animal Farm* by George Orwell (1945)
9. *Still Life* by Louise Penny (2005)
10. *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* by Douglas Adams (1979)

It's interesting to note that eight of the ten titles are works of F&SF; and all of them were first published a decade or more ago.

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Great Conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn

info passed along by Carl

Back on Dec. 21, 2020, Jupiter and Saturn engaged in their "great conjunction" – they were separated by just 6 arc minutes in the Southwest sky after sunset. This conjunction is closer than usual – usually when they line up, Jupiter and Saturn are separated by about 1 degree of arc (10 times further apart).

Jupiter takes nearly 12 years to complete a full trip around the sun, and Saturn takes 29.5 years to do it – so the "great conjunction" only takes place once in a great while. The last time they appeared so close together in the sky was on July 16, 1623 – when they were separated by 5 arc minutes, but not visible in temperate latitudes because of their close proximity to the glare of the Sun and low altitude above the horizon. The last time most the world's population had a favorable view of Jupiter and Saturn coming so close to each other was on March 5, 1226 (just 2 arc minutes apart).

Some have suggested that the "Christmas star" (Star of Bethlehem) was

based on a series of Jupiter-Saturn conjunctions in 7 BC. In that year Jupiter and Saturn "met" three times: in May, September, and December. The May 29 conjunction could have started the Magi on their way from the Far East. The September 30 conjunction could have confirmed their decision to keep on going. And the third conjunction (December 5) could have occurred when they arrived in Judea to meet with King Herod, who sent them on to Bethlehem.

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Picture of the "Christmas star" taken in South Africa on Dec. 21, 2020