



Lambda Sci-Fi

DC Area Gaylaxians

(202) 232-3141 - Issue # 328 – July 2017

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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.

The LSF 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 – for directions or more details, call 202-483-6369. The next book discussion will be held on July 27, 2017.

Here are the details for the next three book discussions:

July 27 – *Everfair* by Nisi Shawl (moderator: Claire).

Aug. 24 – *Radiance* by Catherynne Valente (moderator: Konrad).

Sept. 28 – *A Taste of Honey* by Kai Ashante Wilson (moderator: John).

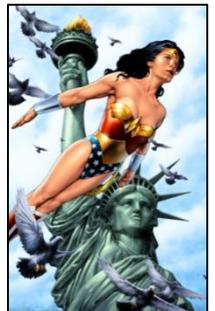
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Rob at the LSF Booth – 2017 Capital Pride Festival
(photography by Peter)



Have a
super
4th of
July!



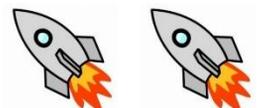
<<<<< July 2017 LSF Meeting >>>>>

The next LSF meeting will be held on **Sunday, July 9th**. The meeting will be held at Peter and Rob's home, **1425 "S" Street NW, Washington, DC**. The meeting will begin at 1:30 and the "group watch" will begin at 3:00 PM. Hope to see you there!



What's Inside?

Page 2: Three Cities (book reviews).
Page 4: Information About Lambda Sci-Fi: DC Area Gaylaxians and Con Calendar.

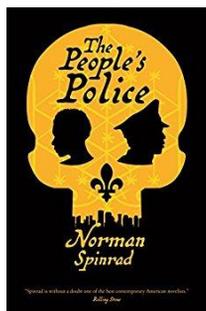


Three Cities

reviews by Carl

Sometimes a city becomes as much of a “character” in the story as the featured humans (or humanoids or aliens, etc.). The LSF Book Discussion Group has observed this fact on at least a couple of occasions: the city of Beszel in China Miéville’s *The City & the City* (2010); and the city of Hav in Jan Morris’s *Last Letters from Hav* (1985). It’s also true of the city of Riverside in Ellen Kushner’s *Swordpoint* (1987) and related novels.

And here are three more examples from F&SF novels published by TOR in 2017.



The People's Police
by Norman Spinrad
(TOR Books, 2017)

The minute I spotted this novel on the B&N shelves, I bought it. I’m firmly of the opinion that when an author like Norman Spinrad has a new novel, *Attention Should Be Paid!* And, as always, I found that Spinrad continues to live up to his reputation as a fascinating, entertaining, and controversial author.

The People's Police is Spinrad’s tribute to New Orleans. He makes that clear right up front, in his dedication: “To THE INDOMITABLE SPIRIT OF THE BIG EASY – Past, Present, and Future – Never let your song sing surrender.”

It’s somewhere in the “near future”. As if climate change, rising tides, and a shift in the course of the Mississippi River aren’t enough, a major financial upheaval (including the collapse of the real estate market) is playing havoc with The Big Easy. Martin Luther Martin is a cop who’s worked his way up from the slums of the “Alligator Swamp” (drowned portions of New Orleans) –

he has a good (but not sterling) reputation; he’s married to a beautiful wife (daughter of a long-time, respected police Sergeant); and he’s bought his own home. Ah, but it’s hard to make ends meet in this *new* New Orleans if you’re not heavily embroiled in “the take” – and Luther ends up being assigned to serve his own eviction notice when he gets behind on his over-inflated mortgage. What’s a poor beat cop to do? J.B. Lafitte is an “entrepreneur”: he owns a landmark bar in the surviving historic section of New Orleans and a high-class bordello in the Garden District – but with the financial meltdown and the annual multiple-hurricane season ruining the local economy, he’s going into foreclosure, too. What’s an “up-standing” (albeit shady) businessman to do? And then there’s MaryLou Boudreau, now known as “Mama Legba”. She’s a flamboyant self-proclaimed “voodoo queen” (in the tradition of Marie Laveau) – she’s also a minor (local cable network) television personality. BUT, through a set of curious circumstances, the *loas* now really *do* speak through Mama Legba – and they’ve got plans. What’s a girl to do? When their paths finally cross, Luther, Lafitte, and Mama Legba turn The Big Easy upside down. Fat Cats and sleazy politicians beware!

The People's Police is definitely *noir-ish* in tone: nobody in the novel truly has “clean hands”, despite the fact that it features any number of characters who have their own “moral center”. After all, the story does take place in The Big Easy, where tradition recommends “go along to get along”. And every so often the story also swerves into the “Theater of the Absurd”, as Spinrad highlights or punches up his message.

As with everything that Spinrad writes, there’s heaps of social criticism in here. He dumps the blame for New Orleans’s (and, indeed, America’s) economic woes squarely in the laps of the “Fat Cats” and “Credit Card Banditos” and “Loan Lizards of Wall Street” and “Ali Blah Blah and the Forty Financial Engineers” *and* the bought-and-paid-for politicians who greased the legislative wheels so it all

could happen. Yup, that’s Spinrad: always quite willing to point the finger at the Powers That Be who are screwing all the rest of us. It’s certainly no wonder that some of his books – such as *Bug Jack Barron* (1969) – have been banned in various countries from time to time. Yes, climate change had a devastating effect on the Big Easy; but that fades in comparison to all the financial and political shenanigans going on elsewhere.

Norman Spinrad rides again! I’m *so* glad I dropped everything to read *The People's Police*; and I highly recommend it. I can hardly wait for the release of his next bombshell: *Osama the Gun* (scheduled for release in late March).



Passing Strange
by Ellen Klages
(TOR Books, 2017)

I’ve previously read two of Klages’s YA historical fiction novels (*The Green Glass Sea*, 2006; and *White Sands, Red Menace*, 2008) and a novelette (“Time Gypsy” in *Bending the Landscape: Science Fiction*, 1999) – and I’m a big fan of Ellen Klages. As soon as I learned about *Passing Strange*, I quickly ordered a copy through Amazon.com – and this new novella just confirms my status in the Ellen Klages Fan Club.

Passing Strange is sort of a love letter to queer San Francisco. As Klages says in her Afterword: “I fell in love with San Francisco in 1963 (I was eight). I moved there in 1976, and a year later wrote the first lines of a story that would become *Passing Strange*.”

Most of the novella takes place in 1939/1940, when the Golden Gate International Exposition was in full swing. It’s definitely an LGBTQ story (with emphasis on the L).

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Three Cities

continued from page 2

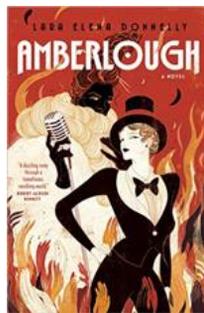
The story centers around the experiences of “The Circle”, a small discussion group composed of some lesbian/women friends. Franny and Babs are the organizers. Franny is a Wiccan, with some genuine and surprising magical abilities; and Babs (aka Barbara, Franny’s partner) has a PhD in theoretical mathematics, although she’s only been able to get a job as a “mathematics lecturer” at an (unnamed) university. Haskell (aka Loretta Haskell) is a painter and cover illustrator for F&SF pulp magazines such as *Weird Menace*; her work is well-known and respected, but her fans don’t know she’s female. Haskell is also married, although separated from her less-than-sterling husband, who’s in the Armed Forces. Emily is a young writer who was expelled from Wellesley when she and a roommate were caught *in flagrante delecto* – but she’s more widely known by her stage name of “Spike”, the sexy “drag king” crooner who headlines at Mona’s Club 440, a well-known (and actual, historical) lesbian bar on Montgomery Street. And, finally, there’s Helen, who’s straight-but-friendly. Helen is Japanese-American, a budding attorney who supports herself by “dancing twelve shows a week at Forbidden City” (a popular club in Chinatown); she’s also responsible for ensuring that Franny’s will (leaving her apartment buildings, etc. to her “live-in friend” Babs) is unbreakable.

Passing Strange is a well-written evocation of the lesbian experience (as well as the Asian-American experience) in San Francisco just before World War II. The personal stories of the women in The Circle – as well as of their friends – are often heart-warming, sometimes harrowing or heart-rending, but always fascinating. I found it difficult to put the book down.

Then there are the F&SF aspects of the story... Of course, there’s the “tangential” SF connection, based on the fact that Haskell is an illustrator for pulp F&SF maga-

zines. (There are definite echoes to themes in the *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* episode “Far Beyond the Stars” and its 1998 novelization by Steven Barnes.) Beyond that, however, there’s genuine Fantasy content subtly woven into the storyline. I don’t want to say too much about it, because it might spoil the effect. (I’ve read some complaints about how Klages melds the Fantasy into what is primarily an historical-fiction storyline, but I just don’t agree. I think it’s a masterful touch.)

I really enjoyed *Passing Strange*. Many thanks to Tor Books for featuring it in their new “novella line” of publications.



Amberlough
by Lara Elena
Donnelly
(TOR Books,
2017)

This third novel is different from the other two, for a couple of reasons. First off, it’s not set in a real, actual city: Amberlough City isn’t part of “our” universe (although there are definite similarities). And, second, it’s a new author’s premiere novel.

Amerlough City is entering a very difficult period of change. It’s the capital of the state of Amberlough and the seat of the elected parliamentary government for a loose federation of four nation-states. Technology is at roughly the level of early 20th Century Europe, and economic conditions are stable enough to provide a fairly comfortable life for Amberlinians. Amberlinian society is also tolerant enough to allow a certain level of political, social, and sexual “variety” and experimentation. Sure, there are certain levels of corruption, smuggling, profiteering, and crime; but it’s nothing the people of Amberlough haven’t been able to live with. But now the One State Party, a conservative fascist-type movement, is taking advantage of rising political, economic, social, and ethnic tensions; and – with the financial backing of cer-

tain wealthy industrialists – it looks like the “Ospies” will soon take control of the federation’s government and quickly bring an end to Amberlough’s free-wheeling social scene.

Cyril DePaul is a secret agent with the Federal Office of Central Intelligence. After a disastrous mission abroad, he took an assignment to investigate drug-running and smuggling inside Amberlough City. His primary target is Aristide Makri-costa, the drag-queen emcee at the Bumble Bee Cabaret, the city’s top nightclub. Cyril knows that Aristide is also the kingpin for most drug-and-refugee smuggling throughout the federation, but he doesn’t intend have Aristide arrested – because the two men have become lovers. And then there’s Cordelia Lehane, a burlesque performer at the Bumble Bee and a runner in Aristide’s smuggling operations. As the feared Ospie take-over looms ever nearer, Cyril finds himself embroiled in the behind-the-scenes political turmoil. Aristide and Cordelia begin working on escape plans, but find themselves entangled in anti-Ospie operations, too.

Maybe all this sounds a little familiar to you? Sounds a bit like Christopher Isherwood’s “Berlin” stories (such as *Goodbye to Berlin*, 1939) – or perhaps a bit like *Cabaret* (either the musical or the 1972 film)? If so, it’s no wonder. Donnelly based conditions in *Amberlough* on those existing in Berlin during the 1930s, on the eve of the Nazi take-over of Germany.

Amberlough is one of those Fantasy novels without any of the “typical” Fantasy trappings (magic, dragons, unicorns, swordplay, etc.). It is, however, filled with fascinating characters and their complex inter-relationships, plenty of espionage and political double-dealing, and a grim reminder of what can happen to a sexually tolerant society when it’s hijacked by the forces of intolerance and demagoguery. I quite enjoyed *Amberlough*; and I look forward to reading any forthcoming works by Lara Elena Donnelly.

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

Lambda Sci-Fi: DC Area Gaylaxians (LSF) is an organization for gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgendered (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. (Hard copies of the newsletter cost an additional \$15 per year.) 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, **July 9th, at Peter and Rob's home, 1425 "S" Street NW, Washington, DC.** 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



July 6-9, 2017 **NORTHAMERICON '17** (NASFiC 2017). Sheraton Puerto Rico (San Juan, Puerto Rico). Guests of Honor: Daina Chaviano, Tobias Buckell, George Perez, Brother Guy Consolmagno, Javier Grillo-Marxuach, Paula Smith. Attending Membership: \$100 (will go up) Website: www.northamericon17.com

July 7-9, 2017 **SHORE LEAVE 39** ("a fan-run media SF convention"). Hunt Valley Inn (Hunt Valley, MD). Guests include: Kevin Sussman, Marina Sirtis, Michael Dorn, Michael Hogan. Membership: \$95 for the weekend (daily rates available). Checks payable to "Shore Leave" and send to: Shore Leave 39, PO Box 6809, Towson, MD 21285-6809 Website: www.shore-leave.com

Aug. 11-13, 2017 **OTAKON 2017** ("an annual convention to celebrate Asian pop culture and its fandom"). Walter E. Washington Convention Center (Washington, DC). New memberships: \$95; \$100 at the door. On-line registration. Website: www.otakon.com

Oct. 6-8, 2017 **CAPCLAVE 2017**. Hilton Washington DC North (Gaithersburg, MD). Author GoH: Ken Liu; Editor GoH: Neil Clarke. Membership: \$60 to July 31; \$65 from Aug. 1 to Sept. 30; \$70 at the door. Website: www.capclave.org Info: info@capclave.org

Nov. 10-12, 2017 **PHILCON 2017**. The Crown Plaza Hotel (Cherry Hill, NJ). Author GoH: Seanan McGuire; Artist GoH: Don Maitz; Special Guest: Janny Wurts. Membership: \$55 thru 8/31; \$60 from 9/1 thru 10/31; \$65 at the door. Website: www.philcon.org www.facebook.com/Philcon.PSFS

Nov. 24-26, 2017 **CHESSIECON 2017**. Radisson North Baltimore (Timonium, MD). Author GoH: Ada Palmer; Music GoH: T.J. Burnside Clapp; Artist GoH: Megan Willis. Membership: \$55 through Nov. 15; \$60 at the door. Make checks payable to "Thanksgiving Science Fiction Society" and send to: TSFS, Inc., PO Box 83032, Gaithersburg, MD 20883-3032 (Also registration on-line via PayPal.) Website: www.chessiecon.org Info: info@chessiecon.org

May 11-13, 2018 **GAYLAXICON/OUTLANTACON 2018**. The Network Board has approved Outlantacon's bid to host Gaylaxicon in 2018. Membership: \$35 until 9/31 (will go up after that). Website: <http://www.outlantacon.org/> Info: info@outlantacon.org

Nov. 1-4, 2018 **WORLD FANTASY CONVENTION**. Baltimore Renaissance Harborplace Hotel (Baltimore, MD). Membership: \$175 (current rate; will go up). On-line registration or print out registration form & send to: WFC2018 c/o Baltimore Science Fiction Society, Inc., PO Box 686, Baltimore MD 21203-0686 Website: <http://www.wfc2018.org/>