



Lambda Sci-Fi

DC Area Gaylaxians



The Left Hand of Darkness
By Ursula K. Le Guin
Discussed April 1999

Discussion Questions

1. Genly Ai appears to be the central character of the book. Is he the central character of change, or is he our window for understanding and watching change in Estraven? What changes, if any, or conflicts are resolved in Genly Ai?
2. Le Guin portrays the Gethenians as remarkably masculine. Is this a result of the gender values of the time the book was written, or a portrayal of how Genly, the main viewpoint character, sees the Gethenians?
3. In reading the book, were you drawn to seeing Estraven as a man or a woman? Is this reinforced by Genly's exclusive use of the masculine pronoun?
4. When Estraven's attributes were portrayed as 'feminine' were they descriptions of weak characteristics or strong ones? What English words could Estraven's name be derived from?
5. The book has been described as the interweaving movements of two characters trying to understand each other, and their cultures. Does either character understand the other at the end of the book? What, if anything do you understand about the characters at the end of the book?
6. What reasons does Le Guin imply for Estraven's running to his death? Do you agree with them, or did you find this action contradictory to the character as revealed in the book?
7. Le Guin portrays the two opposing countries as barely working styles of government. Yet, she seems to think that Karhide is a better place to live, in spite of its mad monarchs. What in the story leads you to believe this is the case?
8. What nations in earth history do you see them as reflecting?
9. Genly Ai and Estraven were trapped together in a small space for an extended period of time, forced to rely on, and trust each other implicitly. Did you assume that when Estraven entered kemmering that they would consummate their 'relationship'? Why do you think Le Guin did not take their interaction to that level?

10. The sacrifices Estraven makes for Genly seem to go far beyond the logical arguments he offered as their justification. Is the implication that he has fallen in love with Genly? Or, are these truly altruistic actions for the good of all Gethenians?

11. The Gethenians considered Genly Ai a perverted individual, because he was permanently male, and always in heat. What do you think Le Guin might be saying about humans as the only mammals who are always in heat?