



Lambda Sci-Fi

DC Area Gaylaxians

(202) 232-3141 – Issue # 397 – April 2023

E-MAIL: info@lambdascifi.org

WEBSITE: www.lambdascifi.org

LSF Tax Day Tabletop Gaming Party announced by Peter



All attendees **MUST** be fully vaccinated.

What: It's a gaming party. There's plenty of room for gaming, so please bring your favorite games (cards, board, etc.).

When: Saturday, April 15 – 2:00 PM to 11:00 PM or so.

What to Bring: Bring your favorite table game (or two or three). Also, please bring munchies and/or soft drinks to share (non-alcoholic please).

Dinner: For those who are interested, we'll order pizza for dinner. To get in on the pizza order, please bring \$10 in exact change. If you don't want pizza, you can order take-out or go forage for food. There are a lot of food choices in the Midcity (14th and U) Corridor. Also, delivery menus will be available if needed.



Where: Home of Peter and Rob, 1425 "S" Street NW, Washington, DC. Their home is in the Midcity (14th and U) neighborhood between Dupont Circle and Logan Circle.

Directions (with Metro & parking advice) at:

<https://www.lambdascifi.org/peterrob/>

Questions: Contact Peter at:

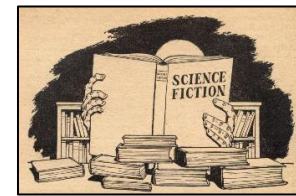
Peter@lambdascifi.org

Remember: All attendees **MUST** be fully vaccinated.

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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 April 27th. **All attendees MUST be fully vaccinated.**

Here are the details for the next couple of months:

April 27 – *Queers Destroy Science Fiction*, anthology edited by Seanan McGuire (moderator: Carl).

May 25 – *Of Wars, and, Memories, and Starlight*, collection by Aliette de Bodard (moderator: Andy).

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***** April 9, 2023 Meeting *****

The next LSF meeting will be held on Sunday, April 9th. The meeting will be held at Peter and Rob's home, **1425 "S" Street NW, Washington, DC**. **All attendees MUST be fully vaccinated.** The doors open at 1:30 PM and the meeting will begin at 2:00 PM. Hope to see you there!



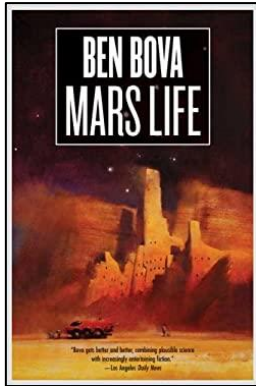
What's Inside?

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Mars Life
by Ben Bova
(Tor Books, 2008)
a short review by Carl



As previously stated, I found Ben Bova's penultimate novel *Uranus* to be a disappointing read. (See my review in the March 2021 LSF newsletter.) I'm a long-time fan of Bova's so-called "Grand Tour" series, a dozen or so loosely-connected novels that collectively explore all of the Solar System's major bodies – but my experience with *Uranus* was such that I figured I'd have to think twice before going back to read any of the others. And then the Fates intervened. I was visiting southeastern Arizona over the Holidays and stopped off at the small desert town of Willcox. As I have on previous occasions, I dropped into the Friends of the Library bookstore – and there I found a hardback copy of *Mars Life*, one of Bova's earlier "Grand Tour" novels – cost: \$3.00. So I took the hint and purchased it – and finished it in a couple of days. A satisfying read.

Navajo geologist Jamie Waterman has a long and notable history with the Red Planet. His first trip to Mars was as part of a 13-person international scientific team (as told in the 1992 novel *Mars*). They stumbled across empty, unidentified ruins below the canyon rim of the Valles Marineris – but no signs of the builders (no art, no artifacts, no other physical remains). Waterman returned to Earth as a hero, traveling the world making speeches in support of efforts for a return mission to Mars. It took six

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**Minutes of the
March LSF Meeting**
taken by Scott

Peter and Rob passionately described their recent vacation to Disneyland, including Galaxy's Edge. And Wess proudly displayed his newly-purchased custom-made Astromech droid that he built at Disneyland. (It cost around \$180.)

Movie News

David enjoyed *Ant-Man and the Wasp: Quantumania*. He described Kang the Conqueror as the new Marvel Thanos-type villain. Everyone loves actor Brett Goldstein as Hercules. Did you know that Cassie Lang – Scott Lang's daughter – becomes Young Avenger member Stature?

Oscar Awards are announced tonight! Nominations include genre titles like *Everything Everywhere All at Once* and *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever*.

Rob reported that *Dungeons & Dragons: Honor Among Thieves* (Paramount Pictures) is coming out this month. Based on previews, Carl said he thought that *65* (the new sci-fi dino-thriller starring Adam Driver) looks ridiculous.

TV News

Peter reported that he binge-watched Apple TV Plus's *Severance*, where non-work memories are separated from work memories. Rob is enjoying the third season of *Picard*, after being underwhelmed with the first two seasons. (Lots of nostalgia! Will George Takei make an appearance?) It was also noted that Annie Wersching (the Borg Queen from *Picard*) has died. The popular HBO series *The Last of Us* includes gay content. (Get out your box of tissues.)

Other News

Carl passed around a flyer for the 2023 PulpFest in Pittsburgh – it's a convention dedicated to Pulp Era literature. He also announced that Matt Ruff's new novel *The Destroyer of*

Worlds: A Return to Lovecraft Country book has been published – it's the sequel to *Lovecraft Country* (which spawned the popular TV series). He also mentioned that he'd recently read *October: The Story of the Russian Revolution* (2018), a nonfiction book by popular science fiction author China Mieville, that tells the story of the Russian Revolution in 1917. Carl reported on *CBS Sunday Morning*'s news story about the popularity of "mundane" video games, such as "Unpacking" and "Power Wash Simulator", and Steve described his own experiences with such games.

Peter reported on new permanent exhibits at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American History, which includes genre content under the topics of American culture and LGBTQ history.

Rob announced Nebula Award finalist titles in several major categories.

Upcoming LSF Events

Peter and Rob announced the LSF Tax Day Tabletop Gaming Party to be held on Saturday, April 15th.

Upcoming LSF book discussions: *Black Sun* by Rebecca Roanhorse (March); *Lightspeed Magazine: Queers Destroy Science Fiction, Special Issue* (April); *Of Wars, and Memories, and Starlight* by Aliette de Bodard (May).



Finally, Carl and Peter brought out a cheesecake to celebrate LSF's 33-year birthday! (The club has been around for 33 years? Wow!) ΛΨΦ



Mars Life continued from page 2

years to organize a much larger second Mars mission, with Waterman as the Director. But the rise of reactionary, fundamentalist organizations around the world ensured that no government would provide funding – so Waterman’s second Mars mission was sponsored by a consortium of corporations (as told in the 1999 novel *Return to Mars*). Waterman hoped to devote most of his time to a more extensive re-examination of the ancient cliff dwellings in the Valles Marineris, hoping to find out the secret of the planet’s past inhabitants. Unfortunately, he increasingly found himself needing to counter the demands of his corporate backers, who wanted to open up Mars for commercial exploitation, which he felt would interfere with any scientific study of the planet.

As *Mars Life* opens, Waterman and his wife have been brought back to Earth by the death of their son. Over the last few years, the New Morality has slowly been gaining power and influence throughout American society and government; and similar fundamentalist movements have been rising to power in other nations. Using “persuasion” and outright intimidation, these organizations have ensured that almost all news services and other media are no longer supportive of the “godless scientists” who, they insist, have manufactured evidence of life on Mars. As a result, the Mars mission might need to close down due to lack of funding. Dex Trumball, the Director of the Board in charge of Mars financing, believes that the only way to secure financing would be to open Mars up to wealthy tourists; but Waterman still resists the idea. Faced with the possible shut-down of the Mars mission, Waterman and his wife manage to return to Mars aboard the last of the scheduled supply ships. Meanwhile, a couple of the remaining scientific teams have made two great discoveries: evidence of surviving microbial life beneath the Martian regolith and a graveyard possibly containing the remains of members of the lost Martian race. Will Waterman compromise his long-held beliefs and allow Trumball to bring wealthy tour-

From Chile to Mars info passed along by Carl



Atacama Desert

From the Atacama Desert of South America to the red sands of Mars... There’s a connection here, trust me. You’ll see in just a bit.

The Atacama Desert is the driest non-polar desert in the world. It is located between mountain chains along the Pacific Coast of Chile, at an altitude of over three miles. Stretches of this stony desert plateau receive almost no rain at all, sometimes for decades at a time. It is also used by NASA as a test site for instruments to be used in future Mars missions.

One region in the Atacama – known as Red Stone – was a river delta

rists to Mars? Or will the New Morality and its allies force an end to all scientific research on the Red Planet?

Mars Life is classic near-future science fiction; it includes everything you’d expect from a thoughtful exploration of conditions on the Red Planet. And it’s certainly “topical” when you consider the potential of the U.S. Mars rover mission to identify signs of Martian microbial life. Unfortunately, *Mars Life* is also “topical” in light of the rise of anti-scientific fundamentalism of late, with its associated book banning, censorship, and “parental influence” over school curriculum. To my mind, one of the most horrifying scenes in the novel takes place in a middle school in Florida when a student’s art project – a meticulous and accurate model of the Timonium Base on Mars – has been rejected as “not an area that we can consider for class credit.” When Bucky (the student) asks for the reason, the teacher says this:

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about a 100 million years ago (during the age of dinosaurs). Its rust color is caused by deposits of hematite. This Red Stone area of the Atacama seems to be much like the plateau within Jezero Crater that is currently being explored by the Mars rover *Perseverance*; it too was apparently a river delta about 3 billion years ago, when Mars had a thicker atmosphere and liquid water on the surface.

For some time now, researchers have been using state-of-the-art equipment to probe Atacama rocks in an effort to locate previously-unknown signs of life. This February, they reported finding genetic fragments from a strange mix of microbes. Their report (in the journal *Nature Communications*) states that some of the DNA fragments are “so strange and different” that researchers could not identify any known relatives. Lead researcher Armando Azua-Bustos (a microbiologist at the Center for Astrobiology in Madrid) reported: “In almost half of the cases, the databases could not clearly say what we had in our hands.” He theorizes that these are “relic genetic material” from life forms long extinct and not previously documented.

But what, you ask, does this have to do with the search for life on Mars? Well, the same examination of Atacama soil samples was conducted in 2003 using versions of the instruments on the Mars rovers; and these earlier examinations could barely detect the microbial signatures at all – or entirely missed signs of life.

This has led scientists to conclude that the best hope of identifying possible signs of Martian life will be a multi-stage mission called “Mars Sample Return.” The plan is to land another spacecraft on the surface of Mars, which would also serve as a launchpad for the return voyage. Samples of Martian materials – which *Perseverance* continues to dig up and securely store – will be transferred to the lander and launched into orbit. Then the samples will be transferred to a European-built orbiter and carried back to Earth sometime early in the next decade, where they can be analyzed under the best possible conditions and using the most up-to-date instruments.

**** 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-generated (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 on Sunday, April 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

May 5-7, 2023 **GALACTIC DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION CONVENTION**. Pennsylvania Convention Center (Philadelphia PA) – Philadelphia Marriott Downtown (hotel). "Gaaays in Spaace (GIS) is an LGBTQ+ non-profit organization dedicated to advancing diversity and inclusion in Hollywood and the Aerospace industry." Guests include: Denise Crosby, Nana Visitor, Robert Picardo, Garrett Wang, and more. Membership available on-line: \$160 (+ \$11.32 fees) for the weekend; daily passes and various "executive" (more expensive) passes available. Website: www.dnicon.org

May 26-29, 2023 **BALTICON 57**. Renaissance Harborplace Hotel (Baltimore MD). GoH: Jane Yolen; Special Guest: John Scalzi (2023 Robert Heinlein Award Winner); Artist GoH: Ariel Burgess. Registration: \$75 until April 15; \$85 from April 16 to May 15; \$95 after May 15 and at the door. On-line registration. Website: <https://www.balticon.org/wp57/>

July 7-9, 2023 **SHORE LEAVE 43**. Delta Hotels Baltimore Hunt Valley (Hunt Valley MD). "Guests will be announced as soon as they are confirmed." Weekend membership: \$105 (daily rates available). On-line membership application if paying by credit card. Website: www.shore-leave.com

June 16-18, 2023 **AWESOME CON 2023**. Walter E. Washington Convention Center (Washington DC). Guests include: Billy Dee Williams; and many more to be announced. On-line registration: \$95 for the weekend; daily badges and various "premium" (more expensive) memberships available. Website: <https://awesome-con.com>

July 21-23, 2023 **CONFLUENCE**. Sheraton Pittsburgh Airport Hotel (Pittsburgh PA). Guest of Honor: Ada Palmer; Featured Artist: Susan Dexter; Featured Music Guest: Sassafra+. 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, Kameron Hurley. Registration details: \$55 until 5/31; then \$60 until 8/31; and \$65 thereafter. Website: <https://www.capclave.org/capclave23/>

Mars Life continued from page 3

"The school board feels that if we start teaching about Mars, then we'll have to get into Darwin and evolution and all that other controversial material. It's much easier to skip the entire business and stick with the curriculum as the school board has approved it."

"Darwin?" Bucky asked, puzzled. "What's Darwin?"

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