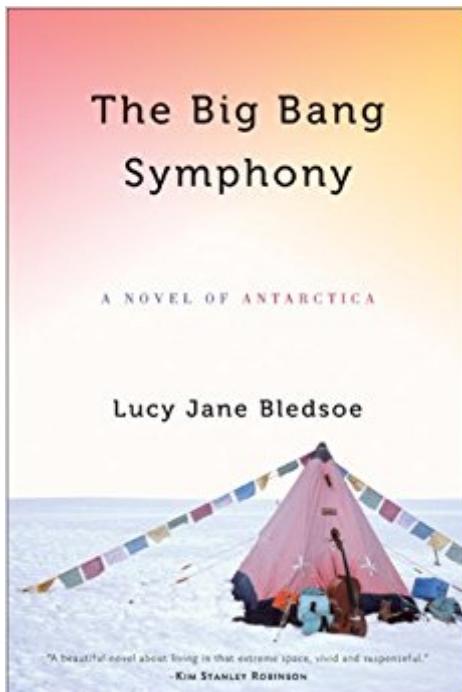


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The Big Bang Symphony: A Novel Of Antarctica



Synopsis

Antarctica is a vortex that draws you back, season after season. The place is so raw and pure, all seal hide and crystalline iceberg. The fishbowl communities at McMurdo Station, South Pole Station, and in the remote field camps intensify relationships, jack all emotion up to a 10. The trick is to get what you need and then get out fast. At least that's how thirty-year-old Rosie Moore views it as she flies in for her third season on the Ice. She plans to avoid all entanglements, romantic and otherwise, and do her work as a galley cook. But when her flight crash-lands, so do all her plans. Mikala Wilbo, a brilliant young composer whose heart and music have been frozen since the death of her partner, is also on that flight. She has come to the Ice as an artist-in-residence, to write music, but also to secretly check out the astrophysicist father she has never met. Arriving a few weeks later, Alice Neilson, a graduate student in geology who thinks in charts and equations, is thrilled to leave her dependent mother and begin her career at last. But from the start she is aware that her post-doc advisor, with whom she will work in Antarctica, expects much more from their relationship. As the three women become increasingly involved in each other's lives, they find themselves deeply transformed by their time on the Ice. Each falls in love. Each faces challenges she never thought she would meet. And ultimately, each finds redemption in a depth and quality of friendship that only the harsh beauty of Antarctica can engender.

Finalist, Lambda Literary Awards Finalist, Ferro-Grumley Award for LGBT Fiction, awarded by the Publishing Triangle Finalist, Northern California Independent Booksellers Association Honorable Mention, Foreword Magazine's Gay/Lesbian Fiction Book of the Year Best Books for General Audiences, selected by the Public Library Association

Book Information

Hardcover: 344 pages

Publisher: University of Wisconsin Press; 1 edition (May 6, 2010)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0299235009

ISBN-13: 978-0299235000

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 1.2 x 8.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 9.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.7 out of 5 stars 7 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #1,941,194 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #53 in Books > Gay & Lesbian > Travel #143 in Books > Literature & Fiction > History & Criticism > Genres & Styles > Short

Customer Reviews

The raw emotions of three women in Bledsoe's fifth novel (after *Biting the Apple*) lead to often explosive interactions among scientists, artists, and other lost souls marooned in Antarctica. A crash-landing and the discovery of a long-frozen body bonds Mikala Wilbo, a composer, to Rosie Moore, a cook beginning her third season at McMurdo research station. Rosie, a woman with nomadic tendencies and no familial ties, longs for a real home and swears this season will be her last. Mikala, meanwhile, is in Antarctica on an artist's grant but also has a powerful secret motive. After the crash survivors are rescued and transported via snowmobiles to McMurdo, Mikala acknowledges her crush on Rosie, who is lusting after someone else. Then arrives Alice Neilson, a geologist who rooms with Rosie to perhaps untoward results. Bledsoe digs into themes of individuality and lonesomeness, and the idea of safety in numbers, and though the narrative's introspectiveness can at times be as daunting as the Antarctic's harsh climate, Bledsoe finds the spark of life amid the ice and desolation. (May) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Bledsoe skillfully orchestrates the lives of an intriguing set of characters gathered at an outpost in Antarctica. Rosie, whose dad was a vagabond Dead Head, is beautifully feral and cooks for the scientific team. Composer Mikala, grieving after the death of her lover Sarah, is part of Antarctica's artists-in-residence program and hopes the South Pole will shock some music out of her as she strives to musically represent the big bang theory being studied there. And there's geology grad student Alice, whose manipulating smother-mother has tried to keep the young scientist from this journey, which could jump-start her career. All this in a genuinely entertaining read whose setting (where priorities are sex first, food second, sleep third) is as much a character as the quirky humans. In fact, Bledsoe uses the locale's incredible beauty and high potential for drama, danger, and self-discovery for insights small and great as the women react to the sun's breathtaking glint on the ice and, conversely, to the power of an unmerciful environment that so quickly turns deadly.

--Whitney Scott

There are 4 main characters in this well wrought novel: the Antarctic environment itself, and 3 very different women, who for different reasons and in different capacities (cook, geologist, musician-in-residence), are residing on this austere, beautiful continent. The interaction between

them and the other characters in the book it very well thought out, and the story is intriguing and elaborate. Highest recommendation. I enjoyed reading Ms. Bledsoe's "This Wild Silence" when it came out (years ago), and I enjoyed "The Big Bang Symphony" even more. The Antarctic brings out the best and the worst in people.

If you are trying to find yourself, what better place is there than Antarctica? All you see in any direction is a whole continent of ice, nothing to distract you. Or is there? The Big Bang Symphony is set at McMurdo Station, the major base at the South Pole, and the surrounding out camps where there is more going on than most people would suspect. People come and go seeking high paying jobs, adventure, or spiritual purification. Some are seeking all three. Into this environment come Rosie Moore, Mikala Wilbo and Alice Neilson. Rosie is the veteran, having spent previous seasons working on the station as a cook. Her interest is in making enough money to finally buy a ranch in Montana and then getting out without any entangling relationships. What you get is often not what you want. Mikala is running from and to something. A recognized musical genius, she wants to escape the memory of the lover she lost and find the father she never knew, while creating a symphonic representation of the Big Bang. Alice is looking for a life. She can have an illustrious career in geology if she can just get away from her mother. To Alice, who has never been away from home before, starting with a trip to Antarctica seems logical, but how to deal with her emotions is totally beyond her. As each one stumbles through her life at the station, she finds an answer, just not the one for which she was looking. Bledsoe uses the South Pole as a metaphor for the search that each person goes on to find meaning in a life. The ice desert is beautiful and frightening and magnetic. It also provides a sterile environment for the characters to work in, one where they can pare their lives down to the bare minimum and see what is important. That is almost as frightening as the dangerous potential of the ice. This isn't an easy book to read. The environment is vast and the characters seem to wander all over it. It may take the reader a while to see where each of these women is heading and there's no real romance, mystery or adventure to sweeten the journey. This is in no way a "typical" lesbian novel. One of the characters is a lesbian, but that plays little part in her story. Readers are going to have to be willing to work a little harder for this story and stretch their minds further than usual, but the journey is worth it. Outstanding writing always is.

In *The Big Bang Symphony* by Lucy Jane Bledsoe, the reader is treated to a glimpse of life in one of the planet's least forgiving ecosystems, the frozen environs of Antarctica. From the first chapter, Bledsoe makes it clear that the Arctic is a place that is at once beautiful yet wonderful with

unforeseen hazards and the unpredictability of nature. In this frozen wilderness, life of any kind is tolerated but never nurtured and can be extinguished in the flash of a sudden storm. The three main characters, Rosie Moore, Mikala Wilbo, and Alice Neilson travel to Antarctica seeking different forms of escape. And all three find unexpected connections, joined together by the ethereal music of the Big Bang. Rosie, seeks to find herself in the loneliness of the arctic wilderness, but she finds only isolation without solitude. She is alternately brooding and reckless as she flings herself headlong into relationships, like a woman plunging into a storm, seeking something neither seen nor sensed, but ardently desired: warmth, safety, and a sense of home. Mikala goes to Antarctica in an attempt to transform the music of the earth's creation into a symphony. In the process, she seeks to develop a relationship with a father she has never known but against whom she has held a lifetime of resentment. She also seeks to transform her crush on Rosie, who is painfully straight, into something that will help her to move beyond the death of her former lover. Similarly, Alice, a graduate student in geology, seeks to escape from her dominating mother into a life of her own. Yet even after having travelled to end of the earth, she still finds it difficult to find her own space. Ultimately each woman hears the music of the earth's formation deep within the ice and snow and each is transformed by it. None of the three finds exactly what she thought she was looking for, but rather each finds the unexpected thing that she needed most. In *The Big Bang Symphony* Bledsoe offers us a glimpse of life in Antarctica that can only be gleaned firsthand. The main character in this novel is the land itself, yet it is neither the protagonist nor the antagonist. It is a benignly indifferent presence that can never be taken for granted and never mastered.

Really enjoyed this one. Makes me want to go to Antarctica. Complex characters in a complex environment. I find the vastness and cold hard to grasp, yet you could feel it everywhere in the book. Yes, too bad that the lesbian's relationship happened off the page, but really, her trip to Antarctica was about something else entirely. I always like Bledsoe for writing about characters that are not always likeable, but so interesting that you want to know more about them. Very satisfying.

This was really an interesting book. Bought it to read before my trip to Antarctica and it gave me incite to trying to live there.

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