



Lambda Sci-Fi

DC Area Gaylaxians

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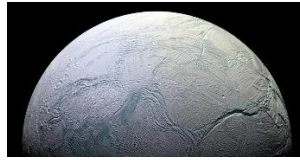
Enceladus Lives?

info passed along by Carl

Enceladus is one of the moons of Saturn. It's only a few hundred miles in diameter, but it possesses a cold, dark ocean beneath its miles-thick crust of ice. Enceladus (in common with other ice moons of Saturn and Jupiter) possesses a liquid ocean because it is subjected to powerful tidal forces as it orbits Saturn; and this produces internal heat. It's theorized that these tidal forces might energize hydrothermal vents on Enceladus similar to undersea "smokers" that spew nutrient-rich water into Earth's deep oceans. And, according to a report published on June 14th in the journal *Nature*, Enceladus's ocean appears to contain dissolved sodium phosphate (a form of phosphorus).

The report is based on data from an instrument on board NASA's Cassini spacecraft, which explored Saturn and its moons for 13 years before engineers sent it crashing into Saturn's atmosphere in 2017. The detection of phosphorus required years of analysis of data that Cassini gathered as it hurtled past Enceladus and intercepted particles that occasionally spurt out into space through cracks in the moon's icy surface.

"So what?" you ask. Well, this would mean that Enceladus possesses



the only ocean beyond Earth that is known to contain all six elements needed for life: carbon, hydrogen, nitrogen, oxygen, phosphorus, and sulfur. These six elements – plus water and energy – serve as the basis of all biochemistry on Earth. Phosphorus is essential to terrestrial biochemistry: it's necessary to the structure of DNA and RNA and for energy transfer in cells.

Frank Postberg is a professor at the Free University of Berlin and the lead author of the *Nature* report. He said: "We now really have found that Enceladus's subsurface ocean is the most habitable place in the solar system, at least as far as we know... But that doesn't mean that it's actually hosting life, that it's inhabited." Jonathan Lunine (Cornell University planetary scientist) commented that Enceladus "has such an earth-like interior ocean that if life is present, we will recognize it."

It's theorized that Europa, one of Jupiter's moons, might also include the whole suite of six essential elements in its subsurface ocean. It's hoped that NASA's Europa Clipper (a Jupiter orbiter scheduled for launch in 2024) will be able to determine if this is true.

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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. The next book discussion will be held in person on July 27th. **All attendees MUST be fully vaccinated.**

Here are the details for the next several months:

July 27 – *Even Though I Knew the End*, by CL Polk (moderator: Carl).

Aug. 29 – *Into the Broken Land*, by Tanya Huff (moderator: Rob).

Sept. 28 – *Middlegame*, by Seanan McGuire (moderator: Judy).

Oct. 26 – *Hellboy: The Chained Coffin & Others*, art and stories by Mike Mignola (moderator: Greg).

Dec. 7 (combined Nov./Dec.) – *The Expert System's Brother* (mod.: Andy).



***** July 9, 2023 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 PM. Hope to see you there!



What's Inside?

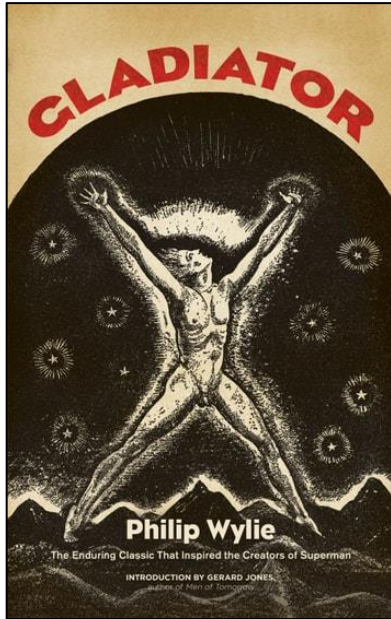
Page 2: Golden Oldies? (book reviews).

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Golden Oldies? short reviews by Carl

Lately I've been reading several works of Golden Age (pre-1950s) F&SF; and I thought I'd pass along some information about them – and maybe a warning or two.



***Gladiator* (1930)
by Philip Wylie**

This novel served as the lead-in for my recent foray into pre-1950s F&SF. I was preparing to moderate a Balticon discussion panel on the subject of “Superheroes;” and I seemed to remember something about a classic SF novel dealing with the subject: Philip Wylie’s *Gladiator*. So I dug deeply into one of my older “to read” piles and located it. Fortunately, it’s a very short novel, and I was able to read it with plenty of time to spare.

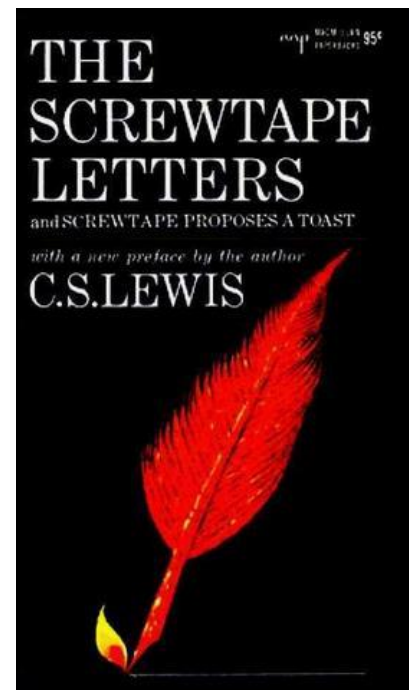
Gladiator was originally written in 1926, when Philip Wylie was only 24 years old; and well-known publisher Alfred Knopf rejected the manuscript when Wylie first submitted it. It was finally published in 1930, after an unknown revision of some sort.

Hugo Danner (the protagonist) is an exceptional human. His incredible powers are the result of an experimental serum developed by his father (a biology professor in a small Colorado town). The professor is secretly experiment-

ing with “alkaline radicals” in an effort to increase physical prowess in animals. Despite some frightening results from test trials with frog eggs and a fetal kitten, he decides it’s time for human testing; so he drugs his pregnant, domineering, religiously-conservative wife and injects her with his serum. As a result, young Hugo grows up with great muscular strength, an ability to leap incredible distances and run at incredible speeds, and virtual invulnerability (skin so tough that nothing short of an artillery shell can pierce it). But Hugo is convinced by his father to conceal his powers from the world at large. After college, Hugo goes out into the world, hiding his powers and holding a series of menial jobs that allow him to explore American society. He discovers that his powers enable him to save individual humans from various perils (fires, bus crashes, etc.); but he is unable to use them to effectively solve the larger societal ills that plague humanity (political corruption, large-scale crime, war, etc.). The novel – and Hugo’s life – ends in frustration and tragedy.

It’s interesting to note that the author never uses the terms “superman” or “superhero” in *Gladiator*. But Hugo is (at least once) described as being able to run faster than a speeding locomotive; he frequently leaps higher than tall buildings; and he is (to all intents) invulnerable to small-scale, hand-held weapons. Sounds sort’a like a certain famous Kryptonian, doesn’t he? OK, Hugo can’t fly – but then neither could the original version of Superman when he first appeared in comic books. As a matter of fact, Jerry Siegal (Superman’s creator) freely admitted that he had read *Gladiator* as a teenager and adapted some of the concepts for his Kryptonian creation.

Gladiator is a literary exploration of the limitations of superhuman powers in the hands of a young man with a moral American upbringing. I didn’t find it to be “a great read;” and I really can’t recommend it as either great literature or great science fiction. On the other hand, I’d recommend it to anyone interested in the origins of what has become a multi-billion-dollar entertainment industry.



***The Screwtape Letters* (1943)
by C.S. Lewis**

The Screwtape Letters is considered one of those “classic” works that I’ve been meaning to read for quite some time now. It isn’t exactly what you’d consider a work of “Golden Age F&SF.” Yes, it’s of the correct vintage – 1943 – but it wasn’t a product of Pulp magazines. *Screwtape* comes from a more high-falutin’ tradition. It’s a fatastical, literary (“li-trary,” don’cha know?) exploration of heavy-duty Christian theological issues. It was written by C.S. Lewis, a well-regarded British literary scholar at Oxford and Cambridge Universities who was also an Anglican lay theologian. (He was a close friend of J.R.R. Tolkien, to whom Lewis dedicated *The Screwtape Letters*.)

Screwtape is a devil. To be more precise, he’s an experienced devil of middling rank currently serving in a department within Hell’s massive bureaucracy. As the title implies, *The Screwtape Letters* consists of a series of letters from Screwtape to his nephew Wormwood. He’s providing advice on how his nephew can more effectively handle a newly-assigned “patient” (i.e., human) “to keep him out of the Enemy’s [i.e., God’s] clutches.” The tone of

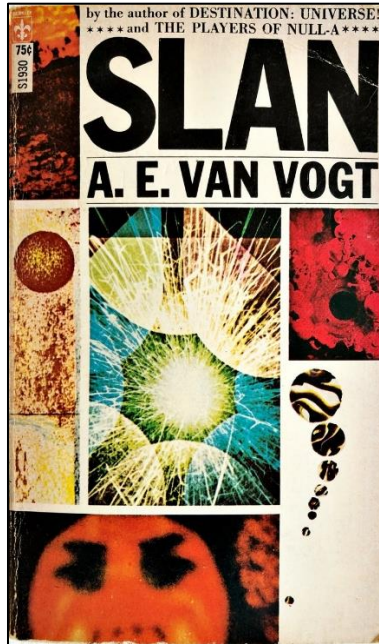
(continued on page 3)

Golden Oldies? continued from page 2

Screwtape's letters is urbane witty, ironically light-hearted – but they also contain thinly-veiled reminders of what happens to devils who fail in their assignments. (It's a competitive, dog-eat-dog Hell out there.) Each letter provides the reader with an exploration of the many moral lapses, misbehaviors, and outright sins that humanity is heir to, the actions and attitudes that can prevent the human soul from ever attaining union with the Divine Presence.

The Screwtape Letters also provides F&SF readers with a fascinating exploration of some lesser-known information about infernal reality. First off, the author depicts Hell as a massive bureaucracy. Here's what Lewis himself says: “[M]y symbol for Hell is something like the bureaucracy of a police state or the offices of a thoroughly nasty business concern.” And: “Everyone wishes everyone else's discrediting, demotion, and ruin; everyone is an expert in the confidential report, the pretended alliance, the stab in the back.” More surprising, however, is Lewis's revelation of *why* devils collect human souls. Yes, devils primarily want to keep human souls out of the hands of “the Enemy” (God); but the goal isn't to imprison and eternally torment them in Hell. Devils actually *eat* corrupted human souls (or, alternatively, distill them into a heady liquor). Yikes!

As I said, *The Screwtape Letters* has been on my “to read” list for a very long time. I found it to be an interesting read, although it's definitely not one of my favorites. It's well written; and Screwtape's screeds are often sly and ingeniously witty. A word of warning, however: the Christian apologetics and moralism in *The Screwtape Letters* is more blatant than in Lewis's other F&SF works, such as *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* (first book of the “Narnia Chronicles”) or *Out of the Silent Planet* (first book in Lewis's “Space” Trilogy). It's not abysmally “preachy,” but Lewis's Christian ethos is very much in evidence.



Slan (1940)
by A.E. van Vogt

Once upon a time, this was the science fiction novel that every Fan *had* to read – and most of them *did* read it! So many Fans identified with the title characters that “Fans Are Slans” became a popular catchphrase. (It meant that Fans were both bright and discriminated against.) And when two or more unrelated Fans lived together, they often called their residence a “slan shack.”

Jommy Cross is a young orphaned slan. His parents were both killed by agents of Kier Gray (“absolute dictator of the entire planet”). Jommy hopes to hide out long enough to reach puberty, when his slan powers will fully develop and he hopes to locate other hidden slans. Fully mature slans have enhanced mental powers that allow them to read minds (and to shield their own thoughts); and they are many times stronger than regular human beings. They can be identified by the tiny tendrils mixed in with the hair on their heads. Slans are the next level in human evolution – or maybe they were the creation of scientist Samuel Lann. (Samuel Lann = S. Lann = Slan.) Some years ago, when slans attempted to take over the world, they were defeated by regular humans in the Slan Wars and have been

hunted down ever since then. Or maybe this is all just propaganda created by Kier Gray as a justification for the creation of a worldwide police state under the control of Gray and his inner circle of cronies. And there's another type of slan out there (without tendrils or psychic powers) who are – or maybe aren't – secretly organized and plotting to assume control of the world.

Sounds rather confused, you say? Well... yes. Now add in wooden characterizations, stilted dialog, overly complex plot complications – all clear signs of the novel's Pulp roots. (It was originally serialized in the magazine *Astounding Science Fiction*, September-to-December 1940.) I can't recommend *Slan* as “a good read” for most modern F&SF fans. It just hasn't aged well. It's an artefact of a bygone age, and it demonstrates how much F&SF literature has changed over the years. (In 2016, however, *Slan* was awarded a Retro-Hugo for Best Novel for 1941.)

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**** 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, **July 9th, 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

July 7-9, 2023 **SHORE LEAVE 43**. Delta Hotels Baltimore Hunt Valley (Hunt Valley MD). Guests include: Grace Park, Claudia Black, Ben Browder, Robert Picardo, Penny Johnson Jerald, Robert Duncan McNeil. Weekend membership: \$105 (daily rates available). On-line membership application if paying by credit card. Website: www.shore-leave.com

July 21-23, 2023 **CONFLUENCE**. Sheraton Pittsburgh Airport Hotel (Pittsburgh PA). Guest of Honor: Ada Palmer; Featured Artist: Susan Dexter; Featured Music Guest: Sassafras+. Weekend membership: \$55 to 7/10/2023; \$65 thereafter (daily rates available). On-line registration. Website: confluence-sff.org

July 28-30, 2023 **OTAKON 2023** (celebrating Asian pop culture, including anime and manga). Walter E. Washington Convention Center (Washington DC). On-line registration: \$75 for the full weekend; daily memberships available. Website: <https://www.otakon.com>

Aug. 3-6, 2023 **PULPFEST 2023** ("celebrating Mystery, Adventure, Science Fiction, and More") Doubletree by Hilton Hotel Pittsburgh-Cranberry. Weekend membership = \$40 if you stay at the Doubletree \$50 if you stay elsewhere (daily rates available). For registration via PayPal, go to the con's website: www.pulpfest.com

Sept. 29 – Oct. 1, 2023 **CAPCLAVE 2023**. Rockville Hilton & Executive Meeting Center (Rockville MD). GoHs: Sarah Pinsker, Charlie Jane Anders. Registration details: \$55 until 5/31; then \$60 until 8/31; and \$65 thereafter. Website: <https://www.capclave.org/capclave23/>

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



Have a  **Super-Happy**  **Fourth of July!!**
     