



The Big Bang Symphony: A Novel of Antarctica

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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

The Big Bang Symphony: A Novel of Antarctica Details

Date : Published May 6th 2010 by University of Wisconsin Press (first published 2010)

ISBN : 9780299235000

Author : Lucy Jane Bledsoe

Format : Hardcover 344 pages

Genre : Fiction, Gltb, Lesbian, Lgbt, Queer, Travel

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Sissy Van Dyke says

The Claustrophobia of Vast Spaces in The Big Bang Symphony by Lucy Jane Bledsoe

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.

Miriam Murcutt says

I very much enjoyed the Antarctic setting in Bledsoe's book, and also reading about the lives and motivations of the zany and flawed characters she created. The doses of science and music she introduced sat easily within her story and made this book into a wide-ranging and fascinating read. This is the second of Bledsoe's novels I have read, and I intend to read more. Great book. I highly recommend it.

Eileen says

Dull people do dull things in a dull place, all the while learning just the things they need in order to solve their most fundamental problem on returning to the USA. The most remarkable thing about this book is that it makes Antarctica seem boring.

Alena says

Really enjoyed this one. First grown-up book I could stick with in a while ;)

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.

Meg says

Beautifully told story of three different women who come to Antarctica for various reasons... and what they find there. Some of the plot elements would have felt cliched in the hands of a different writer, but instead they felt new and original because of the way they were narrated and the way the characters unfolded. I loved the way people in this novel inspire and challenge each other, not only through romantic passion but through other kinds of human connection as well. The final scenes were a little bit too neatly wrapped up (though I admit it satisfied my secret desire for a tidy ending to life!) but the characters' changes felt genuine and meaningful.

Colleen Irwin says

Enjoyed the premise~ Isolation in Antártica and subsequently the character development. All pretty unique. A quick read.

Elaine Burnes says

I liked it, but one thing that really irked me was that Mikala, the only lesbian, found her love off the page,

not at the Pole, with the others. Mainstream publisher, hardcover book, so you know she's successful, and what happens to the lesbian? Her story, her sexuality, gets short shrift. I don't know if it was exactly how Bledsoe wanted to tell it or if she bowed to pressure from the publisher, or the NSF for the grants she got to go to Antarctica. Aside from that, it's a lovely story. You can tell she spent time on the continent, because the sense of place is riveting. The sense of danger, too. That's a character right there. A definite theme. When you are facing possible death, have seen death, how does it change you?

Katie says

Shallow tripe.

Jesseb says

Another one of my "grab five books off of the new fiction shelf before my kids rip the pages out of anything" books, This book explores the long term ramifications of short-term relationships in an unforgiving environment. The writing was fantastic, the characters were well defined and believable, the descriptions of life at the pole were intriguing (5 stars). However, the book ended up being more about the vagaries of sexual hook-ups than anything else (1 star). An interesting look into hedonism and grief and the ways our past shapes our future.

Jill says

Good thing about the book: set in Antarctica;
Bad things about the book: not one likable or interesting character;
everyone having sex without emotion or relationship, let alone love and commitment;
a supposed friendship between three women that was never developed or explained, apparently based on nothing

Darlene Vendegna says

One of the best books I've read this year, or maybe ever. The author weaves a fascinating tale of the search for identity, family and purpose in a backdrop of frigid temperature in the sparse landscape and pristine surroundings of the Antarctic. I could not put it down and now I'm sorry I finished so soon. The novel is written from the perspective of three very different women, who all travel to the Antarctic for different reasons. One a line cook planning to earn money to help her finally find a place to call home. One a musician/composer mourning the loss of her lover, who wants to meet her birth father and find the inspiration to compose a symphony. The third woman is an exacting and very direct speaking geologist who has never traveled or lived away from home, trying to break ties with her controlling manipulative mother and find if she has the fortitude to make her own life. All of them have their lives changed in unexpected ways by the land they inhabit and by the intersections of their lives.

Arja Salafranca says

A novel about three women who journey to Antarctica: 30-year-old Rosie, back for her third season the ice; Mikala Wilbro, a composer there as part of the Writers' and Artists' programme, and Alice Neilson, a geologist. The three women meet at various points, although the story is told separately, and their connections are only established quite a way into the story. Mikala has lost her lover, a woman, and is seemingly unable to feel or love again. Neilson, in her late twenties has never left home and is tied to her increasingly psychologically dependent mother, while Rosie is set on avoiding all attachments. Antarctica is the real star and character of this book – in all its icy beauty. I loved this book – wanted to immediately journey to this place of extremes myself, fascinated by the “fishbowl” community of life at McMurdo Station. Not a brilliant book – it took too long for the characters to meet each other, and I felt there was some “stiffness” in the story telling and the meeting – but still such an enjoyable book, such an evocation and ode to Antarctica, and a small window on lesbian life.

Carla says

reading for end of july book club. makes me want to go to antarctica where it's cold, especially with the heat wave going on here. love the book. once i got past the first quarter of it, it got easier as it is a story told with three narratives so at first was a bit confusing and frustrating as i wanted to find out more about a particular character and then it would switch. it was a nice read considering the temperatures have been in the 3 digits here in atlanta. i was trying to cool off vicariously through the descriptions of ice, freezing temperatures and frozen landscapes.

Allyson says

Had the location not been antarctica, this would have been such a snooze. She may have received many writing awards but her language was too pedestrian for my taste. Cliques and common turns of phrase were rampant and not interesting at all. The story line was boring and her characters contrived. I only finished it since it was relatively short and fast paced, and not too annoying as some I have abandoned midway. Very disappointing actually.

Sandra Helen says

Fascinating novel about three women who travel to the South Pole to change their lives. Each is changed in a different, but believable, way. Rosie Moore wants to find her forever home (and will use the earnings from this trip to find it); Alice is finally leaving home for the first time at age 28; and Mikala is a composer seeking inspiration as well as her birth father. Their lives intersect, intertwine, and take interesting twists and turns along the way. The trip begins with a big bang and ends with music from THE big bang. Lucy Jane Bledsoe is a writer whose works I've discovered this year and look forward to for years to come.

