



# Lambda Sci-Fi

## DC Area Gaylaxians

(202) 232-3141 – Issue # 372 – March 2021

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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.

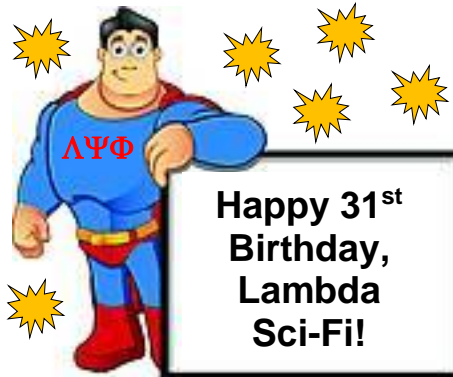
Before the COVID-19 shut-down orders, the LSF Book Discussion Group usually met on the 4th Thursday of every month, starting at 7:00 PM, at Peter & Rob's home: 1425 "S" St., NW – for directions or more details, call 202-483-6369. Now, book discussions are held virtually (same "4th Thursday" schedule). The next book discussion will be held on March 25 (via Zoom).

Here are the details for the next couple of discussions:

**March 25** – *Enter the Aardvark* by Jessica Anthony (moderator: Konrad).

**April 22** – *They Both Die at the End*, by Adam Silvera (moderators: Ben/Rob).

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The first club meeting was held on March 14, 1990, at the home of Loree and Marcelle Cook-Daniels. There were nine attendees. The minutes of that first meeting include the following information:

“As for ‘business,’ we decided to circulate and read the Gaylactic Network’s Principles and By-Laws, with an eye toward sooner or later deciding if we want to join as a subsidiary group; not to decide now about officers, name, structure, etc...”

When Al Weiner created the first issue of the club newsletter a month later, he called it “Lambda Sci-Fi” – and everyone thought that sounded like a great name for the club, too!

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### NASA's Perseverance Lands on Mars info passed along by Carl



On February 18th, NASA's science rover *Perseverance* safely landed on the floor of the giant Jezero Crater. *Perseverance* is the most advanced astrobiology laboratory ever sent to another world – its mission: to search for fossilized traces of ancient Martian microbial life at the site of a long-vanished lake bed.

This landing was the end of a journey lasting almost seven months and covering 293 million miles. The multi-stage spacecraft carrying the rover entered the Martian atmosphere at 12,000 MPH, angled to produce aerodynamic lift while jet thrusters adjusted its trajectory. It performed a complex series of maneuvers called “the seven minutes of terror” at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory. The landing itself was the risk-

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### << March 2021 LSF Meeting TO BE HELD VIRTUALLY >>

Due to Coronavirus concerns, we plan to hold the March 14th LSF meeting virtually. Anyone who would like to participate can contact Rob for virtual meeting information at [rob gatesdc@gmail.com](mailto:rob gatesdc@gmail.com). Hope to “see” you there!



### What's Inside?

Page 2: Minutes of the February 2021 LSF Meeting; Ben Bova (obituary).

Page 3: A Handful of Bova (book reviews).

Page 4: Information About LSF & Con Calendar.

## Minutes of the February 2021 LSF Meeting taken by Scott

### TV Stuff

Everyone is buzzed about *WandaVision!* (Billie as man-child. Evan Peters shows up. There was a Bova Easter egg in the first episode.) Jeffrey is enjoying *The Expanse*. Rob loves the plot development of *Resident Alien* (starring Alan Tudyk). A young Luke shows up in *The Mandalorian*. David mentioned NBC's *La Brea*: "disaster-themed drama about a massive sinkhole opens up in Los Angeles, revealing a whole separate primeval world." (Watch your step!) Also coming up on NBC is *Debris*, which sounds like *Roadside Picnic* (published in 1972). Not quite genre... *Heil Honey I'm Home* was discussed – a full uncut episode is available on You-Tube.

### Movie Stuff

Dan is looking forward to the new *Fantastic Four* movie. M. Night Shyamalan's *Old* movie is supposed to have a twist, but what will it be? Dan mentioned John Cusak's horror movies, including *Identity* and *Cell*.

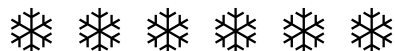
### Other Stuff

The abuses of Joss Whedon have been talked about for years. Bob had a reading of his "Remote Control" short story at this year's online Arisia convention. (He mentioned that the Kindle version is available for 99¢.) Rob provided a brief update on DC's DisCon convention. There was lots of non-genre discussion about vaccines and vaccinations. Teresa wants to play *Star Wars Fallen Order*. (Bob is playing the game as a full Jedi. He loves the graphics.) Bob wanted to know if PS5 games are "downward compatible" on PS4 – lots of input from the meeting attendees!

### Upcoming LSF Book Discussions

- *Glass Hotel* by Emily St. John Mandel (February)
- *Enter the Aardvark* by Jessica Anthony (March)
- *They Both Die at the End* by Adam Silver (April)

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**Ben Bova**  
1932 – 2020

Ben Bova was an American writer, the author of over 120 works of science fact and fiction. He was the long-time editor of *Analog Science Fact & Fiction* – for which he won six Hugo Awards for Best Professional Editor – an editorial director of *Omni*, and president of both the National Space Society and the Science Fiction Writers of America. He taught science fiction at Harvard University and the Hayden Planetarium in New York City. Bova died on November 29, 2020, from COVID-19-related pneumonia and a stroke.

Bova brought a wealth of experience to science fiction that few other authors could match. In the 1950s, he worked as a technical editor for Project Vanguard, the first U.S. effort to launch a satellite into space (1958). He worked as a science writer for Avco Everett Research Laboratory – AERL conducted research in lasers and fluid dynamics and built the heat shields for the Apollo 11 module. He went back to school in the 1980s, earning a Master of Arts in communications (University of New York at Albany, 1987) and an Education Doctorate (California Coast University, 1996).

Bova published his first novel, *The Star Conquerors*, in 1959, and followed it up with dozens of others in the following years, as well as numerous short stories that appeared in publications such as *Amazing Stories*, *Analog Science Fact and Fiction*, *Galaxy Magazine*, *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, and others.

His best-known works involve plausible stories about humanity's expansion into the universe and how we might

adapt to live in space. An example is his novel *Mars* (1992), about the first human expedition to the planet. He followed up that novel with a dozen or so others that have been called "the Grand Tour" series; they collectively explore all of the Solar System's major bodies. The latest installment is *Uranus* (July 2020), with the next novel, *Neptune*, scheduled for release in 2021. These visions of the future encompass a wide range of technological advances, along with the delights or horrors that result. In 2004, the *New York Times* described Bova as "the last of the great pulp writers".

In 1972, Bova became editor of *Analog Science Fact & Fiction*, after the death of long-time editor John W. Campbell in 1971. He broadened *Analog's* male-hero-based, hard-science ethos by embracing darker and more nuanced works from authors like Joe Haldeman, Spider Robinson, Vonda McIntyre, and George R.R. Martin. Bova left *Analog* in 1978 and went on to edit *Omni* from 1978 to 1982. He also edited several SF works, including *The Science Fiction Hall of Fame, Volume II* (1973) and *Nebula Awards Showcase 2008*.

Bova was also involved with various TV shows and films. He served as the science advisor for the TV series *The Starlost* (1973), although he resigned because they didn't give him the "contractual right to remove his name from the credits." In 1974, he co-wrote the screenplay for an episode of *Land of the Lost*: "The Search". He was hired in 2007 as a consultant on the film *Repo Men* (2010, starring Jude Law and Forest Whitaker), to provide insight into what the near future world might look like. In 2007, he also provided consulting services on the film adaptation of Richard K. Morgan's 2002 novel *Altered Carbon*.

Bova was awarded the Hugo Award six times by the World Science Fiction Society for his work as an editor. In 2005, he received a lifetime achievement award from the Arthur C. Clarke Foundation "for fueling mankind's imagination regarding the wonders of outer space." He was awarded the Robert A. Heinlein Award in 2008 for his work in science fiction.

## A Handful of Bova

book reviews by Carl

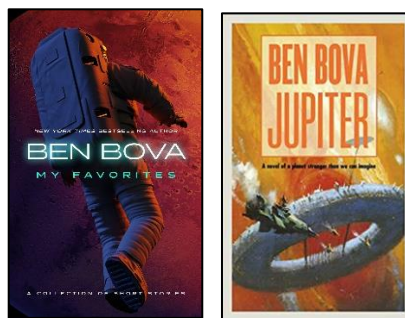
During his long writing career, Ben Bova wrote nearly 150 novels, anthologies, and books of nonfiction – and more than a hundred works of short fiction. I've enjoyed reading Bova off and on for many years; but he won't be everyone's cup of tea. His works tend to be very much in the style of "the Golden Age of SF" – more ideas and "hard SF" than characterization. In the April 2020 LSF newsletter, I reviewed *The Sam Gunn Omnibus* (Tor, 2007), a collection of Bova's "Sam Gunn" stories. Following Bova's death in November 2020, I decided to read and review a few more of his works.

*My Favorites: A Collection of Short Stories* (Blackstone Publishing, 2020)

This collection of his short fiction is one of the last two Bova books published before he died. It contains 14 stories that were first published between 1984 and 2014.

In his Introduction, Bova poses the question: Why *another* anthology? His answer: "Because the stories I write are like my children. I want them to see the light of day, to sparkle in the sunshine, to please the men and women who read them... So here are fourteen stories. From among all the short fiction I've written, these are my favorites."

I think this collection contains a good representative sample of the type of works that I'd come to enjoy over the years. There are plenty of stories here in which Bova depicts humanity's near-future exploration and exploitation of the Solar System – "hard SF" illustrated by the adventures of courageous individuals. Here are a few examples. "Monster Slayer" (2003) is one of Bova's "Harry Twelvetoos" stories, in which his Native American protagonist leaves the reservation to work in the construction industry and – after various misadventures – eventually winds up working on the construction of the first huge orbital habitat. In "Mars Farts" (2013), a maintenance crew is stranded out in the Martian desert after their rover is damaged in a micro-meteorite shower; while attempting to rescue themselves, they discover the source of the methane exhalations that



occasionally show up in the thin Martian atmosphere. There's even a "Sam Gunn" story: "Sam and the Flying Dutchman" (2003), which relates one of the irrepresible Mr. Gunn's adventures out in the Asteroid Belt. (I'd previously read this story in *The Sam Gunn Omnibus*.)

I was surprised by some of the stories in this collection – non-SF stories that didn't exactly fit my preconceived notions about "the Bova-style story". "Inspiration" (1994) and "The Café Coup" (1997) are clever time travel stories with significantly different results. "Scheherazade and the Storytellers" is a tongue-in-cheek historical fantasy – Bova's humorous tribute to the Science Fiction Writers Association (SFWA). One of my favorites is the non-F&SF story "We'll Always Have Paris" (2014); it's based on the classic 1942 film *Casablanca* and describes a meeting between Rick, Ilsa, and Captain Reynaud in La Belle Aurore Café *after* the liberation of Paris from the Nazis – a fascinating interpretation of the relationship between Rick and Ilsa and (I think) a fitting coda to their story.

I found *My Favorites* to be a delightful reading experience throughout.

*Jupiter* (Tor Books, 2001)

I dug through one of my deep "to read" piles to find this one. It's one of Bova's so-called "Grand Tour" stories, a dozen or so loosely-connected novels that collectively explore all of the Solar System's major bodies.

After a tumultuous period of wars, famine, terrorism, plagues, and socio-political upheavals, the major nations of the world have come under the control of conservative movements – in the United States, it's "the New Morality" – that are attempting to bring about their version of a "better life". When young Grant Archer graduates from college, he

hopes to be sent to the Moon's Farside Observatory so he can pursue his studies in astrophysics while fulfilling his four-year Public Service obligation. Instead, his New Morality advisor sends Grant to the Thomas Gold research station in orbit around Jupiter, where scientists are studying the oceans of Jupiter and several of its moons. The 20-year-old research station only continues to function because of pressure from "the global financial power structure" and the International Astronomical Authority – and because the all-important fusion plants that support Earth's enhanced living standards need the hydrogen and helium brought from Jupiter by automated scoop ships. The New Morality suspects that Gold Station's scientists are secretly performing unauthorized (and "subversive") research – looking for life in the Jovian atmosphere and ocean depths; and they order Archer to spy on the scientists and report back. Once he's actually on Gold Station, Grant learns there's actually more going on: a small group of scientists suspect there's some form of *intelligent* life in the Jovian depths, and they secretly plan to send a manned probe to find that life.

The novel is a fascinating "hard SF" exploration of possible conditions on Jupiter and life aboard an orbital station, combined with speculations on the nature of intelligence and a young man's quest to reconcile science and religious belief. Archer's adventures at Gold Station are apparently continued in a much later sequel, *Leviathans of Jupiter* (2011).

*Uranus* (Tor Books, 2020)

This is the last of the "Grand Tour" novels to be published prior to Bova's death. It's the first part of an unfinished trilogy involving the Outer Planets, with *Neptune* (Bova's final novel) to be published in 2021.

I wish I could recommend *Uranus*, but I can't. It contains precious little of the "Bova touch" that has attracted me to his other works. There's very little discussion of conditions on and around the planet Uranus – other than the fact of the planet's radical tilt (97.9 degrees from vertical, pretty much rolling around the sun) and that, unlike the other gas giant planets, it has no biosphere whatsoever – it's "sterile". There's also no real presen-

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**\*\* 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-gendered (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.

Annual membership fees are \$10, for which you will receive an e-mailed copy of this monthly newsletter and a membership directory. Newsletter submissions are always welcome.

Meetings are usually held on the second Sunday of each month at a private residence. Due to Coronavirus concerns, the Lambda Sci-Fi meeting for Sunday, March 14th, will be held virtually. We'll keep you informed of the status of future meetings.

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

April 16-18, 2021 **RAVENCON 15**. "We have cancelled the 2021 convention for safety reasons and have rescheduled for April 29-May 2, 2022, at Virginia Crossings hotel in Richmond, VA. Terry Brooks and Rhiannon's Lark are still our GOHs."

Website: <https://www.ravencon.com/>

July 9-11, 2021 **SHORE LEAVE 42** (rescheduled from July 2020). Delta Hotels Marriott Baltimore Hunt Valley (Hunt Valley MD). Actor GoH: Denis Lawson (*Star Wars* "Wedge Antilles"); Brandon Routh (Superman & The Atom); Robert Duncan McNeill (Lt. Tom Paris); Brent Spiner (Data); Alex Kingston (River Song). Membership: \$105 for the weekend (\$120 at the door); daily rates available. Printable registration forms & on-line registration available through the Registration Page.

Website: <https://www.shore-leave.com/info/update-2020-04-25.htm>

**A Handful of Bova**

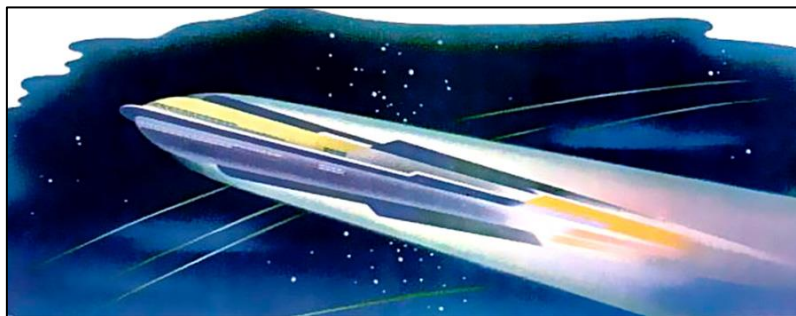
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tation of the mechanics of life aboard an orbital space station. *Uranus* is rather more representative of that type of Golden Age SF that seems kind'a "clunky" nowadays: characterization is minimal, even in the major characters. I found myself having to pretty much accept what characters say and do at face value, with no clear sense of their motivations or why they choose to do what they do. There were a number of times I even found myself saying "Wait... what?" when a character chose to take some action. The villains aren't much more than stereo-

typical "mustache-twirlers" (along the lines of Snidely Whiplash or Boris Badenov). The plot – such as it is – involves interpersonal and gender-based conflicts as well as social unrest caused by a drug cartel aboard *Haven*, the wheel-like station in orbit around Uranus. Other than occasional speculation about "what happened to make Uranus the way it is" (maybe an ancient alien invasion?), the novel could just as easily have been set in an American city during the 1950s.

I couldn't help but be disappointed by *Uranus*. It's sad – I'll need to think long and hard about whether to pick up a copy of *Neptune* when it's published.

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**Perseverance Lands on Mars**

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iest part of the mission. A supersonic parachute further slowed the craft's descent, followed by the deployment of a rocket-powered "sky crane" vehicle that flew to a safe landing spot in the crater, lowered the rover on tethers, and then flew off to crash a safe distance away. JPL mission managers burst into applause and cheers when radio signals confirmed that the six-wheeled rover had survived the descent and arrived within its target zone inside Jezero Crater.

Scientists hope to find biosignatures embedded in samples of ancient sediments that *Perseverance* is designed to extract from Martian rock. It's larger and packed with more instruments than the four preceding Mars rovers (such as *Curiosity*, which landed in 2012 and is still operating). *Perseverance* will build on previous findings that liquid water once flowed on the surface of Mars. Two subsequent Mars missions are planned in the next decade to retrieve the *Perseverance* samples and return them to NASA for analysis.

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