



Lambda Sci-Fi

DC Area Gaylaxians



Light From Uncommon Stars
By Ryka Aoki
Discussed July 2022

Characters

- Katrina Nguyen - Violinist
- Shizuka Satomi – Teacher (The Queen of Hell)
- Lan Tran – Donut Lady, plum colored Starship Captain
- Shirley, Edwin, Windee, Markus, Aunty Floresta – Lan’s family/crew
- Astrid – Caretaker
- Lucia Matia – Luthier
- Tremon Philippe – Demon

Discussion Questions

1. Did you finish the book?
2. Did you enjoy the book overall? Why or why not?
3. What was your emotional response to the book?
4. Aoki mixes a lot of genres in the book with the inclusion of pure science fiction elements (alien civilizations, starships, stargates); magical/supernatural elements (demons, the trading of souls); and very mundane elements (food, family, the experience of refugees and immigrant cultures on Earth). How well did that mixing work for you? What genre would you call this book?
5. In many ways a central theme of the story is “seeking out a place of safety” (whether that place be a physical location, or a social place). In what ways did we see this theme played out?
6. Shizuka in particular is portrayed in ways that seem at odds in the book. She is the self-styled Queen of Hell and we see her do some very dark things (she condemns souls to Hell, kills the luthier who belittles Katrina, and burns down the house of the emcee who misgenders Katrina), but at the same time she provides Katrina with the first loving, caring home she’s ever had and shows a sweet romantic side with Lan. What did you think of the duality of Shizuka...and did you find other examples of characters that had sides that seemed at odds?

7. While clearly being an uplifting, positive book – there are elements of the book that do not speak kindly of the queer community (see: how Katrina is treated by Evan and his roommates – and how aimless and self-centered they are presented to be). Did the negative portrayal of these queer characters bother you? Why or why not.

8. What did you think of Katrina as a character? Did reading her story provide you with any insights into the struggles that many trans youth go through?

9. Why do you think Aoki included the character of Astrid? From a storytelling perspective, what role did she play? How would a woman such as Astrid come to work for someone like Shizuka?

10. Food plays a significant role throughout the story...donuts, the descriptions of cuisines, the experience of eating, Olive Garden, and so much more.....why do you think Aoki used food as such a foundational element in the story?

11. Even secondary characters – Lucy Matia, Ellen Seidel, and more – are the central characters at points in the story. Do their stories inform the stories of the three core characters (Katrina, Shizuka, Lan) or are their stories their own?

12. Was the happy ending “earned” by the story?

13. Would you read more works by Ryka Aoki?