



lambda Sci-fi DC Area Gaylaxians



PO Box 656, Washington, DC 20044



(202) 232-3141 - Issue #256 - July 2011

E-MAIL: info@lambdascifi.org WEBSITE: www.lambdascifi.org



LSF Gaming/Potluck Party - July 9th -

Join the gang at Lambda Sci-Fi at a Gaming/Potluck Party!

When:

Saturday, July 9; 2 PM – Midnight

Where:

Home of Peter and Rob
1425 “S” Street NW, Washington, DC

Directions at:

<http://lambdascifi.org/club/PeterRob.html>

What to bring:

Bring board and card games, as well as snacks and dinner items (main courses, salads, etc.) and non-alcoholic drinks to share.

For more information, please contact Rob at: robgatesdc@gmail.com or call him at 202-483-6369.



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July LSF Meeting

The next LSF meeting will be held on Sunday, **July 10th**. The meeting will be held at James Crutchfield’s apartment (1414 17th St. NW, #413), near Dupont Circle. The business meeting will begin at 1:30 PM; and the social meeting will begin at 2:00 PM. Please also bring some munchies or soft drinks, if you can. See you there!

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**Games are important;
they mark that we are
not just animals
trying to stay alive
but humans
enjoying life
and savoring it.**

**-- Robert E. Heinlein --
Farnham's Freehold
(1964)**

quoted in
*Science Fiction Quotations: From
the Inner Mind to the Outer Limits*
edited by Gary Westfahl
(Yale University Press, 2005)



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 roundtable 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 meeting will be held on **July 28th**.

Here are the details for the next several book discussions:

July 28th - *Finder: Voice*, by Carla Speed McNeil (a Dark Horse graphic novel); moderator: Greg.

Aug. 25th - *Going Bovine*, by Libba Bray; moderator: Rob.

Sept. 22nd - *Perks of Being a Wallflower*, by Stephen Chbosky; moderator: Alex.

Oct. 27th - *Demon’s Lexicon*, by Sarah Rees Brennan; moderator: Claire. Λ Ψ Φ



WHAT'S INSIDE?

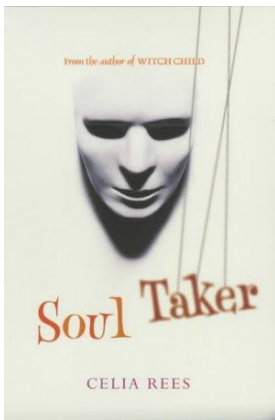
Two by Celia Rees (book reviews - pg.2); *The Hittite* (book review - pg.3); About Lambda Sci-Fi: DC Area Gaylaxians (pg. 4); Con Calendar (pg. 4)

Two by Celia Rees

short reviews by Carl

There's a lot of really good F&SF out there labeled as YA (young adult). But don't let the YA label turn you off. In previous reviews, I've talked about the quality – and the “edginess” – of some of the YA F&SF I've read. Now I'd like to tell you about a couple of YA works by Celia Rees that I've recently read.

You might not be familiar with Celia Rees. She lives in England, although a number of her works have also been published here in the U.S. She studied History and Politics at Warwick University. She was an English teacher in Coventry secondary schools for 17 years; and that's when she began writing for (and with) her students. She's been a full-time writer since 1997.



Soul Taker
(Hodder Children's Books, 2003)

Lately, I seem to be doing a lot of reading related to circuses, carnivals, puppets, and such – so, when I ran across a description of *Soul Taker*, I quickly decided I wanted to read it. *Soul Taker* isn't a “scary puppets” story; it's a scary story with puppets in it.

Lewis is a very unhappy teenager. He's overweight and unpopular at school; girls will have nothing to do with him; and he's often picked on by other boys. He has no friends. His father openly despises him and seems to get some sort of pleasure (a boost to his own failing self-esteem?) making snide and derisive comments to Lewis. Lewis's mother, on the other hand – well-meaning, but shy and subject to low self-esteem herself – over-

compensates by feeding and coddling Lewis (which, of course, simply adds to his problems).

One day, just before Halloween, Lewis decides to see if he can change his lot in life. He decides to get his fortune told by Mr. Viktor Ladslow, proprietor of Toys'N'Gifts, a popular shoppe on the town square. (Mr. Ladslow is descended from Romany wanderers and as a sideline tells fortunes by appointment during off-hours.) In his reading (via crystal ball), Mr. Ladslow gives Lewis a very depressing – and probably accurate – assessment of his future prospects if things go on as they are. Then he offers Lewis a fascinating alternative:

“Tell me,” Ladslow went on, leaning back in his chair, regarding Lewis over steepled fingers, “what would you give to change from what you are to what you want to be?”

“Anything,” Lewis said quietly, looking away from the man down to his big podgy nail-bitten hands. “I would give anything.”

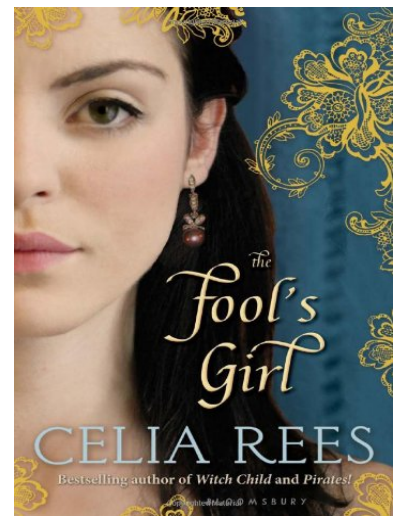
“Anything, eh?” Ladslow's thin black eyebrows rose, creasing his high white forehead. “There is much that can be done for a boy who is prepared to give anything. In that case, perhaps I can help you.” Ladslow leaned forward now, resting his hands on the table, slim fingers laced together. “But all I can do is help you to help yourself. There is no magic involved. Do you understand me?”

Ah, that Faustian bargain! Yes, Ladslow sets young Lewis on a self-improvement regimen that works very rapidly – much too well, when you think about it. But Lewis doesn't suspect that Viktor Ladslow has ulterior motives that are dark indeed. Lewis is seduced by his much-improved life: he improves his health and physical condition; he stands up to his father and the school bullies; he even meets a pretty girl! Little does Lewis know that Ladslow has definite plans for his young protégé – and for Lewis's new girlfriend, too – plans that involve the oh-so-realistic “poppets” on display in the backrooms of Toys'N'Gifts. Only gradually does Lewis come to the realization that something dark and disturbing is

going on – but it might just be too late to escape from Ladslow's mystical trap!

I found one aspect of *Soul Taker* to be particularly effective. Every now and then, short chapters are inserted into the story. They describe events happening elsewhere in England that are seemingly unrelated to Lewis's adventures. But, as it turns out, these mysterious and creepy events provide the reader with glimpses of how truly terrible Mr. Ladslow and his “poppets” are – and how far his mystical influences can reach.

Celia Rees's *Soul Taker* is a quick, good read – satisfyingly creepy, too!



The Fool's Girl
(Bloomsbury Publishing, 2010)

This book is a real gem! I'm now sorry that I let it languish on my “to read” pile for so long! It's a well-crafted work of historical fantasy. If you liked the film *Shakespeare in Love* (1998; with which *The Fool's Girl* shares some themes) or the comedic historical novel *No Bed for Bacon* (1941; by Caryl Brahms and S.J. Simon), then I think you'll enjoy this book, too. Unlike the aforementioned film and book, however, *The Fool's Girl* is not a comedy. It's quite serious – with lots of sadness, tragedy, and perils – and a happy ending. (Now that I think of it, I guess the happy ending qualifies it as a “comedy” in Shakespearean terms.)

And, make no mistake, this is a very Shakespearean novel. Will Shakespeare himself – actor, playwright, part-

(continued on page 3)

Two by Celia Rees

continued from page 2

owner of The Globe Theatre—is one of the main characters. The “current” action in the novel occurs in 1601-1602. Shakespeare is in his late 30’s and has already written and performed such plays as *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Hamlet*. In fact, *The Fool’s Girl* purports to show how Shakespeare is inspired to write *Twelfth Night* (which was, in fact, written during 1601-1602).

The story actually begins some years earlier in the little city-state of Illyria, on the Adriatic Sea’s eastern coastline. Violetta, the title character, is the daughter of Duke Orsin and his wife, Viola, who had been shipwrecked on the shores of Illyria and, through a series of romantic adventures, became Orsin’s wife. If you’ve read or seen *Twelfth Night*, you can see how Ms. Rees has cleverly adapted the play as the backstory for her novel. But now she goes on to show the reader what happened *after* “they all lived happily ever after.” Through a series of flashbacks, the reader sees how Illyria is brutally conquered by an alliance of the ever-greedy Venetians, Adriatic pirates, the vengeful Jesuit Malvolio (achieving the revenge he threatens in the final scenes of Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night*), and Viola’s own ambitious twin brother Sebastian. Malvolio captures the young Violetta and her protector, Feste (her father’s jester), sells Violetta into courtesanry in Venice, and condemns Feste to slavery in the galleys. Woe and alas!

Eventually, having escaped various perils and now disguised as itinerant street entertainers, Violetta and Feste reach England in hopes of reacquiring an all-important holy relic stolen during the sack of Illyria and of getting help to drive her evil uncle Sebastian from the Illyrian throne. The relic (containing the myrrh given to baby Jesus by the Magi) is now in the hands of the Jesuit priest Malvolio, who pretends to be in service to the Venetian ambassador to England but is actually the leader of a conspiracy to kill the heretic Queen Elizabeth and return England to Catholic rule. How will Violetta and Feste get access to the Venetian ambassador’s home? Aha! Shakespeare

The Hittite by Ben Bova (TORBooks, 2011) a very short review by Carl

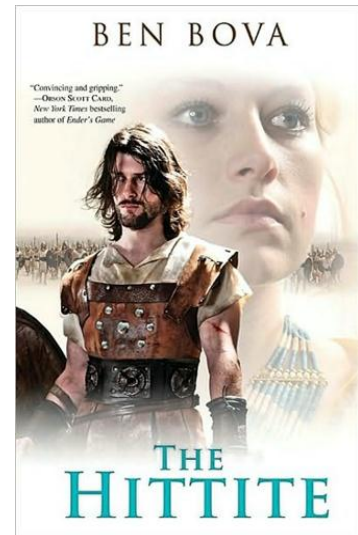
And here I thought that Ben Bova – former editor of *Analog*; former editor of *Omni*; 6-time Hugo Award winner; one of my favorite authors – only writes hard sci-fi. I was pleased to learn that I was wrong. Dr. Bova also writes historical fiction – and pretty darn *good* historical fiction, at that. The evidence? *The Hittite*.

Just one week prior to Balticon, *The Hittite* hit the stands in mass market paperback format. (Somehow I’d missed the hardback version during 2010.) It’s Bova’s take on the Trojan War, as seen through the eyes of a Hittite mercenary.

Lukka commands a small troop of Hittite soldiers. After a long and difficult campaign against the Armenians, he leads his troop back to Hattusas, the war-torn Hittite capital. Unfortunately, the Hittite Empire has collapsed: the emperor was poisoned, and his heirs are engaged in a civil war to see who gets to rule what’s left. Chaos reigns in Hattusas. Lukka learns that his wife and two sons have been kidnapped by slavers and taken off to the west somewhere, and he convinces his small but loyal band to follow him in pursuit of the slavers. They battle their way across eastern Asia Minor and eventually reach the Plains of Ilios and the besieged city of Troy (a former Hittite ally). There, as chance would have it, they fall in with the Achaians; and Lukka learns that his

and his players, of course! Plots, counterplots, disguises, kidnappings, murders – *The Fool’s Girl* is a non-stop entertaining roller-coaster ride. (As they say in *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*: “Something for everyone!”)

“OK,” you say, “but where’s the F&SF connection?” Oh, it’s there all right! It starts out slowly but intriguingly with the following sentence: “Master William Shakespeare, poet, player and sometime mage, had been on his way home from the theatre...” The reader doesn’t get to find out what “sometime mage” means until rather later in the story. In the meantime, the Illyrian flashbacks provide fascinating glimpses of witchcraft, scrying, sor-



wife and sons now belong to High King Agamemnon. Lukka offers the services of his iron-weaponed warriors to Odysseus, King of Ithaca, hoping that the wily Achaian king will be able to help him free his wife and sons from Agamemnon.

It’s through Lukka’s eyes that the reader gets to see the Trojan War from a new perspective. And Bova has written some surprising and ingenious variants into this age-old tale. (No, I won’t tell you what they are – it’d be a shame to spoil the surprises in store for you.) Don’t expect to find “magical” or “supernatural” elements in *The Hittite* – as I said, it’s pretty much a work of historical fiction. I found it to be a fast and enjoyable read. And, based on the ending, I can’t rule out the possibility that “Lukka’s continuing adventures” might be out there somewhere, too.

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cery, and ghostly visitations. And it’s when Shakespeare, his players, Violetta, and Feste finally travel to Stratford on Avon that Ms. Rees makes clear the connections between Master William Shakespeare and “the Old Ways.” (*Shades of A Midsummer Night’s Dream!*)

As I said, *The Fool’s Girl* is a truly entertaining historical fantasy! Ms. Rees has expertly interwoven the fictional and historical elements – as well as the supernatural elements – into a great story! And if you’re a fan of Shakespeare, I think you’ll find this novel to be even more of a treat! As much as I enjoyed *Soul Taker*, I found *The Fool’s Girl* to be far and away superior. Λ Ψ Φ

**** 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 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, June 10th, at James Crutchfield's apartment (1414 17th St. NW, #413), near Dupont Circle. The business meeting will begin at 1:30 PM; and the social meeting will begin at 2:00 PM. Please bring some munchies or soft drinks, if you can. 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



Aug. 17-21, 2011 **RENOVATION** (69th World Science Fiction Convention). Reno-Sparks Convention Center (Reno, Nevada). Guests of Honor: Ellen Asher, Charles N. Brown, Tim Powers, Boris Vallejo. Membership: currently \$195 until 7/17 (will go up!). Website: www.renovationsf.org Membership queries: memberships@renovationsf.org

Oct. 14-16, 2011 **CAPCLAVE 2011**. Hilton Washington DC/North Gaithersburg (Gaithersburg, MD). Guests of Honor: Carrie Vaughn & Catherynne Valente. Membership: \$45 thru June; \$55 July thru September; \$60 thereafter. Make checks payable to "Capclave" and send to: Capclave 2011, PO Box 53, Ashton, MD 20861. Register online at: www.capclave.org Website: www.capclave.org Info at: info@capclave.org

Nov. 18-20, 2011 **ANIME USA** ("Of Otaku, by Otaku, for Otaku!"). Hyatt Regency Crystal City (Arlington, VA). Membership: \$38 thru 6/30/2011; \$43 from 7/1 thru 8/31/2011; \$48 from 9/1 thru 10/31/2011. Register on-line at: <https://www.animeusaregistration.org/>

Nov. 25-27, 2011 **DARKOVER GRAND COUNCIL 34**. (A very LGBT-friendly convention.) Crowne Plaza Baltimore (Timonium, MD). Guests of Honor: Ellen Kushner & Delia Sherman; Special Guests: Katherine Kurtz, Melissa Scott. Membership: \$50 until 11/1; \$55 thereafter & at the door. Make checks payable to "Armida Council" and send to: Armida Council, PO Box 7203, Silver Spring, MD 20907. Website: www.darkovercon.org Info at: jaille@darkovercon.org

April 13-15, 2012 **RAVENCON 2012**. Holiday Inn Select Koger Center (Richmond, VA). Guests: TBA. Membership: \$30 before 12/31/2011; \$35 after that; \$40 at the door. Make checks payable to "RavenCon" and send to: RavenCon, PO Box 36420, Richmond, VA 23235. More info online at: <http://www.ravencon.com>

Aug. 30 - Sept. 3, 2012 **CHICON 7** (70th World Science Fiction Convention). Hyatt Regency Chicago (Chicago, IL). Guests of Honor: Mike Resnick (author), Rowena Morrill (artist), John Scalzi (toastmaster), Story Musgrave (astronaut). Membership: \$175 until 09/30/2011. (Will go up after that!) Make checks payable to "Chicon 7" and send to: Chicon 7, PO Box 13, Skokie, IL 60076. (You can also register on-line.) Website: www.chicon7.org Info: info@chicon.org

Oct. 5-7, 2012 **GAYLAXICON 2012**. Doubletree Hotel Minneapolis-Park Place (Minneapolis, MN). Guests: Gary Russell (writer/producer), Wendy Pini (*Elfquest*), Lyda Morehouse (author), Kyell Gold (furry author). Membership: \$70 - 2011 registration. Register on-line (via Eventbrite). Website: www.gaylaxicon2012.org