

## How to Mars

**David Ebenbach**

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Six bold adventurers leave Earth behind forever in David Ebenbach's droll science fiction novel *How to Mars*.

Of the many applicants for a one-way excursion to Mars, six are selected, both for their scientific acumen and for their telegenic qualities. Destination Mars! isn't just a terraforming project: it's a reality television show, sponsored by a corporation that's in semi denial about its godlike aspirations.

Though there are hard conditions to being a part of Destination Mars!, the six agree to every rule. When Jenny and Josh flip the script by getting pregnant, it sends their community into crisis mode. The danger is not just from within, or from the resentful organizers on Earth: the unseen Martians, who are already wary of their visitors, are alarmed. They plot to reorganize the chaos.

*How to Mars* is a raucous joyride across the red planet. It discombobulates for the fun of it, and is sly in raising issues of voyeurism, consumerism, and the unholy combination of moneyed interests with science. Sweetness and melancholy wend into otherwise dire situations. A geologist learns to knit booties while the Martians try to make first contact; a technical engineer flirts with anarchy. The search for life in Mars's groundwater turns up little; the six are overwhelmed by frequent, unnecessary shipments of branded towels. And though the days are long, there's reason to stay active: "Mars ... may be dull, but only until your oxygenator stops working."

Among scenes that find the six establishing mundane Martian routines come riotous clips from the Destination Mars! handbook, flashbacks to the torturous tests that Destination Mars! subjected its applicants to, and notes from the field (both the Martian landscape, and the six's internal topographies). The combination is irresistible fun. Through its heartbreaks and surprises, *How to Mars* is an interplanetary delight.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (May / June 2021)

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