lambda Sci-fi

DC Area Gaylaxians

(202) 232-3141 – Issue # 430 – January 2026
E-MAIL: info@lambdascifi.org
WEBSITE: www.lambdascifi.org

Annual LSF Gift Exchange
at Jan. 11th Meeting

LSF will host its *thirty-fifth* annual book (*et al*) exchange at the in-person monthly LSF meeting to be held on January 11, 2026!

All LSF members – and visitors, guests, attendees, etc. – are invited to participate in this "blind exchange."

In case you've never participated in one of these before (or in case you've forgotten), here's how it works:

(1) Go out and purchase a copy of your "favorite" science-fiction, fantasy, or horror book. (*NOTE*: Over the years, LSF has expanded the concept of book to include comics, graphic novels, videotapes, "books on tape," etc. If you want – or if you're feeling particularly wealthy – you can even make it *several* favorite books or whatever.) New or used, it makes no difference, as long as it's one of your favorites!

(2) Insert a piece of paper (or bookmark) with your name on it. That's so whoever eventually ends up with the item will know who it's from and will get to know a little about you – at least to know what one of your "favorites" is.

(3) Wrap up the exchange item, but don't put any identifying marks or anything on the wrapped package to say who it's from. That's to make sure it's a "blind" exchange – *i.e.*, no one is supposed to know who it's from at first. (And all that leftover Holiday wrapping paper should come in handy here!)

(4) At the meeting, add your wrapped exchange item to the pile with all the others; and you'll be assigned a number. (Only one exchange item – *i.e.,* one package per person, please!)

(5) When your number is called, you pick one of the packages from the pile. And when you open it up, you'll find out who it's from. See how easy?

I can hardly wait to see what shows up *this* year!

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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 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 January 20, 2026.

Here are the details for the next several discussions:

January 22, 2026 – *This World Is Not Yours*, by Kemi Ashing-Giwa; moderator: Tim.

February 26, 2026 – *Gideon the Ninth*, by Tamsyn Muir: moderator: Tod.

March 26, 2026 – *Klara and the Sun*, by Kazuo Ishiguro; moderator: Zena.

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***** January 11, 2026 Meeting *****

The next LSF meeting will be held on **Sunday, January 11th**. 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 and will feature the annual LSF Book(ish) Exchange. Hope to see you there!

What's Inside?

Two Sleeps

info passed along by Carl

It all started with a discussion initiated by Karl ("with a K") at the December LSF meeting. Karl mentioned that he's noticed that he wakes in the middle of the night, does "stuff" for an hour or so, and then goes back to bed. And he said he'd found information talking about this type of behavior, which was described as "two sleeps." (Similarly, Carl – "with a C" – cited his own experience with occasional voluntary or unexpected mid-day naps.)

As it seems, "two sleeps" – also known as "biphasic" or "segmented" sleep – was the historical norm before the Industrial Revolution and electric lighting shifted us to a single, consolidated sleep pattern (aka a "monophasic" sleep pattern). People would sleep in two distinct chunks: for example, sleeping from about 9 PM to Midnight ("first sleep"), then wake for a few hours ("the watch"), and then sleep again until dawn ("second sleep"). This biphasic sleep pattern involved an active period in the middle of the night for socializing, chores, prayer, etc. A common practice of modern biphasic sleep is a nap – or short period of daytime sleep – in addition to nighttime sleep.

The biphasic sleep pattern (and its implications) is explored by A. Roger Ekrich in his book *At Day's Close: Night in Time's Past* (2005). The book is described as "a fascinating and colourful social history of the nighttime in the pre-Industrial era" (from the late medieval period to the Industrial Revolution). Ekrich's research has turned up a multitude of citations for biphasic sleep and nighttime wakefulness, including Chaucer's 14th Century *Canterbury Tales* (in the Wife of Bath's tale).

I'm looking forward to reading *At Day's Close*. In the meantime, it's nice to know that there's historical precedent for Karl's middle-of-the-night wakefulness and Carl's mid-day naps.

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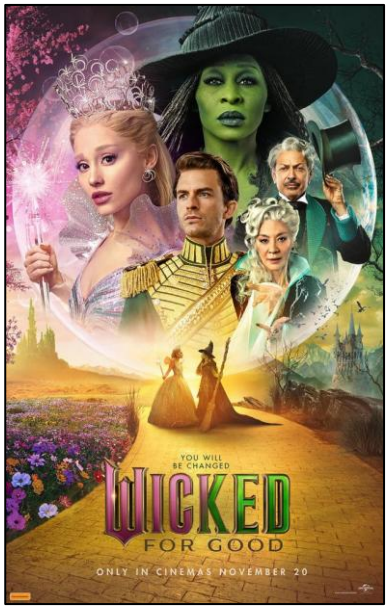
Minutes of the December 2025 LSF Meeting

taken by Scott

There were only 6 attendees – probably because: (1) it's December; (2) it snowed last night; and (3) it's COLD! [Ye Olde Editor's Note: We talked about a bunch's stuff – much of it non-genre – that Scott didn't take notes on.]



The trailer for producer James Gunn's *Supergirl* movie is now out. Milly Alcock plays Kara Zor-El/Supergirl. Rob described the character as "a hot mess." Peter & Rob enjoyed *Wicked: For Good* ("Wicked Part II"). It includes the origins of the Scarecrow, Tin Man and Cowardly Lion.

Rob expressed dismay over the 2nd season of James Gunn's *Peacemaker* series on Max: "Goofy fun, but disturbing." The final season of Netflix's *Stranger Things* has arrived – three episodes are to be released on Christmas Day; the final episode is set to be released on New Year's Day. Rob advised that some fans who have watched the *Starfleet Academy* YouTube clip have called it "Starfleet 90210."

Carl mentioned that tryptophan has been identified on asteroid Bennu. (*See article on page 4 of this newsletter*.)

Upcoming Events: Rob reported on the LSF New Year's Eve party and the annual LSF Book-ish Exchange slated for the January 2026 LSF meeting. (*See article on page 1 of this newsletter*.)

Upcoming LSF book discussions: *This World Is Not Yours* by Kemi Ashing-Giwa (January); *Gideon the Ninth* by Tamsyn Muir (February); *Klara and the Sun* by Kazuo Ishiguro (March).

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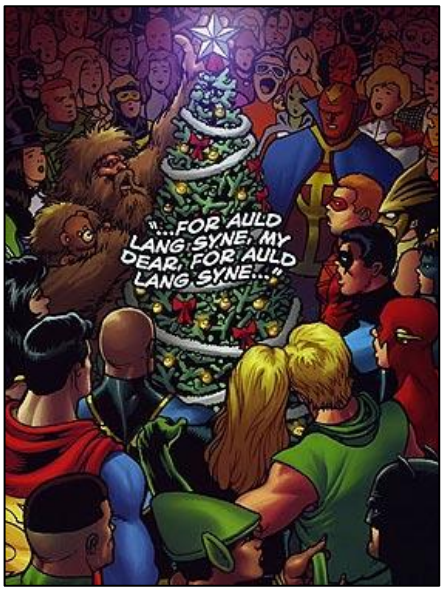
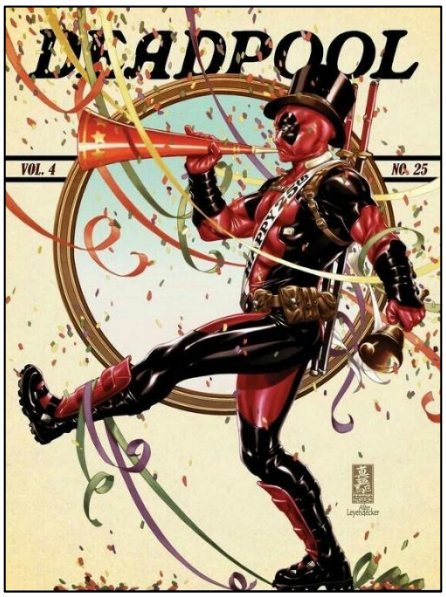




Happy New Year Wishes to all LSFers and their friends!

Weird Exo-planet Discovered

info passed along by Carl

We all know there's some really weird stuff out there; and now a newly-discovered exo-planet is causing a lot of raised eyebrows in the science community, as reported on December 16th in *The Astrophysical Journal Letters*.

The James Webb Space Telescope discovered an exoplanet located about 2,300 light years away, and it's unlike any other known world. Officially labelled PSR J2322-2650b, it challenges existing theories of the formation of planets. Said study co-author Peter Gao (Carnegie Earth and Planets Laboratory in Washington): "I remember after we got the data down, our collective reaction was 'What the heck is this?' It's extremely different from what we expected."

PSR J2322-2650b is roughly the mass of Jupiter but has been pulled into a bizarre lemon shape by the intense gravity of its host star. It has an atmosphere unlike any ever seen before, an exotic mix dominated by helium and carbon. Michael Zhang (University of Chicago, principal investigator on this study) says: "This is a new type of planet atmosphere that nobody has ever seen before. Instead of finding the normal molecules we expect to see on an exoplanet — like water, methane, and carbon dioxide — we saw molecular carbon, specifically C_3 and C_2." Temperatures on the planet range from 1,200 degrees Fahrenheit at the coldest points of the night side to 3,700 degrees Fahrenheit at the hottest points of the day side. Molecular carbon is very unusual because at these temperatures, if there are any other types of atoms in the atmosphere, carbon will bind to them. Molecular carbon is only dominant if there's almost no oxygen or nitrogen. Out of the approximately 150 planets that astronomers have studied inside and outside the solar system, no others have any detectable molecular carbon.

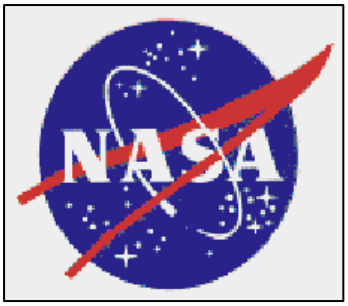
The amount of carbon and helium in the atmosphere implies that thick, sooty clouds probably drift across

the sky. Scientists theorize that deep inside the planet these carbon materials condense under pressure into actual diamonds.

PSR J2322-2650b orbits its star, a city-sized pulsar (fast-rotating neutron star) that weighs as much as our Sun. Its orbit is extremely close, only about one million miles from the pulsar. (In contrast, Mercury orbits the Sun at a distance of about 40 million miles.) Due to its tight, fast orbit, PSR J2322-2650b completes its "year" in just 7.8 hours. (Mercury orbits the Sun in 88 days.) Because the pulsar mostly emits gamma rays and other high-energy particles (which the Webb cannot detect), the atmosphere of the planet can be studied in great detail without a bright star in its way. Gravitational forces from the much heavier pulsar are pulling the Jupiter-mass planet into a bizarre lemon shape. Only a handful of pulsars are known to have planets; and this is the only example of a gas giant (with mass, radius, and temperature similar to a hot Jupiter) orbiting a pulsar.

How the planet came to be is a mystery. The star and its exoplanet could be considered a "black widow" system, but it's not a typical example. Black widow systems are a rare type of double system where a rapidly spinning pulsar is paired with a small, low-mass stellar companion. Material from the companion streams onto the pulsar, causing the pulsar to spin faster over time and power a strong wind. That wind and radiation then bombard and evaporate the smaller and less massive companion. Like the spider for which it is named, the pulsar slowly consumes its unfortunate partner. But in this case, the companion is officially considered an exoplanet, not a star.

Michael Zhang: "Did this thing form like a normal planet? No, because the composition is entirely different.



Did it form by stripping the outside of a star, like 'normal' black widow systems are formed? Probably not, because nuclear physics does not make pure carbon. It's very hard to imagine how you get this extremely carbon-enriched composition. It seems to rule out every known formation mechanism."

The findings of this study highlight the abilities of the James Webb Space Telescope, without which the observation would not have been possible. The ability of the telescope to observe such a cold object so far away with so much sensitivity has opened a new, puzzling chapter in exoplanet research.

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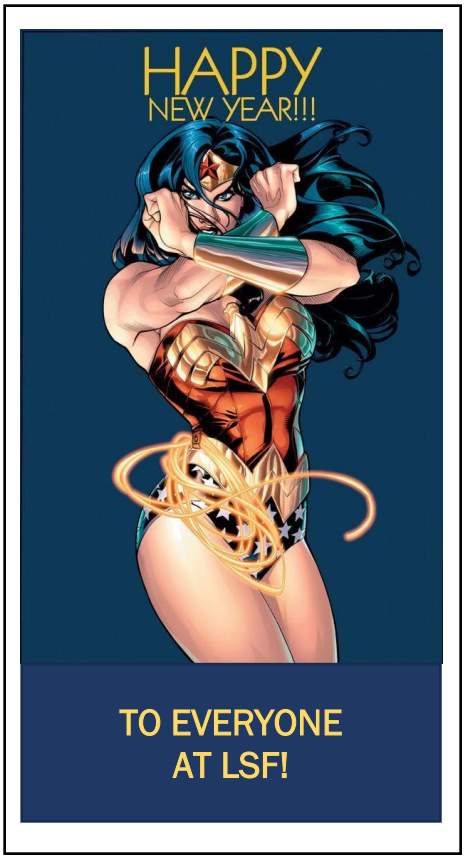

* * INFORMATION ABOUT LAMBDA SCI-FI: DC AREA GAYLAXIANS * *

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 LGBT people and their friends;
- provide forums for LGBT people and their friends to share their interest in SF/F/H;
- promote the presence of LGBT elements within SF/F/H and within fandom; and
- promote SF/F/H within the LGBT 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, January 11th, at Peter and Rob's home, 1425 "S" Street NW, Washington, DC** and will feature the annual LSF Book(ish) Exchange. 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

May 16-17, 2026 **HANACON**. "Anime, Art, Asian & Pop Culture Convention." Sheraton Baltimore North Hotel (Towson MD). Membership: $65 (until May 15, 2026); $70 thereafter and at the door. Website: www.HanaConAnime.com

May 22-25, 2026 **BALTICON 60**. Renaissance Baltimore Harborplace Hotel (Baltimore MD). Guests of Honor: Jim Butcher, Jennifer Blackstream, Elizabeth Leggett (Art GoH). Membership: $75 thru Feb. 29, 2026; then $80 thru April 15; then $85 thru May 15; $89 at the door (daily rates available). More details as they become available. Website: https://www.balticon.org/

July10-12 2026. **SHORE LEAVE 46**. "Celebrate Star Trek's 60th Anniversary." Lancaster Wyndham Resort & Convention Center (Lancaster PA). Names of celebrity guests on website. Membership: $130 for the weekend; daily rates available. Website: www.shore-leave.com

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/

October 2-4, 2026 **CAPCLAVE 2026**. Rockville Hilton & Executive Meeting Center (Rockville MD). Guests of Honor: Rebecca Roanhorse, Nino Cipri. Details as they become available. Website: https://capclave.org

Amino Acids on Asteroid Bennu

info passed along by Carl

NASA's OSIRIS-REx mission collected a sample from the asteroid Bennu back in 2020; and that sample was returned to Earth in 2023 for analysis (as reported in the January 2024 issue of the LSF newsletter). Scientists are particularly interested in the asteroid's make-up, because it's thought to reflect the early Solar System and to offer clues about the origins of life.

Previous studies of the Bennu sample have already identified 33 amino acids, including 14 of the 20 used by life on Earth – plus all five genetic nucleo-bases ("the building blocks of DNA and RNA").

According to a new study (as published on Nov. 24, 2025 in *PNAS*, the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences), the Bennu sample *also* includes tryptophan. In case that word sounds familiar, it's because tryptophan is the amino acid often linked to post-turkey-dinner drowsiness. (*Too bad I didn't know about this piece of information in time for the November 2025 newsletter!*)

Says José Aponte (an astro-chemist at NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center and co-author of the new study): "Finding tryptophan in the Bennu asteroid is a big deal, because tryptophan is one of the more complex amino acids, and until now it had never been seen in any meteorite or space sample."

The findings support the idea that the ingredients for life might have been present in space and delivered to Earth via asteroids. However, researchers urge caution and that further testing is needed to confirm the findings of the new study. But, they say, the pristine condition of the Bennu sample makes terrestrial contamination unlikely.

For all the details of the study (in great detail, *very* technical), go to: *PNAS*

For more information about the OSIRIS-Rex mission and the Bennu sample, go to: https://science.nasa.gov/mission/osiris rex/

For a "NASA's Curious Universe" interview with José Aponte, go to: How NASA Found the Ingredients for Life on an Asteroid - NASA

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Asteroid Bennu (NASA)