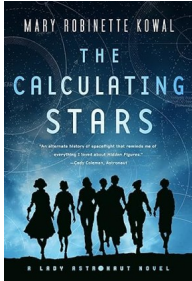




Lambda Sci-Fi

DC Area Gaylaxians



The Calculating Stars
By Mary Robinette Kowal
Discussed April 2026

Dramatis Personae

- Elma York – mathematician; former WASP pilot; “the Lady Astronaut”
- Nathaniel York – Elma’s husband; rocket scientist (formerly with Manhattan Project & NACA); IAC lead engineer
- Hershel Wexler – Elma’s brother; polio victim
- Col. Stetson Parker – USAF; lead astronaut
- Norman Clemons – Director IAC
- Helen Holmes – computer
- Myrtle Lindholm
- Maj. Eugene Lindholm – USAF; Myrtle’s husband
- Helen (Huilang) Liu – computer
- Nicole Wargin – former WASP pilot
- Betty Ralls – journalist
- Senator Kenneth Wargin – Nicole’s husband; Senator from Kansas
- Members of the 99s Flight Club & the Kansas City Negro Aeronautics Club
- The astronauts and astronettes, flight crews, ground crews and IAC teams
- Acting President Brannan – Secretary of Agriculture for the Dewey Administration; senior post-Meteor survivor of the presidential order of succession

Discussion Questions

1. Did you finish the book? If not why?
2. There’s a lot going on in this book: ecological disaster; space race and scientific advances; social commentary (misogyny & racial discrimination); mental health issues; etc. How did you feel about the inclusion of all these issues in the novel?
3. Elma York is the main POV character. How effective was this for you in highlighting the various issues and themes in the story? What about the other characters?
4. If you are familiar with any of the following books or films, how does *The Calculating Stars* compare?
 - For All Mankind (Apple TV series, 2019 to date)

- “Apollo Rising” novels by Alan Smale: *Hot Moon* (2022), *Radiant Sky* (2024), and *Burning Night* (2025)
 - *Hidden Figures*: 2016 film, based on the 2016 book by Margot Lee Shetterly
 - *When Worlds Collide*: 1951 film, based on the 1933 novel by Philip Wylie & Edwin Balmer
5. What’s your opinion on the feasibility of the IAC’s “big plan to save humanity”?
 6. How realistic did you find the author’s depictions of social and international conditions in the 1950s and 1960s? For example:
 - Worsening climate predictions (with associated food riots, population problems, etc.).
 - Denials of worsening climate predictions & fundamentalist anti-IAC activities.
 - International tensions and/or cooperation.
 7. Each chapter is introduced by a news excerpt either based on or directly taken from contemporary news media. How effective did you find this in providing you with context?
 8. If you listened to the audio version, what did you think about MRK as the narrator?

Other Information

The Calculating Stars Awards (2018):

- Hugo (Best Novel)
- Nebula (Best Novel)
- Locus (Best Science Fiction Novel)
- Sidewise (Best Long Form)
- *The Lady Astronaut Universe* – short-listed for Hugo for Best Series (2021)

Stories & Novels in the “Lady Astronaut” Universe:

- “We Interrupt This Broadcast” (2013, *The Mad Scientist’s Guide to World Domination*, also available at <https://maryrobinettekowal.com>)
- *The Calculating Stars* (2018)
- “Articulated Restraint” (February 2019, *Reactor*)
- *The Fated Sky* (2018)
- “The Lady Astronaut of Mars” (2012, *Tor.com*, also available at <https://maryrobinettekowal.com>) – Hugo Award for Best Novelette
- *The Restless Moon* (2020)
- *The Martian Contingency* (2025)
- “The Phobos Experience” (July 2018, *Fantasy & Science Fiction Magazine*)
- “Amara’s Giraffe” (2018, available at <https://maryrobinettekowal.com>)
- “Rockets Red” (2015, available at <https://maryrobinettekowal.com>)
- “In the Moon’s House” (July 2024, *Reactor*)
- *Silent Spaces: Short Stories from the Lady Astronaut Series* (in Kickstarter)