

Life Beyond Us: An Original Anthology of SF Stories and Science Essays

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Laksa Media (Apr 22, 2023)

Softcover \$25.00 (584pp)

978-1-988140-48-3

Pairing hard science fiction stories with essays about extraterrestrial life, *Life Beyond Us* asks metaphysical questions about definitions of life and sentience.

Fierce and imaginative, these are stories about first contact, establishing communication with alien species, and terraforming other planets and moons. The accompanying essays explore the geological, biochemical, and technological context of the tales as a jumping-off point for further research, delivering cutting-edge understandings of the universe. Most compelling are those stories that tackle the human element of space exploration, as with “The Dog Star Killer” and “The Lament of Kivu Lacus,” where people with terminal illnesses note life’s impermanence in the context of astronomical discovery, acknowledging that their work is finite; they shift their priorities to love, family, and the safety of their planets as a result.

While most of the stories feature human heroes, a few have extraterrestrial ones. “Lumenfabulator” and “Heavy Lies” experiment with biological and emotional differences between humans and other species, bolstering empathy by seeing through an extraterrestrial’s eyes—for those creatures who possess them. “They completely ignored us for years until it was in their own self-interest to pay attention,” one character observes. “If that isn’t the hallmark of a sentient species, I don’t know what is.” Herein, alien lifeforms come in many shapes, sizes, and chemical makeups; thus, multiple essays also work to answer the question “what is life?”, despite science not having an agreed-upon definition. Complex biological, technical, and physics concepts are rendered comprehensible and enlightening throughout.

Pairing science essays with science fiction stories, *Life Beyond Us* explores the cosmos to answer pressing philosophical questions; it is an extraordinary collection.

AIMEE JODOIN (May / June 2023)

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