



Lambda Sci-Fi

DC Area Gaylaxians

(202) 232-3141 – Issue # 380 – November 2021

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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. *Until at least February 2022, book discussions will continue to be held virtually (same "4th Thursday" schedule).* The next book discussion will be a combined Nov/Dec event, held on December 2nd [via Zoom](#).

Here are the details for the next several discussions:

Dec. 2 (combined Nov/Dec discussion) – *Finder*, by Suzanne Palmer (moderators: Bob A & Carl).

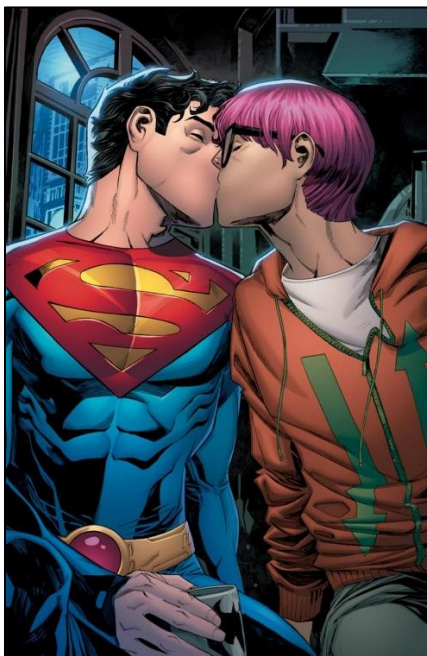
Jan. 27, 2022 – *Far Out: Recent Queer Science Fiction & Fantasy*, anthology edited by Paula Guran (moderator: Carl)

Feb. 24, 2022 – *A Memory Called Empire*, by Arkady Martine (moderator: Judy).

March 24, 2022 – *Architects of Memory*, by Karen Osborne (moderator: Bob A)

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Superman's Son = Bisexual info passed along by Carl



There's a new Superman in town! And he's apparently bisexual!

Superman: Son of Kal-El is the name of the new DC series. It takes place in mainstream continuity – it's not an alternate-universe storyline. Jon Kent is the son of Kal-El (Clark Kent) and Lois Lane. In this series, Kal-El is starting to feel his age and is "passing the cape" on to his son

Jon. The first four issues are already available; and Issue #5 is coming out on Nov. 9th

And they do mean "coming out"! In Issue #5, Jon Kent is getting mentally and physically burned out as he tries to save everyone he can. And who's there to care for Jon? It's Jay Nakamura, a young reporter; and Jon and Jay become romantically involved. (Hmmm. Those men in the El family seem to have a thing for reporters.)

The story is authored by Tom Taylor and illustrated by John Timms. The main cover for Issue #5 is by Timms, with two variant covers by Inhyuk Lee and the team of Travis Moore/Tamra Bonvillain.

Tom Taylor says: "I've always said everyone needs heroes and everyone deserves to see themselves in their heroes and I'm very grateful DC and Warner Bros. share this idea." And Jim Lee (DC publisher) says: "We talk a lot about the power of the DC Multiverse in our storytelling and this is another incredible example. We can have Jon Kent exploring his identity in the comics as well as Jon Kent learning the secrets of his family on TV on *Superman & Lois*. They coexist in their own worlds and times, and our fans get to enjoy both simultaneously."

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> November 2021 LSF Meeting TO BE HELD VIRTUALLY <

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



What's Inside?

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Rambling Notes from the Oct. 2021 Social Gathering

by Rob

Our intrepid Secretary and note-taker Scott had been called away on a secret mission involving alien vampires and a black market tribble ring, so I graciously offered to take notes for the newsletter.

First up: TV Talk. *What If...* has wrapped its first season which indeed saw what at first appeared to be a collection of disconnected episodes turn into a single story arc all along. David noted that there was one additional episode that they did not quite complete and (which will appear in Season 2) which involves the Gamora variant we saw in the finale.

Archer has also wrapped its current season (its twelfth). They did a fitting send-off for Malory (voiced by the wonderful Jessica Walter...may she RIP). This got us talking about TV shows replacing actors (*Bewitched*, *Roseanne*, *Dynasty*), which we decided (while possible) can cause fannish uproar if the actor or character is iconic enough.

There was brief mention of *Star Wars Visions*, which has had a decent first episode (a Samurai Western style) – and then a bewildering episode about a rock band (“this episode might have been a bad idea” was uttered).

Other current shows getting mentions were: *Q-Force* on Netflix, which most folks in attendance who’ve seen it said they enjoyed; the new *Spiderman and His Amazing Friends* (on Disney+) with big “moral lesson of the week” vibes; *Squid Games* on Netflix, which none of us got the popularity of; *La Brea* (on NBC), which seems to be *Land of the Lost* for adults; *Star Trek Lower Decks*, which had a great finale involving Klingons; *Foundation* (Apple+), which no one had an opinion on (I’ve since seen episode 1 and it’s visually fabulous, but did not do well in the pacing/story department); and *Doom Patrol* (HBOMax), which continues to be weird. We also hit a blast from the past with a brief detour into talking about *Blake’s 7* – an old 1970s era BBC sci-fi series that had the traditional cheesy sets and costumes and which became an influential cult classic.

Upcoming TV stuff was also a

topic. A trailer for the final season of *The Expanse* (Amazon Prime) is out, as well as a trailer for the next Disney+ MCU series, *Hawkeye*. HBOMax is working on a *Peacemaker* series as well. We also talked about the upcoming season of *Doctor Who*; some have heard rumors that the chameleon circuit of the TARDIS will get fixed so the TARDIS can become something other than a police box, and people wondered if the show is headed toward another ending for the series as a whole.

On the movie front, we talked about the recent success of theatrical releases like *Shang Chi: Legend of the Ten Rings*, *No Time To Die*, and *Venom: Let There Be Carnage* – signaling that theatrical releases are clearly not dead – though a quick glance at box office numbers makes you wonder whether non-“event” movies are viable, as those movies are seeing average per-screen numbers well under \$1000 per weekend. Upcoming big-screen-oriented films include: *Dune*, which opens later in October; *The Eternals*, which opens in November; and *Spiderman: No Way Home*, which opens in December. We also had mentions of a couple of movies coming out in 2022: the new *Ghostbusters* and *The Flash*.

Speaking of box office resurgence, we wondered whether the theatrical success of *Shang Chi* helped to force Disney’s hand to settle the Scarlett Johansson lawsuit about the release shenanigans Disney did with *Black Widow* and its effect on her cut of box office.

A few odds and ends also got mentioned/discussed: Shatner going into space; the queer content in the new Bond film (where it is made clear that the current Q is queer); a fascinating alternate history book about Amelia Earhart written by Harry Turtledove; and an interesting discussion about one of the lesser-known vampire mythology ways to fight vampires: throw a handful of rice or similar so the vampire will stop to count. (And here you thought The Count on *Sesame Street* was just silly. Instead, he’s relying on some deeper vampire myth cuts!)

Last but not least – upcoming events. Book discussions are scheduled through March 2022, with all of them through February 2022 happening virtually. (We’ll decide in February about March and beyond.) Regular second Sunday so-

Venus Probes

info passed along by Carl

On June 2nd, Bill Nelson, NASA’s new administrator, announced two new robotic missions to Venus during his first major address to employees. “These two sister missions both aim to understand how Venus became an inferno-like world capable of melting lead at the surface.” These missions will be launched between 2028 and 2030 to study the atmosphere and geologic history of Earth’s closest planetary neighbor.

NASA has awarded about \$500 million for development of each of these two missions, as part of the Agency’s Discovery Program. These missions beat out two other proposed projects: one to Jupiter’s moon Io and the other to Neptune’s moon Triton.

The missions are called DAVINCI+ (Atmosphere Venus Investigation of Noble Gases, Chemistry, and Imaging) and VERITAS (Venus Emissivity, Radio Science, InSAR, Topography, and Spectroscopy).

DAVINCI+ will measure the composition of the Venusian atmosphere, with the goal of improving understanding of how it evolved and whether Venus ever had an ocean and was possibly habitable at some point. It will launch a small craft through the Venusian atmosphere to measure the gases. It is also expected to return the first high-resolution images of the Venusian “tesserae” (unique geological features that might be comparable to Earth’s continents and suggest that Venus experiences plate tectonics).

VERITAS will map the planet’s rocky surface to determine its geologic history and possibly explain why Venus developed so differently from Earth.

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cial gatherings like this one are virtual through the end of this year. We’ll decide in December whether we’ll be back in person in January. Finally, Karl is looking into scheduling an outing to go see *Dune*, so watch for an announcement on Facebook and/or our e-mail list!

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Short Bursts of Alternate History

two reviews by Carl

What If... Book of Alternative History
(Future Publishing Limited, 2021)



Future Publishing is a British company that produces “bookazines” (pictorial single-issue magazines) on a variety of subjects. I own a number of their “All About History” bookazines, such as *Aztecs*, *Ottoman Empire*, and *Folklore, Fairy Tales & Monsters*. One of their latest 2021 titles is *What If...Book of Alternative History*.

This bookazine examines the concept of “alternate” (*i.e.* alternate) history in 41 short articles written by (or from interviews with) various historians, scholars, and academics. Each article is from two to four pages long, is illustrated in full-color (with a few black-and-white graphics here and there), and includes a forked timeline to show the divergence between the “real timeline” and the “alternate timeline” being discussed. The alternate history scenarios examined in each article are considered separately – in other words, they don’t build on each other to form one long, continuous alternate timeline.

The 41 scenarios include a fairly standard range of “what if” possibilities. Here are a few of them: “What if Queen Elizabeth I had married?” “What if Abraham Lincoln hadn’t been assassinated?” “What if Napoleon had won the Battle of Waterloo?” “What if the Cuban Missile Crisis had escalated?” “What if Rome never fell?” “What if the Nazis had never gained power?” And so on. On the other hand, some of the articles discuss unexpected alternatives. For example:

“What if Attila the Hun had survived his wedding night?” “What if China had discovered America first?” “What if the Beatles never formed?” “What if John Wayne had joined with George Wallace?”

Based on some of the comments recorded in the articles or interviews, I got the distinct impression that some of the historians, scholars, and academics didn’t view some of the “what if” scenarios as viable causes for substantive changes to the real timeline. Their comments sometimes included such phrases as “highly unlikely” and “not very probable.” (However, nobody comes right out and says: “Are you kidding me? Who thought *this* one up?”)

The final section of this bookazine is entitled “Fiction’s Greatest Alt-history Timelines.” It includes short reviews of 13 works that they consider “some of the finest examples of alt-history.” Their list includes some of my favorites: *The Difference Engine* by William Gibson and Bruce Sterling (1990), *Resurrection Day* by Brendan DuBois (1999), *Fatherland* by Robert Harris (1992), and *Lion’s Blood* by Steven Barnes (2002). The first title on their list was a book I’d never heard of: *If It Happened Otherwise* edited by JC Squire (1931). It includes alternate history essays by such famous literary figures as Winston Churchill, Hilaire Belloc, GK Chesterton, Emil Ludwig, and Andre Maurois. It sounds fascinating and (according to Amazon.com) costs a small fortune to purchase a copy thereof. Ah well...

On the whole, I quite enjoyed *What If...Book of Alternative History*. If you’re as big a fan of alternate history as I am, you might want to pick up a copy.

Or Even Eagle Flew
by Harry Turtledove
(Prince of Cats Literary Prod’ns, 2021)

I’m a big fan of Harry Turtledove’s alternate history stories; but I haven’t read a new one in several years. Recently I ran across *Or Even Eagle Flew* while wandering around in Amazon.com and immediately ordered it. Based upon my previous experiences with Turtledove’s works, I found *Or Even Eagle Flew* to be a bit of a departure. Sure, I’ve read a few Turtledove short stories from time to time, but most of my enjoyment has been from his heavy-duty one-shot novels (such

as *Joe Steele*, 2015) or his massive 11-volume alternate American history series: starting with *How Few Remain* (1997) and concluding with *In at the Death* (2007). In contrast, *Or Even Eagle Flew* is a really short novel (novelette? novella?), clocking in at a modest 168 pages.



Or Even Eagle Flew is the story of Amelia Earhart’s adventures as a pilot during WWII, from the fall of France until just before D-Day. Yes, that’s right... Amelia Earhart participates as an American volunteer in the RAF during the Battle of Britain! The novel’s “point of departure” from our timeline is, of course, that Earhart *completes* her 1937 around-the-world flight. Instead of mysteriously disappearing somewhere in the central Pacific, she and navigator Fred Noonan manage to reach their stopover landing strip on Howland Island (an uninhabited coral island halfway between Hawaii and Australia) and subsequently complete the flight.

Now, it’s May 1940; and 42-year-old AE (as she’s known) wants to fly in combat against the Nazis. Unfortunately, the US of A is firmly and officially neutral; and it’s illegal for Americans to participate in the European war. So she crosses the border into Canada and illegally travels to France to join the American volunteers in the French air force. Unfortunately, France soon falls and AE and her fellow American pilots are forced to flee to Britain. There they enlist in the so-called Eagle Squadrons, RAF squadrons filled by American volunteers prior to the US entering the war in December 1941. (This is similar to the Americans who joined the Lincoln Brigade in 1936-1938 to fight against Franco’s Nazi-backed forces in the Spanish Civil War – or the Americans

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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-generated (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, November 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

Nov. 19-21, 2021 **PHILCON 2021**. Crown Plaza Hotel (Cherry Hill NJ) – hotel registration: www.hotel.philcon.org (please reserve by Nov. 5). “We will require all attendees to show proof of vaccination and to wear a mask.” Principal Speaker: Fran Wilde; Musical Guest: Sara Henya. Adult membership = \$55 until 11/14/2021

Website: www.philcon.org

Purchase memberships on-line at: www.membership.philcon.org

Dec. 15-19, 2021 **WORLD SCIENCE FICTION CONVENTION (DisCon III)**. Omni Shoreham Hotel (Washington DC) – hotel information: <https://discon3.org/location/accommodations> Incorporating virtual and on-site/face-to-face programming. “We are committed to having a masking and health policy which complies with local legal requirements and CDC recommendations. As the situation is still fluid, we will be updating you with our requirements to be in-person as we get closer to December.” Author GoH: Nancy Kress; Artist GoH: John Harris. Adult attending membership = \$275; virtual membership (to access on-line programming) = \$90.

Website: <https://discon3.org/> Purchase memberships on-line at: <https://discon3.org/membership/membership-information/>

April 29 – May 1, 2022 **RAVENCON 15**. Virginia Crossings Hotel & Conference Center (Richmond VA). GoH: Terry Brooks; Music GoH: Rhiannon's Lark. Membership: \$35 before 12/31/2021; \$40 before 4/5/2022; \$50 at the door; day badges available. On-line registration at: <https://ravencon.com/store/Registration-c23522469> Webpage: <https://ravencon.com>

Alternate History

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who joined the Flying Tigers to defend China against the Japanese starting in April 1941.)

However, don't expect a strategic “big picture” description of the aerial defense of Great Britain. The story is told from very much a “pilot's-eye” point-of-view. As a simple combat pilot, Earhart isn't privy to high-level information, including such secrets as “radar”. And through AE's eyes, you'll read about individual combat sorties, as well as the day-to-day trials and tribulations of combat pilots. And you'll also read about the difficult personal experiences of women pilots in both America and Britain. (Hint: It's only AE's fame that allows her to push and finagle her way into the Eagle

Squadrons.) The storyline follows AE's experiences in WWII until soon after America's entry into the war after Pearl Harbor. Along the way, she meets various real-life historical folks who actually participated (and sometimes died) during the Battle of Britain.

One of the pilots she meets is fellow American volunteer John G. Magee. Odds are good you haven't heard of him; but you just might have heard of his poem “High Flight”, which he wrote just before being killed in action in 1941.



AE

In fact, the title of Turtle dove's novel is taken from the final line of Magee's poem:

*I've topped the wind-swept heights with
easy grace
Where never lark or even eagle flew –
And, while with silent lifting mind I've
trod
The high untrespassed sanctity of space,
Put out my hand, and touched the face of
God.*

As with so many of Turtle dove's works, I found *Or Even Eagle Flew* to be a satisfying (and even educational) read.

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