



Lambda Sci-Fi

DC Area Gaylaxians

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E-MAIL: info@lambdascifi.org

WEBSITE: www.lambdascifi.org

Earth Has Two Moons (Temporarily)

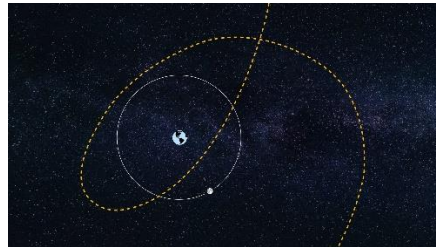
info passed along by Carl

On September 29th, Earth gravitationally captured a second moon: a tiny asteroid known as 2024 PT5. But Earth's possession of this second moon will only last until November 24th.

2024 PTS is actually a "mini-moon." It's believed to be about 37 feet wide, about the size of a school bus. (In contrast, the Moon is about 2,159 miles in diameter.)

Where did this "mini-moon" come from? It belongs to the Arjuna Asteroid Belt. Carlos de la Fuente Marcos (Universidad Complutense de Madrid) described 2024 PT5 as "part of the near-Earth object population of asteroids and comets." The Arjuna Asteroid Belt is a secondary asteroid belt composed of objects that follow orbits very similar to that of Earth, at an average distance of 93 million miles from the Sun. The dynamic properties of 2024 PT5 were noticed by Marcos and team as they routinely monitored newly-discovered objects for potentially interesting behavior.

2024 PT5 will not maintain a full stable orbit of the Earth before it escapes Earth's gravity again. At its closest, 2024 PT5 will be about 932,000 miles away (roughly four times the av-



erage distance between Earth and the Moon, which is 238,900 miles).

Unfortunately for most of us, the "mini-moon" will be too small and dim to be seen with typical amateur telescopes and binoculars. According to Marcos: "A telescope with a diameter of at least 30 inches plus a CCD or CMOS detector are needed to observe this object..."

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Happy Thanksgiving?!?!

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 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; but the next book discussion will be held on December 5th.

Here are the details for the next discussion:

Dec. 5 (combined Nov/Dec discussion) – *The Terraformers*, by Annalee Newitz (moderator: Zena).

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What's Inside?

Page 2: Strange Tales, Part 2 (book reviews); Minutes of the October 2024 Meeting.

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**** November 10, 2024 Meeting ****

The next LSF meeting will be held on **Sunday, November 10th**. 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!



Strange Tales, Part 2

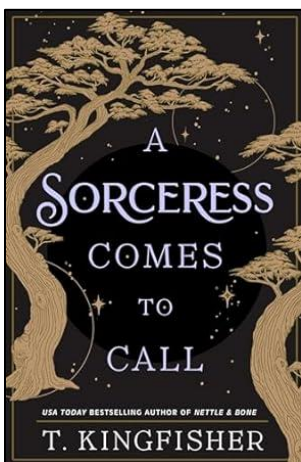
reviews by Carl

It's that time of year again – longer nights, Halloween, *Día de los Muertos*, and the Winter Solstice – and I generally enjoy reading “weird,” “creepy,” “scary,” or “dark” books in honor of the season. This October was no exception. Here are more reviews of the books I've read this year.

A Sorceress Comes to Call

by T. Kingfisher

(Tor, 2024)



Over the last few years, T. Kingfisher (aka Ursula Vernon) has become one of my favorite Fantasy authors. *A Sorceress Comes to Call* is her latest novel. I'd call it a “dark fantasy” story; and Kingfisher describes it as follows: “...well, this isn't *technically* a Regency [romance], but it's in the same ballpark...” Indeed, it includes a number of Regency tropes, as well as the “feel” and socio-economic-technological background typical of a Regency romance (such as the novels of Jane Austen and Georgette Heyer) – with a healthy (un-healthy?) dose of murder and malicious magic added in.

Cordelia doesn't have a happy life. She lives in genteel poverty with her widowed mother Evangeline in the out-of-the-way town of Little Haw in the outback of... well, I suppose it's England. (The country is never actually named, but it certainly *seems* like England, or a close imitation thereof.) Evangeline has occasionally sweet-talked her

Minutes of the October 2024 Meeting

taken by Scott

Carl brought in some *Star Trek: Next Generation* socks, which Randy says he'll donate to a charity.

Film News

There was much chatter about Francis Ford Coppola's *Megalopolis*: the plot is a collection of magic, character emotionality, and gangsters; and it sounds like *Dark City*. The general consensus is that Tim Burton's *Beetlejuice Beetlejuice* is not as good as the first movie; Rob, however, commented that the world-building is good. Lots of discussion on the current *Venom* movie, as well as the extensive *Venom* character and backstory. Rob reported many viewers of the new 2024 *Joker: Folie à Deux* movie were unaware that it was a musical. (There have been many negative reviews.) Teresa described the satirical body-horror 2024 movie *Substance*. She described the plot: “a fading celebrity uses some black market drug that creates a younger version of herself by popping out her back.” The movie appears to be a study on vanity.

John M. Chu's 2024 movie *Wicked* premieres in the U.S. on November 3rd.

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“gentlemen friends” out of a financial contribution; but she's socially ambitious, to say the least. She has plans to get out of Little Haw and lure some socially prominent (and financially secure) man into marrying her. And she also has future matrimonial plans for young Cordelia, plans that will help Evangeline reach even greater social and lucrative heights.

As if being the pawn of a socially-ambitious mother isn't enough, Cordelia's life has one more – major – complication: her mother is an evil sorceress. No, really. Evangeline is not one of those small-time sorceresses that “everybody knows about” – you know, card-sharps and side-show hustlers without any serious magical powers. No,

Television News

Peter and Rob are enjoying *Good Omen* Season II. They are also delighted with Disney+'s *Agatha All Along* – the costuming, dialogue, the continuing reveals. “Walk the Witch's Road” refers to the mystical dimension: the source of magical power for witches and warlocks in the Marvel universe.

Teresa talked about the 2019 HBO Nordic TV series *Beforeigners*. Plot: People from different time periods suddenly appear in the present and then integrate into current society. The protagonists are a current-day police detective and a Viking-era police recruit who investigate a murder. Sort of sounds like *Alien Nation*.

The final season of Paramount Plus's *Star Trek: Lower Decks* starts soon. Prime's *Nautilus* TV series – starring Shazad Latif – looks like lots of adventure!

Gaming News

Rob says he enjoys BioWare's *Dragon Age* fantasy role-playing video game. It was reported that the makers of *Civilization 7* are working with the Shawnee Nation to bring tribal representation to the game.

Upcoming LSF Events

Book discussions: October will be *Camp Damascus* by Chuck Tingle; combined November/December: *The Terraformers* by Annalee Newitz.

There will be an LSF New Year's Eve gaming party. ΛΨΦ

Evangeline has some truly disturbing powers – primarily her ability to enforce “obedience” on someone for a certain period of time. As punishment, Cordelia is often subjected to periods of “obedience” by her mother, periods in which she is unable to either move or talk for hours at a time. And then there's Falada, Evangeline's big white horse. Falada is actually Evangeline's “familiar” and not really a horse at all. (Falada's true and horrific nature becomes ever more apparent as the story goes on.)

Having messily disposed of her latest, disappointing “benefactor,” Evangeline plans to move to another county and has set her sights on the wealthy,

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Strange Tales, Part 2

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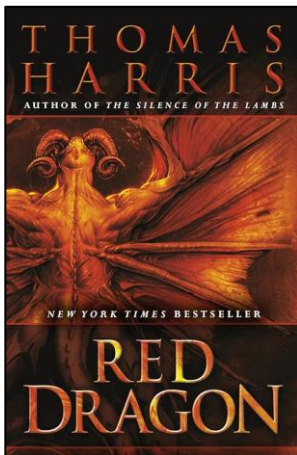
older Squire Samuel Chatham of Chatham House. Will Cordelia be able to break free of Evangeline's domination? Will Cordelia and her new friends – including Hester, Squire Chatham's spinster sister, and Lord Richard Evermore, Hester's long-time suitor – be able to foil Evangeline, as she practices her feminine wiles (and magical ploys) on the hapless Squire Chatham? And what can they expect from Falada, Evangeline's deadly familiar?

I found *A Sorceress Comes to Call* to be yet another example of Kingfisher's skill as a Fantasy author. As I said, she does a masterful job at recreating the style and feel of a Regency Romance. (Julian would have loved it!) And she has expertly grafted the magical system and supernatural elements onto the storyline. The last several chapters are outright exciting, too! I look forward to reading more of Kingfisher's works, including *Thornhedge* (winner of this year's Hugo Award for Best Novella).

Red Dragon

by Thomas Harris

(Berkeley/Random House, 2009)



I'm a big fan of the movie *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991), starring Jody Foster and Anthony Hopkins; and I realized that I'd never read anything written by Thomas Harris. But I decided that I didn't want to read the 1988 novel as my introduction to Harris's works, because there probably wouldn't be any surprises. And then I remembered that a

number of years ago a co-worker of mine told me that she'd read *Red Dragon* and found it very disturbing. OK, problem solved... *Red Dragon* it is.

This is the novel in which Thomas Harris introduced the reading public to serial killer Dr. Hannibal Lecter (aka "Hannibal the Cannibal") – but (to my surprise) Lecter is only a secondary character in *Red Dragon*. As the story opens, Dr. Lecter has already been securely confined to the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane, under the "care" of its ambitious Chief of Staff, Dr. Frederick Chilton. Dr. Lecter only makes a few appearances in *Red Dragon*; and although his actions definitely affect the storyline, Hannibal Lecter is not the focus of everyone's attention. That "honor" goes to a new and horrific serial killer known at first as "the Tooth Fairy" and later as "the Red Dragon."

Will Graham is a consultant for the FBI, specializing in the identification, location, and capture of serial killers. When on a case, he immerses himself in the mind of the killer – the crime scene, the family history of the victims, the methods used to kill them, etc. He's very good at it. In fact, Graham is the one who captured Hannibal Lecter – and almost died during the capture. Besides all the physical damage, Graham suffers mentally. It's impossible for him to "get into the minds" of serial killers without suffering a fair amount of mental strain and anguish. There's also been collateral damage to his marriage and other interpersonal relationships. Graham decided that Hannibal Lecter would be his last case. But now FBI agent Jack Crawford (head of the FBI's profiler division) needs Graham for another case. "The Tooth Fairy" has horribly killed two families (one in Birmingham and one in Atlanta, about a month apart); and Crawford manages to convince Graham into hunting him down before the next full moon. Unfortunately, Graham comes to the realization that he'll need to consult a "specialist" for the case: Dr. Hannibal Lecter himself.

Much of the first half of the novel is dominated by forensic science, as Graham and Crawford painstakingly

gather the evidence needed to identify and track down "the Tooth Fairy" – with occasional sidebars describing his victims and their slaughter. Never fear... if you're interested in all the lurid details, it's in there. And there are several later chapters devoted to exploring the origins of "the Tooth Fairy" and his first psychotic forays into murder. And then there's his deeper venture into insanity as he becomes "the Red Dragon." The final chapters are downright exciting, with a truly surprising twist at the end. All in all, I found *Red Dragon* to be a darkly satisfying read. I might even decide to try some of the other "Hannibal Lecter" novels, such as *The Silence of the Lambs* (1988), *Hannibal* (1999), and *Hannibal Rising* (2006).

Pathogenesis: A History of the World in Eight Plagues

by Jonathan Kennedy

(Crown Publishing, 2023)

Here's a brief description of this *non-fiction* book: "*Pathogenesis* takes us through sixty thousand years of history, exploring how outbreaks of infectious disease have made the modern world." This might seem an unlikely choice for inclusion in my October (and later) reading list. But it's not that far afield. Its descriptions of the effects of viral and bacterial pandemics – both on individual humans and on their societies and civilizations – are pretty darn "dark" and horrific. Even viewed with scientific detachment, I didn't find this book to be an example of "light" reading.

Kennedy naturally explores the origins and effects of the most famous pandemics: the Black Death during the Middle Ages and Restoration England; the "imported" pandemics (such as smallpox) that wiped out millions of Indigenous Peoples and enabled the European conquest of the New World; and the cholera and typhoid epidemics that killed so many inhabitants of cities in the Nineteenth Century. There are also chapters describing the origins and effects of several epidemics that devastated the Classical Greco-Roman world: the plague that devastated Athens

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

Lambda Sci-Fi: DC Area Gaylaxians (LSF) is an organization for lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, and trans-gendered (LGBT) 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, **November 10th, at Peter and Rob's home, 1425 "S" Street NW, Washington, DC.** 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

Nov. 22-24, 2024 **PHILCON 2024**. DoubleTree by Hilton (Cherry Hill NJ). Guests: Max Gladstone; Matthew Stewart & Gina Matarazzo, Nghi Vo. On-line registration: <https://reg.philcon.org> For more info: www.philcon.org

June 5, 2025 **HANACON**. "Anime, Art, & Asian Pop culture Convention." Silver Spring Civic Building at Veterans Plaza (Silver Spring MD). "Early bird special" membership: \$40 (offer expires 1/1/25).

For more information: www.HanaConAnime.com

August 13-17, 2025 **SEATTLE WORLDCON 2025**. Seattle Convention Center (Seattle WA). Guests of Honor: Martha Wells, Donato Giancola, Bridget Landry, K. Tempest Bradford, Nisi Shawl. Full attending membership: currently \$230 (will go up). For more information & on-line registration: <https://seattlein2025.org>

August 27-31, 2026 **LACON V** (2026 World Science Fiction Convention). Anaheim Convention Center, Hilton Anaheim & Anaheim Marriott Hotels (Anaheim CA). Guests of Honor: Barbara Hambly, Ronald D. Moore, Colleen Duran, Dr. Anita Sengupta, Tim Kirk, Geri Sullivan (Fan GoH), Stan Sakai, Ursula Vernon (aka T Kingfisher). Full attending membership: currently \$200 (will go up). For more information & on-line registration: <https://www.lacon.org/>

Strange Tales, Part 2

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during its Golden Age (5th Century BC); the Antonine Plague that hit during the height of the *pax Romana* in the 2nd Century AD; and the initial appearance of the Black Death (the so-called "Plague of Justinian") that ravaged both the Late Roman Empire and its rival, the Persian Empire, in the 6th Century AD.

I was surprised to see that there was very little discussion of the so-called "Spanish flu" pandemic of 1918-1919, which eventually killed tens of millions worldwide. In a footnote, Kennedy explained that this pandemic had already been extensively explored in Laura Spinney's 2017 *Pale Rider: The Spanish Flu of 1918 and How It Changed the World* (which is, by the way, a fascinating read).

But maybe you're interested in some *fictional* depictions of the effects of a pandemic on people and societies. OK, I've got a few suggestions:

A Journal of the Plague Year, by Daniel Defoe (1722) – Defoe provides a vivid chronicle of the Great Plague as it progresses through the streets of London in 1665, killing over 97,000 people. Defoe was an eyewitness – he was five years old in 1665 and based this novel on his own memories. His descriptions are full of the sounds and smells of human suffering.

Journals of the Plague Years, by Norman Spinrad (2013) – The novel's connection to the AIDS epidemic of the 1980s is obvious – and is reinforced in Spinrad's Afterword. The Plague's origins are mysterious; but the consequences are obvious: quarantined cites, safe-sex machines, Sex Police, old-fashioned love-making is outlawed.

A Song for a New Day, by Sarah Pinsker (2019) – The novel follows the life of a musician in a future where pandemics and terrorism make public events (such as concerts) illegal.

But maybe you'd prefer visual (rather than literary) depictions of pandemics. Here are a couple of suggestions:

Forever Amber (1947, starring Linda Darnell and Cornel Wilde) – The scenes depicting Amber's experiences in London during the 1665 Great Plague are sobering.

Contagion (2011, featuring Matt Damon, Gwyneth Paltrow, Jude Law, and Kate Winslet) – The film depicts a worldwide pandemic. It's based on knowledge of the H1N1 flu and SARS viruses; and it's a surprisingly accurate prediction of the effects of the COVID pandemic that we all experienced.

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(to be continued next month)