



# Lambda Sci-Fi

## DC Area Gaylaxians

(202) 232-3141 – Issue # 404 – November 2023

E-MAIL: [info@lambdascifi.org](mailto:info@lambdascifi.org)

WEBSITE: [www.lambdascifi.org](http://www.lambdascifi.org)

### New Images of the Ring Nebula by the James Webb Space Telescope

info passed along by Carl



#### Views of Ring Nebula

Left: Hubble Telescope (October 2013)

Right: James Webb Space Telescope (August 2023)

NASA reports that images of the Ring Nebula from the James Webb Space Telescope have revealed unexpected details of a dying star's final stages. Webb's Mid-Infrared Instrument has provided the clearest view yet of the faint molecular halo in the Nebula and up to 10 concentric "arcs" in the halo. These more detailed Webb images reveal curious "spikes" in the Ring Nebula that were only faintly visible in previous images from the Hubble Telescope (2013). Scientists believe these arcs formed about every 280 years as the central star shed its outer layers.

Roger Wesson (research associate at Cardiff University) reviewed the Webb Telescope's observations and stated the following: "When a single star evolves into a planetary nebula, there is no process that we know of that has that

kind of time period. Instead, these rings suggest that there must be a companion star in the system, orbiting about as far away from the central star as Pluto does from our Sun. As the dying star was throwing off its atmosphere, the companion star shaped the outflow and sculpted it. No previous telescope had the sensitivity and the spatial resolution to uncover this subtle effect."

The Ring Nebula (Messier 57, aka NGC 6720) is located about 2,000 light years away, in the constellation Lyra; and it can be spotted using a moderately-sized telescope.

For more information, go to: <https://science.nasa.gov/mission/hubble/science/explore-the-night-sky/hubble-messier-catalog/messier-57/>

ΛΨΦ

### 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.

The Book Discussion Group usually meets on the 4th Thursday of every month, starting at 7:00 PM, at Peter & Rob's home: 1425 "S" St., NW. The next book discussion will be held in person on December 7th. **All attendees MUST be fully vaccinated.**

Here are the details for the next couple of discussions:

**Dec. 7** (combined Nov./Dec.) – *The Expert System's Brother*, by Adrian Tchaikovsky (moderator: Andy).

**Jan. 25, 2024** – *A Haunting on the Hill*, by Elizabeth Hand (moderator: Carl).

ΛΨΦ



### \*\*\*\*\* November 12, 2023 Meeting \*\*\*\*\*

The next LSF meeting will be held on **Sunday, November 12th**. The meeting will be held at Peter and Rob's home, **1425 "S" Street NW, Washington, DC**. The meeting will begin at 1:30 PM followed by gaming at 3:00 PM. Hope to see you there!



### What's Inside?

Page 2: Strange Tales, Part 1 (book reviews); Minutes of the October LSF Meeting.

Page 4: Info About Lambda Sci-Fi: DC Area Gaylaxians and Con Calendar.

## Strange Tales, Part 1

reviews by Carl

I generally enjoy reading “weird” or “creepy” or “scary” books in honor of the season of Halloween and *Día de los Muertos*. This October was no exception. Here are reviews of some of the books I’ve read.

*In Space No One Can Hear You Scream*  
edited by Hank Davis  
(Baen Books, 2013)

Horror and science fiction – sounds like a great combination! I decided to start off the season with this anthology of 13 previously-published short stories. Perhaps it wasn’t the best choice. The anthology’s title might in fact be true – that people can’t hear you scream in the vacuum of outer space – but, on the other hand, they might be able to hear you *yawn*. I’ve often commented that anthologies are sometimes “uneven” when it comes to the quality of stories they include – you know: some are “good” and some are “not so good.” In the case of this particular anthology, I found all but two of the stories to be on the “not so good” side of the equation. It’s a shame, too, because a number of the stories are from Big Names: Arthur C. Clarke, Robert Sheckley, Theodore Sturgeon, James Schmitz, Neal Asher, and Clark Ashton Smith. In my opinion, most of the stories in here haven’t “aged” well: I suspect they wouldn’t appeal to the sensibilities of most modern science fiction readers. Even worse (again, in my opinion), they just aren’t “scary” or “creepy.”

But, as I said, the anthology *does* include two stand-out stories: “Mongoose” by Elizabeth Bear and Sarah Monette, and “Sandkings” by George R.R. Martin. Both of them are well-written and have a satisfying level of “creepy-ness” to them. Interestingly, both of them are also “infestation” stories.

“Mongoose” (2009) is one of the short stories that Bear and Monette have set in their “Boojum-verse.” In the distant future, humans have be-

## Minutes of the October LSF Meeting

taken by Scott

### TV News

Andy is enjoying Netflix’s *One Piece*, a live-action series whose main character is a pirate kid. Peter loves the Netflix series *Wandering Earth*: “People of Earth build giant thrusters to move the planet out of orbit and sail to a new star system.” Rob is looking forward to the continuation of the Apple+ alternate history series *For All Mankind*. The final episode of the animated series *Archer* is fast approaching. Peter is really enjoying the series *Interview with the Vampire* (now being shown on HBO Max).

come a space-faring species – but it’s a universe where Lovecraftian horrors also exist. Interstellar travel is often accomplished aboard huge creatures (known as “boojums”) that function as living spaceships. There are also the traditional non-living “steelships” for those of a less adventurous nature. I think these stories might be classed as part of the New Space Opera sub-genre – and possibly even as part of the New Weird movement.

Izrael Irizarry and his alien “cheshire” Mongoose are successful interstellar exterminators; and they have been hired by Stationmaster Lee to clean out a suspected infestation of “toves” (interdimensional pests) somewhere in the depths of Kadath Station. The hope is that Irizarry and Mongoose can eliminate all the toves before they become too numerous and widen the interdimensional rift to the point where “raths” (somewhat larger and more dangerous creatures) are able to enter the station in pursuit of their natural prey (the toves) and to breed and (incidentally) seek other living prey (such as humans). And, as everyone knows, a rath infestation would eventually lead to a more sizeable interdimensional rift that would allow a “bandersnatch” (a horrific interdimensional apex predator) to enter the station – at which point, Kadath Station

(continued on page 3)

### Movie News

Peter observed that the new *Blue Beetle* movie is similar in tone to *Shazam*. Viola Davis stars in *Hunger Games: Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes*, which is a prequel to *Hunger Games*. Coming out in December: *Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom*, starring Jason Momoa and Amber Heard. Here’s the plot summary to another upcoming movie, *Godzilla Minus One*: “After the war, Japan’s economic state has been reduced to zero; Godzilla appears and plunges the country into a negative state.”

### Other News

Carl is looking forward to reading Elizabeth Hand’s newest novel *A Haunting on the Hill*, which is an authorized successor to the Shirley Jackson’s classic *Haunting of Hill House*. He reported that he enjoyed attending Capclave last weekend and talking with LSFers Jim Williams and Bob Angell, as well as chatting with the Author Guest of Honor Sarah Pinsker and Suzanne Palmer (one of his favorite authors).

### Special Treats

We watched two *Very Short Trek* cartoons, celebrating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the *Star Trek* animated series. We also watched excerpts from *Clutch Cargo* and *Space Angel*, a couple of animated series (1959 to 1964) that used the “Synchro-Vox” lip-animation technique – which is about the creepiest thing for a small child to have to see.

### Upcoming LSF Events

Rob reminded everyone about the *Dungeons & Dragons* “introductory session” to be held on Saturday, October 28<sup>th</sup>. (Pre-registration is required.) Rob also advised about the two upcoming LSF book discussion titles: October – *Hellboy: The Chained Coffin and Others* by Mike Mignola; and the combined November/December discussion: *The Expert System’s Brother* by Adrian Tchaikovsky.

ΛΨΦ

## Strange Tales, Part 1

continued from page 2

(and everyone aboard) would be doomed. Unfortunately, Irizarry and Mongoose discover that the Stationmaster has intentionally understated the seriousness of Kadath's tove infestation – and that a rath colony has begun to form. Can Irizarry and Mongoose eliminate all the toves *and* even destroy an armored, breeding rath before a bandersnatch appears? Or should they try to secretly escape and abandon Kadath to its doom?

I found the Lovecraftian influences and references in this story to be delightful. Space stations all seem to be named after Lovecraftian locations (Kadath, Leng, Providence, Dunwich); there's an itinerant space-faring cult called "Arkhamers" (although no one seems quite certain of the beliefs or goals of Arkhamite professors); and the horrific bandersnatches are actually dimension-hopping monsters from the Lovecraftian mythos (Hounds of Tindalos). For those of a more literary bent, there's another obvious influence: the names of all the interdimensional creatures (tove, rath, bandersnatch, cheshire) come from various works by Lewis Carroll (of *Alice in Wonderland* fame). What a hoot!

If you're interested in tracking down the other two "Boojumverse" stories, they're "Boojum" (2008) and "The Wreck of the *Charles Dexter Ward*" (2012), both of which have been anthologized several times.

**"Sandkings" (1979)** by George R.R. Martin is a classic – and creepy – science fiction story; but I'd never read it before. I'd only seen the televised version: a 1995 *Outer Limits* episode of the same name. (It was interesting to see how Martin's short story differs from the television script written by George R.R. Martin, Melinda Snodgrass, and Leslie Stevens.)

Simon Kress is a wealthy businessman who lives in "a sprawling manor house" in the barren countryside about 50 kilometers outside the city of Asgard on the planet Baldur. He loves to collect rare, exotic creatures in his home, and he enjoys showing them off to all his associates. I say

"associates" rather than "friends" because Simon Kress doesn't *have* any friends. He's an egotistical and very unlikeable person, but he's wealthy and influential enough that no one dares to ignore the invitations to his parties.

One fateful evening, Kress enters an unusual little shop under a sign that reads: "Wo and Shade, Importers – Artifacts, Art, Lifeforms, and Misc." And it's there that he first learns of the truly exotic creatures that Wo calls "sandkings." They're vaguely like rather large insect-forms: armored exoskeletons; six legs (the foremost of which function as arms, with hands); mandibles; mobile workers/warriors directed by a reproductive "queen;" and a hive mind with rudimentary psionic sense. And, Wo assures Kress, adjacent nests (each a different color) will fight wars against each other (which will entertain him) and will "worship" him (which will soothe his raging ego). Kress can't resist purchasing four "nests" and installing them in a huge terrarium in his home. Then, as the nests mature, Kress goads them into ever-more-violent battles, so that he and his friends can enjoy the carnage and even pit various predators against the sandkings and bet on the outcomes. Late one night, Kress invites an ex-lover over for a solo viewing; but during a physical altercation he accidentally kills her, the terrarium is damaged, and the sandkings escape. From then on, things predictably go from bad to worse – and get creepier and creepier! – as Kress becomes ever-more-panicky while attempting to limit the damage without alerting anyone to the murder and the infestation he caused. Also predictably, there isn't a happy ending to this story.



*Batman:  
The Doom That Came to Gotham*  
written by Mike Mignola  
& Richard Pace  
(DC Comics, 2023)

If Bob Kane and HP Lovecraft had teamed up to write a dark and creepy Batman story, I think this would have been the result. Writers Mignola and Pace have done a marvelous job of "channeling" Kane and Lovecraft to create a story about a Batman whose character is reminiscent of the original "Dark Knight" created by Bob Kane and Bill Finger. The graphic novel features a host of characters (both heroes and villains) that will be familiar to fans of the Batman franchise; and it's replete with Lovecraftian horrors. It's also set in a kind of "alternate Batman universe" in the late 1920s (the classic Lovecraftian time period).

It's 1928. Millionaire Bruce Wayne has sailed to Antarctica in search of a lost Gotham University expedition led by Prof. Oswald Cobblepot. Wayne is accompanied by his three adopted sons, Dick, Tim, and Jason. (Note: In the "regular" Batman stories, they're Bruce Wayne's wards, each of whom becomes a version of Robin, the Boy Wonder.) They find Cobblepot's diary and learn that most of the lost expedition has died (under mysterious circumstances, of course) – and they find two survivors who have been... changed. And, of course, the Waynes run across various Lovecraftian creatures, including some mutated penguins (*a la* Lovecraft's *At the Mountains of Madness*) and a massive, tentacled creature buried in the ice that is identified as the spawn of "He who bays and slavers forever outside time and space, who shambled down out the stars when Earth was new and spawned abominations in the seas and blights upon the land." After some harrowing adventures under the ice, the Waynes manage to escape and sail back to Gotham. Unfortunately, they unknowingly bring "unspeakable horrors" back with them, and Gotham faces a Doom that stems from unholy pacts made centuries ago by the city's founders. Madness, mayhem, death, and destruction ensue.

(continued on page 4)

**\*\* 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.

Newsletter submissions are always welcome

Meetings are usually held on the second Sunday of each month at a private residence. The next Lambda Sci-Fi meeting will be held on Sunday, **November 12th, at Peter and Rob's home, 1425 "S" Street NW, Washington, DC. All attendees MUST be fully vaccinated.** We 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.

**\*\* Con Calendar \*\*** by Carl

Nov. 17-19, 2023 **PHILCON 2023**. DoubleTree by Hilton (Cherry Hill NJ). Principal Speaker: Jonathan Maberry; Artist Guest: Rob Carlos; Special Guest: Kelley Armstrong. Membership: \$65 until Nov. 10<sup>th</sup> (when pre-registration closes); higher at the door. Website: [www.philcon.org](http://www.philcon.org) On-line registration: <https://philcon.org/registration/>

March 22-24, 2024 **OUTLANTA CON/GAYLAXICON 2024** ("Atlanta's LGBTQ+ convention for Sci-fi, Pop Culture, Multi-media & Gaming!"). Atlanta Marriott Northeast/Emory Area (Atlanta GA). Weekend membership: \$60 (purchase on-line at the website). Website: <https://outlantacon.org>

May 24-27, 2024 **BALTICON 58**. Renaissance Baltimore Harborplace Hotel (Baltimore MD). Guest of Honor: L.E. Modesitt Jr; Music GoH: Rhiannon's Lark; Editor GoH: Sheila Williams; Artist GoH: Omar Rayyan. More info to be announced. Website: <https://www.balticon.org/> E-mail: [balticoninfo@balticon.org](mailto:balticoninfo@balticon.org)

Sept. 27-29, 2024 **CAPCLAVE 2024**. Rockville Hilton (Rockville MD). Guests of Honor: Sheree Renee Thomas; Matt Din-niman. Membership: \$55 from Jan to May 2024; \$60 from June to July 2024; \$65 from Aug to Sept 2024; \$70 at the door. Website: [www.capclave.org](http://www.capclave.org) Info: [info@capclave.org](mailto:info@capclave.org)

**Strange Tales, Part 1**  
continued from page 3

Writers Mignola and Pace do a fine job of melding Batman-esque and Lovecraftian themes and characters. Various villains are given alternate Lovecraftian origin stories, including Penguin, Mr. Freeze, Two-face, and R'as al Ghul. Other familiar DC Comics characters also appear in rather unusual roles: Barbara Gordon (as a disfigured spiritualist), Oliver Queen (aka Green Arrow, as a modern-day crusader), Etrigan (aka "the Demon"), and the Man-Bat.

I could have wished that Mike Mignola had also done all the artwork – he was only the cover artist for the serialized version. "Penciller" Troy Nixey did a fine job as the primary artist; his artwork (as inked by Dennis Janke and colored by Dave Stewart) effectively

contributes to the overall dark tone of the story. Warner Brothers has also released an animated version of the story (2023), but with a different artist. You can view the official trailer on YouTube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uj6wScDm2SQ>



ΛΨΦ

[Part 2 continued next month]



Happy  
Thanksgiving!?