



# Lambda Sci-Fi

DC Area Gaylaxians



**Iron Widow**  
 By Xiran Jay Zhao  
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## Characters

Pilots	Strategists and officials	Others
Wu Zetian	Gao Yizhi	Gao Qiu
Li Shimin	Sima Yi	Zetian's family: father, mother, Big Sister (deceased), Dalang (younger brother), paternal grandparents
Dugu Qieluo and Yang Jian	Zhuge Liang	
Ma Xiuying and Zhu Yuanzhang	An Lushan	
Qin Zheng		
Yang Guang		

## Discussion Questions

1. Did you finish the book? Did you like it?
2. How would you categorize the genre of Iron Widow? Fantasy, sci-fi, something else?
3. Are you familiar with the history, culture, or folklore that inspire this story? What do you think of the adaptations?

4.This book also draws from several modern stories, like Pacific Rim, Handmaid's Tale, and Hunger Games. Do you find the use of borrowed tropes to be interesting and novel or cliché? Does the book subvert any tropes, and how does that affect the story?

5.How do you feel about the worldbuilding? Do you have enough details to understand how the setting works? Do you feel anything is missing?

6.What do you think of Wu Zetian as a protagonist? Is she a hero? Did you root for her? How does she compare to the protagonists of similar stories?

7.The whole book besides the prologue is from Zetian's perspective. Is first person present tense an effective narrative format? How do you feel about restricting the narrative to just one person? Would you have liked multiple perspectives, like from Yizhi or Shimin?

8.A review on Tor.com pondered how the book would be different if it were written and marketed towards an adult audience instead of YA. What are your thoughts?

9.The night after their first battle together, Zetian accuses Shimin of being a coward because, by her perspective, he should have let himself be killed instead of sending his copilots to their deaths. What do you make of this? Did you agree with Zetian? Did your opinion change as we learned more about Shimin's past?

10.Zetian interacts with few other women in the book. It's primarily her mother and grandmother (both unnamed), Qieluo, and Xiuying. And these are not particularly positive or respectful interactions. Why do you think there are so few other women in the story? Is a story about uprooting and trashing the patriarchy undermined when the main revolutionaries are one woman and two men?

11.What do you think about Qieluo's and Xiuying's opposing advice to Zetian about her family? Xiuying pleads compassion, arguing that giving Zetian's family a leg up will alleviate the pressure put on the women. Qieluo takes a cynical perspective, that any grace Zetian shows her family will be returned with tenfold animosity and greed. Do you agree with one or the other, either in general or specifically for Zetian's conflict?

12.Zetian partly justifies the killing of her family is a mercy to them, because they won't suffer through life as pawns to be played against her. What's your take on that argument?

13.YA books often end on a note of hope, even in a dystopian series. How would you describe the ending of this book? Is it hopeful?

14.Is this a queer book? Besides the polycule, did you see any other queer elements?

15.A sequel is set to come out in 2023: Heavenly Tyrant. Do you intend to read it? Are you interested in the author's new middle grade book, Zachary Ying and the Dragon Emperor?