



A Journey in Other Worlds: A Romance of the Future

John Jacob Astor , S.M. Stirling (Introduction)

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What did our ancestors dream of when they gazed up at the stars and looked beyond the present? Wildly imaginative but grounded in reasoned scientific speculation, *A Journey in Other Worlds* races far ahead of the nineteenth century to imagine what life would be like in the year 2000. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, Earth is effectively a corporate technocracy, with big businesses using incredible advances in science to improve life on the planet as a whole. Seeking other planets habitable for the growing human population, the spaceship *Callisto*, powered by an antigravitational force known as apergy, embarks on a momentous tour of the solar system. Jupiter proves to be a wilderness paradise, full of threatening beasts and landscapes of inspired beauty, where the explorers must fight for their lives. Dangers less tangible but equally deadly await the *Callisto* crew on Saturn, which yields profound secrets about their fate and the ultimate destiny of mankind. Thoughtful, adventurous, and replete with a dazzling array of futuristic devices, *A Journey in Other Worlds* is a classic, unforgettable story of utopias and humankind's restless exploration of the stars.

A Journey in Other Worlds: A Romance of the Future Details

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From Reader Review A Journey in Other Worlds: A Romance of the Future for online ebook

M.G. Mason says

He is known as the most high-profile victim of the Titanic disaster that happened 100 years ago last week. Philanthropist, businessman and part of the American high society of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, John Jacob Astor IV published this futuristic tale in 1894 about a journey around our solar system and man's attempts to colonise his neighbours. I am absolutely astounded by the vision of the future that he created and the technologies he envisaged would exist in the year 2000:

- * Solar power
- * Mag lev
- * air travel
- * global telephone network
- * speed cameras!

...amongst other things. He couldn't expect to get everything right. He imagined the gas giants of Jupiter and Saturn to be worlds with solid surfaces upon which life was abundant and ripe for terraforming for human colonisation. In 1894 he had no way of knowing otherwise and in a world of pre-Einstein physics, naturally a lot he got wrong about the physical world. He also imagined a world still dependent on coal, the growth of electricity and a form of energy based on the premise of anti-gravity called "apergy". In this world, the two superpowers are the USA and the United Kingdom. Canada, Mexico and several other nations had chosen to join the USA. The UK rules Africa, eastern Europe, the middle east and all the way to the Pacific. Most other dialects are dying or dead in a world where the English language reigns supreme. In this world, no Great War would ever take place. I'm sure he would have seen the irony that he would be proven wrong just two years after his death.

The writing style is a hybrid of fiction and non-fiction. Lengthy chapters written in a documentary format as though in a history book are given over to explaining how this world came to be. It takes a while for the story proper to get going and the interludes feel jarring as the story halts for a lengthy exposition. This is the worst of the sins and if you can forgive that then you are in for a good old-fashioned science fiction adventure yarn for most of the first 3/4 of the book.

In the final quarter there is a lot of pseudoreligious commentary that sometimes borders on platitude. Couple this with the imperialistic and exploitative free market approach of the protagonists and it sometimes makes uncomfortable reading. The religious philosophising in particular, though made integral to the nature of the story as the characters go on personal journeys, becomes wearisome. But this was the product of its time not written by a radical like H.G. Wells but a member of high society in a free market world of American Exceptionalism and Christian imperialism.

Because of the age of the text, you just go with it when he discusses landing on the surface of Jupiter and Saturn and the lifeforms they discover there. He imagines biological life and an ecosystem much like our own and though you might chuckle at first, you soon settle in. It is little more than a minor irritation that the lifeforms are much like we have on Earth but with singing carnivorous flowers and other oddities it does make the environment alien enough.

It is a book that feels very much of its time even though you might feel pleasantly surprised at some of the

technology he imagines (scarily accurate as pointed out above) and uncomfortable that the journeys are effectively game shoots for the elite. It would have been more enjoyable had he stuck to the technology and left the propaganda aside.

I would recommend this if you are interested in Victorian sci fi and are already bored to death with the big names. However, it is never going to be considered a great American novel, except perhaps, by the likes of Rush Limbaugh and Glen Beck.

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Geoff says

I could not finish the book, as I lost interest. It started off exciting, and I liked that it tried to use hard science (for the time period). So I started off enjoying the book, but it jumped around, and the hard science explanations of this sci-fi tale started to get tedious. And this book started running longer than I would have liked. So, after sitting on my shelf abandoned for months, I decided to give up. It gets two stars as it is different, and that was an experience, so I was glad I tried the book. But unfortunately I could not finish it.

Trish says

Okay, so the first thing to say is that this needs to be treated as either fantasy, or science fiction dealing with exploration outside the Solar System (despite the adventures supposedly being on Jupiter, Saturn and Mars). The distance between Astor's imagination and scientific reality as we now know/believe it to be is immense, and therefore the "science" needs to be taken in the same spirit as Jules Verne or HG Wells. It is interesting to see what he thought the world would be like in 2000AD.

All in all, though, it was a bit of a struggle, and the last third to way too much into Christian theology without much story.

Debbie Zapata says

What do you do if you are one of the wealthiest men in the world and you are bored with your normal day to day activities? If you are John Jacob Astor, you write a book that will share your vision of what life will be like in far away year 2000.

The Terrestrial Axis Straightening Company will be hard at work to correct the tilt of the Earth and therefore provide a more temperate climate, and your three heroes will travel for six whole months in outer space, having grand adventures on both Jupiter and Saturn before returning home.

The book is a museum piece, but I was tickled with it. The science is naturally either outdated or too bizarre to ever have been factual, and the attitudes of the heroes are not exactly pc according to modern day standards, but I can usually overlook that when reading the antiquated books I enjoy. Someday I imagine people will be shocked at the attitudes revealed in our modern books, too.

The fun for me here was the idea of this incredibly wealthy man sitting down to imagine What If.....and then filling pages with his visions. Astor would have been a completely fascinating dinner guest. I would ask him How? and Why? and generally be totally nosy about the book. The fact that he was a passenger on the Titanic and went down with the ship adds poignancy to the story...I kept wondering if he would have written another book if he had survived.

Marsha says

Rather odd. Much less science in this fiction than, say, Jules Verne or H. G. Wells.

Wreade1872 says

Nope.. can't do it, i can't give this 2 stars. Part of me wants to, it has some interesting sci-fi elements and alien critters but its just too awful.

It's very dry and boring most of the time with an overly scientific style that also reacts very badly with the story, which is so unscientific. When its not being mind numbingly boring the characterization seems to be from a really bad pulp.

Then there's the religious stuff which manages to be both terrible on its own and still as dull as the science.

It has been quite some time since i've had such a painful reading experience, despite minor points of interest, such as one of the characters turning into Patrick Swayze (Ghost), this is a truly terrible book.

Go read 'A Honeymoon in Space by George Griffith' instead.

Sarah Stegall says

I think John Jacob Astor IV would have been fascinated by the machine that killed him. One hundred years ago, the *RMS Titanic* sank in the North Atlantic after being struck by an iceberg. Many people know that Astor was one of the victims, but most do not know that he was also the world's wealthiest science fiction author. Astor, the fourth of his name, inherited great wealth but also created plenty of his own. His real estate ventures include the building of the Astoria Hotel "the world's most luxurious hotel", which became the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel, one of the most famous in the world. Astor patented several inventions and helped develop a turbine engine. As an inventor, he would certainly have been impressed by the reciprocating steam engines of the ship he died on, not to mention the Parsons turbine that drove the propeller. There is no record of his touring the ship, but had he asked for one, he'd have gotten the red-carpet treatment. I can imagine JJ (as he was called) deep in conversation with *Titanic's* designer, Thomas Andrews, in a haze of cigar smoke and whiskey.

Such a scene could come right out of the pages of Astor's novel, *A Journey in Other Worlds*, which purports to be a story of interplanetary exploration in the year 2000, but which reads more like a catalog of future technological achievements. As with many 19th century "scientific romances", the emphasis is on the ideas, not the story or the characters. A large percentage of the novel consists of members of the white male elite standing around telling one another things they would normally know anyway, in classic "As you know, Bob" dialogue. When they aren't telling one another the diameter of Jupiter, they make speeches to faceless crowds or recite the "history" of the (white) race up to the year 2000, all of it in the most glowing, optimistic terms an educated imperialist can devise.

The plot, such as it is, is simple: having begun the process of tilting the Earth on its axis to a more beneficial angle, the masters of technology look around them for new challenges. They decide to travel to other planets to see if they are worth colonizing/exploiting. Far from the classic "sense of wonder", our explorers view the entire solar system as a warehouse of riches to be looted. Space travel is made easy with the use of *apergy*, the opposite force to gravity, a concept introduced by Percy Greg in his novel *Across the Zodiac* (1880). The nominal hero, Ayrault, accepts bids for a spacecraft specially outfitted with curtains and carpets that can be rolled up so as not to obstruct the view from the floor windows. Ayrault is careful to include gutters around the roof of the spacecraft in order to catch the rain on Jupiter, and to procure sufficient supplies of rattlesnake venom to ward off disease. Finally he and President Bearwarden and Dr. Cortlandt (an exceptionally long-winded "Government expert") ensure that they are properly armed:

"They found that, in addition to their medicine-chest, they would have to make room for the following articles, and also many more: six shot-guns (three double-barrel 12-bores, three magazine 10-bores), three rifles, three revolvers; a large supply of ammunition (explosive and solid balls), hunting-knives, fishing-tackle, compass, sextant, geometrical instruments, canned food for forty days, appliance for renewing air, clothing, rubber boots, apergetic apparatus, protection-wires, aneroid barometer, and kodaks."

The high level of firepower packed aboard the *Callisto* may speak as much to the origins of the Astor fortune in the fur trade, as to the expectation of hunting opportunities on the largest planet in the solar system. During their journey the *Callisto* passes Mars, and Ayrault carefully photographs its surface, thereby anticipating the Mariner IV mission 71 years later. Arriving on Jupiter, the trio crack a window to see if the air is okay, then venture out to explore. Astor sees the denizens of Jupiter pretty much as a dinosaur park, with flying lizards, enormous snakes and vampire bats. Their instruments of science are the guns, so as soon as they see something interesting, they shoot it to smithereens.

"On passing a growth of most luxuriant vegetation, they saw a half-dozen sacklike objects, and drawing nearer noticed that the tops began to swell, and at the same time became lighter in colour. Just as the doctor was about to **investigate one of them with his duck-shot**, the enormously inflated tops of the creatures collapsed with a loud report, and the entire group soared away." (Emphasis mine)

Having now established that they are on safari, rather than in an exploration team, the trio continue on, talking as they go, to discover that Jupiter holds gratifyingly vast reserves of exploitable resources such as gold, coal and oil. During their travels, they continue to congratulate themselves on being the heirs of such an advanced race, all the while naming various features of the landscape. I really wish Astor had commissioned a map of Jupiter; I'd have dearly loved to see the Harlem River, Sylvialand, or the Twentieth Century Archipelago on Jupiter. The trio declare Jupiter to be a paradise, eminently fit for colonization by the huddled masses of benighted Europe. And here, for the first time, Astor introduces a new theme: religion.

"Mars is already past its prime, and Venus scarcely habitable, but in Jupiter we have a new promised land..."

From here on, the theme of religion, specifically Protestant Christianity, becomes more and more prominent. Having established the profit potential of Jupiter to their satisfaction, the trio spontaneously decide to proceed to Saturn, "where we may find even stranger things than here". They note the habitability in passing of Ganymede and Europa, Iapetus, Hyperion and Titan, explore the rings (which, unsurprisingly, turn out to comprise rocks and sand), and land on the second largest planet in the solar system. They discover that it is cold enough to require changing into their winter garments. Arming themselves as before, they trudge off across the barren ground and shoot a couple of white birds. Almost immediately, a distracting low hum surrounds them, disorienting them until they discover the ground strewn with rubies and emeralds the size of eggs. When they go to record their thoughts, however, they discover their pencils and other instruments

taken over by invisible spirits. An old man with a white beard appears out of thin air, and begins explaining things.

From here on in, most of the exploration of Saturn reveals a planet full of disembodied spirits, who like nothing more than to discuss Christian theology. Like everyone else in the book, the spirit discourses on air pressure, geological deformation of strata, or tide levels at the drop of a hat, rather like one of the omniscient characters in a Dan Brown novel. The spirit, who used to be a bishop, explains that "continuity and balance of Nature" will be restored with Christ's second coming, and delivers several sermons worthy of a Presbyterian pulpit. Seeing no difficulty in reconciling Darwin and Moses, he cheerfully predicts the perfectability of Mankind through evolution. The explorers are not quite convinced of this, as Cortland regrets that he was not born a thousand years later, and Ayrault laments that "I should rather never have lived, for life in itself is unsatisfying", an odd thing to say for a man who has set foot on two planets beyond Earth for the first time in history. President Bearwarden, however, neatly encapsulates the ethos of his (Astor's) time:

"The utilitarianism of the twentieth century, by which I live...would be out of place in space, unless we can colonize the other planets, and improve their arrangements and axes."

The next day, they shoot down a few flying dragons with buckshot. When night falls, Ayrault goes out for a walk and encounters the ghost of an old college sweetheart. After a short conversation, he returns to bed and dreams of an angel, who quotes the Bible to him. It seems that God has designated the planet Saturn as a kind of waiting room for dead souls, where they wait to be reborn or returned, it's not clear which.

"Therefore we are brought here, where God reveals Himself to us more and more, and the flight of the other souls -- those unhappy ones -- does not cease..." Further conversations with ghostly bishops and other phantoms enlarge on the themes of redemption, resurrection, and geological evolution. Ayrault ducks into a hollow tree to get out of a storm, is struck by lightning, and undergoes an out-of-body return visit to Earth, where he undergoes a spiritual epiphany. When he is restored to his companions, they return to Earth.

A Journey in Other Worlds is not really a story of exploration. Rather, it is the story of an elite cadre of white men projected from the 19th century capitalism Astor so robustly celebrated, into a future in which all that has really changed are the shiny toys they play with. On the political front, the countries of Europe have become socialist failures and have sold their colonies to the US. Canada has joined the United States, which also controls the South American continent:

"Spanish and Portuguese elements in Mexico and Central and South America show a constant tendency to die out...As this goes on, in the Western hemisphere the places left vacant are gradually filled by the more progressive Anglo-Saxons."

Secretary Deepwaters intones that, while his little cadre of engineers is re-tilting the Earth's axis, "we shall have time meanwhile to absorb or run out all the inferior races".

It's hard to read that sort of thing without wincing. There is a nod to women's education, when scientist-explorer Ayrault praises his girlfriend Sylvia for her resolve to complete her degree at Vassar. She's not much of a feminist, but at least she's there and she has a name, which is more than can be said of most of the rest of the females in this book. Characters with names like Bearwarden, Tubercle Girminy, and Deepwaters sit in comfortable rooms with cigars and brandy and congratulate themselves on their technological progress, which has made all of mankind happier and healthier. It is almost impossible not to imagine a similar attitude prevailing in the First Class lounge of the *Titanic*, as the immigrant masses belowdecks ate their meager dinner.

I could not help but wonder if Astor wrote this book more or less as a rebuttal to a now nearly forgotten novel of the day, *Looking Backward: 2000-1887*, by Edward Bellamy. At the time of its publication in 1887, *Looking Backward* was the third most popular novel in America, after *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Ben-Hur*. Bellamy's work is an almost Marxist view of the future, with an economy based on publicly owned means of production. To a Republican capitalist like Astor, the novel must have seemed to be an attack on the political foundations of Western culture. The two books nicely embody a dynamic tension that extends to science fiction written today: the novel that focuses more on social change (Bellamy) than technological change (Astor). Astor's novel never seems to really gel, however, as he freely mixes redemptionist philosophy, electrical engineering, Victorian romance, and the thrills of big-game hunting. In the end, his explorer Ayrault seems to actually reject the scientific principles of the book, longing to return to a hedonistic, thoughtless existence:

"I have often longed in this life to be in the spirit, but never knew what longing was, till I experienced it as a spirit, to be once more in the flesh."

Astor's prose is often overwrought, but he does occasionally carve a gem out of the mass of ore he dumps on the reader. The flowers of Jupiter sing: "The flowers have become singers by long practice". Many of the plants and animals he imagines, if not strictly original, are vividly realized. His ideas are bold if not innovative: Astor anticipates the speed-trap, with cameras placed at intersections to record drivers' speeds, the New York subway system, maglev trains, biological warfare, and even television (his "kintograph"). These ideas, if not original with Astor, were certainly the cutting edge of science in 1894. He envisions dynamos running off Niagra Falls, the terraforming of Earth, and wind and solar power. Ironically, he includes extensive descriptions of marine transports that make large liners like the *Titanic* obsolete. In all these passages, his enthusiasm for science and his love of technological toys shines through with breezy excitement. So great was his faith in the machines of man and the ideal of "progress", that it may have gotten him killed. As the *Titanic* listed forward and the crew scrambled to get passengers into lifeboats, he told Second Officer Charles Lightoller, "We are safer here than in that little boat." As the ship continued to sink, he changed his mind and assisted his pregnant wife into the lifeboat. He was last seen standing on the deck, smoking a cigar. He did not survive the sinking, and his body was recovered a week later. He is buried in Trinity Cemetery, New York City. At the time of his death, he may have been the wealthiest private individual in the world; without question, he was the wealthiest science fiction author in the world, with a net worth in 2011 dollars of over \$11 billion.

A Journey in Other Worlds does not really show us much we can relate to on a scientific or technological level; much of Astor's "science" was outdated at the time he wrote it. We can laugh at the overblown, purple prose and the naive simplicity of the unexamined assumptions underlying it, the unconscious assumptions about race and class. There are ugly moments when racism and sexism inject themselves jarringly into the narrative. But Astor, like any writer, was a product of his times, and though he could not know it, his era of manifest destiny and freewheeling, no-holds-barred capitalism would come to a close very soon. He would not live to see the Great War he feared, but neither would he live to see the collapse of the society of privilege he took for granted. As a founding member of the 1% even now being protested in Wall Street, he would have found a "Journey to 2012" far more startling, challenging, and fascinating than any number of imaginary Jupiters.

Ira Therebel says

Published in 1894 the book goes by the usual formula of those times. Basically no story and a lot of

description of technology or what they see in space. Those books are never my favorites but I always have an interest to read what this person imagined the future to be like. In this case I had some extra interest because this book was written by Astor, the rich guy who died on Titanic. He was not a writer. I guess being filthy rich gave him the opportunity to do this dream of his and publish a book. You know, no matter what the job is people always have that one hobby they didn't go for, be it writing or making music hits or designing clothes etc. In our time it is a bit easier with internet and all, but back then he was lucky to be the rich guy and publish his book.

One can feel the fact that he is not a writer through the reading. As I said such books are usually not having a very eventful story. But this book is absolutely tedious. I had trouble reading it and it took me forever. It was hard to concentrate so I was either jumping over lines or had to read them several times before it finally got into me.

The first part is basically the description of the "future" on Earth. Which happens in the year 2000. No pretty much nothing described is true, but this is actually the part that was more or less interesting to read. Just to see what this man imagined life to be like in our time (or well 20 years ago). Then they take off to the space to explore Jupiter and Saturn. Jupiter is the planet that is basically in our far past now, dinosaurs, mammoths and giant turtles live there. This is where I reread the passages because in a way I wanted to get the picture of what is on Jupiter even though it is so hard to read and imagine. Characters, whose names I didn't even bother to remember as it was useless to know who is who, just discuss science and what they see around with each other. Nothing is happening. And then comes the last part, when they get to Saturn. Now Saturn has spirits on it. This part is a sort of philosophical and theological discussion and self discovery and going through it was especially horrible for me. Not my topic, not something I care about being on Saturn or in outer space, dense writing and even my interest in what a wealthy man from over 100 years ago thought could help here.

Now I am finally done. It is still 2 stars because reading such an old book with ideas about the future is always exciting even if for a very tiny bit. I am happy for him he got to write it and even that I got to read it, but I sure won't do it twice.

Lisa says

John Jacob Astor is best known for being the richest man to go down with the Titanic, but he should be better known for his science fiction. This is a great work of early science fiction and is an interesting story of exploration, not just the exploration of Jupiter and Saturn, but the exploration of how science and religion can co-exist. I have studied the history of the biological sciences, but wish I knew more about the history of the physical sciences so I could better appreciate the world he created. The history chapters in the beginning are interesting, but a little difficult to get through; Astor's capitalist views shine through pretty strongly. But they are needed to set the scene, so get through them, then enjoy visiting other worlds.

Oh, and I love how whenever the characters want to study a creature they find on these new worlds they shoot them! How wonderfully Victorian.

Richard Abbott says

A Journey in Other Worlds is a science fiction book published in 1894 and available these days in Kindle format, and describes a space journey taking place in the year 2000. I came across it through a Google+ post by a friend.

It is definitely of the old science fiction school in which the appeal of the book was reckoned to be in the lavish detail supplied of future inventions and society. I realised that EE “Doc” Smith (writing from around 1920 onwards) was following in the same pattern. They share the same tendency for male protagonists, supported by supremely beautiful and talented women who remain faithfully at home while their men go out and face danger. They also both posit a world where white American society (and to a lesser degree English culture) have dominated the world and other races and ethnicities have been absorbed or marginalised.

Astor, an extremely rich man who died on the Titanic, was himself something of an inventor, and clearly took great delight in long descriptions of the engineering feats of the future. One of the spaceship’s crew of three is on a well-earned rest after co-ordinating a global project to straighten the earth’s axis so that it is perpendicular to the orbital plane, in order to remove seasonal extremes. This feat is described in considerable length for those who want to put it into practice today – though in fact it would be as out of reach today as it was in Astor’s day.

Modern readers will probably be impatient with what comes over as great naivety about the role of science (an unmitigated boon and triumph of human ingenuity) and of politics (the right way to run the world is so abundantly obvious that there is no real opposition of any kind). And many modern readers, both religious and otherwise, will find difficulties with his methodology for fusing scientific and biblical statements. However, his ability to imaginatively project the knowledge of his time, and his recognition of the limits of knowledge, are both striking and appealing.

The book is divided into three parts: an initial review of life on planet earth, followed by extended descriptions of the explorers’ visits to Jupiter and Saturn. Jupiter is basically an extended big game hunt, together with musings on the ease with which parts of Jupiter could be appropriated for colonisation from earth. Not sharing the 19th century desire to hunt anything large enough to be shot at, I did not find this especially moving. The characters come over as unconsciously arrogant and parochial.

The Saturn trip, however, brings out a very different side to the crew. Anxieties and worries surface in them, along with existential fears that their lives are not, after all, up to the quality that they had imagined for themselves. As a result, this section of the book was much more engaging for me.

I found A Journey in Other Worlds to be an interesting book – significantly more modern in outlook than parts of Jules Verne, and with a clear line of descent through Smith to more recent writers. Not everybody will like the book, either for its writing style or the ideas expressed in it, but I am glad to have read it. It seems slightly churlish to rate a book of this kind, but for consistency with other books I would give four stars.

Cinnamingirl says

I'm listening to this while knitting... and I'm kinda tempted to stop it, because its full of a lot of science that is honestly a bit boring. And it's talking about a lot of climate change, which, while the idea of a planet having eternal spring by the process of changing the pole oceans every 6 months... I just can't imagine the havoc that would wreak on the ecosystem. I'm also not really sure that it's the heaviness of the pole oceans that keeps

the Earth's axis tilted. Still, it started out with them landing on Jupiter, which sounds intriguing. The whole thing reminds me a bit of Perelandra.

-sigh- I cant decide what to do about this. It's kinda interesting, just in terms of speculative fiction, but story-wise it's hella boring. I'm on chapter 6 now and they're discussing the physics of Christ's ascension, if it could be attributed to the 'apergy' that is believed to be the force that annuls gravitation. I really wonder what current scientists would think about the science here.

Hahahah!! The government in this story has a Promotion of Science Act whereby their Congress funds scientific endeavors such as space exploration. Wow. Also, they just said something about running out 'inferior races'. So much contradiction in one story. Made it to chapter 13 tonight, calling it a night and I think it's about to start getting good... ^_^

So after wading through this, I actually really enjoyed it. It got better once it actually got to the adventuring, though at times I was rolling my eyes at what is essentially a trio of boys exploring and shooting stuff, in true 19th century style. Overall though, the author really constructed some interesting worlds, and while he did get a bit preachy at times, the mixture of science and spirituality was intriguing. I still really want a real scientist to read this and tell me their thoughts...

Micah Siegmund says

In the year 2000...

I've been on a kick of reading classic futuristic sci fi lately. It is always fascinating what authors predicted 100 years ago and where they got pretty close and where they were way off.

This book involves space travel within our solar system using apergy, planetary exploration of Jupiter and Saturn (which have habitable environments), and straightening the Earth's axis in order to make the climate more stable. Some interesting ideas for sure, but there is a lot of 19th-century philosophizing and religious theory woven in that reads more like a thesis than a sci fi adventure at times.

Despite it taking longer to get through this book than I hoped, it was a decent read.

Rena Searles says

Had a real hard time staying awake through this one. A futuristic fantasy of the first voyage into space and the exploration of Jupiter. So much detail, both scientific and philosophical, was difficult to navigate the long stretches of explanations. Some entertaining bits and comical visioning.....

Pam says

I really enjoy reading old futuristic stories and seeing what people got right and how they got things wrong-- and also reminding myself that all of our favorite hard scifi will one day sound as dated as this book does, and wondering what people will be able to infer about us from the values we project on our visions of the

future.

The perspective of this book is so very 19th century, rich, white, American, well-educated. It has manifest destiny written all over it. All of the countries of the Americas have become part of the United States, because of course, what else would they do? Non-white peoples outside of Europe have slowly died out making room for the white people (yes, really), and next humanity will expand to other planets, perhaps even other stars! (They discover later that there are other intelligent people in the universe, but fear not, only humans have souls.) And though the protagonists undertake a mission to Jupiter, do not mistake it for a scientific mission, they are on safari.

Despite all that, it's also interesting what he gets right. Toward the beginning are a couple chapters of the history of the 20th century, which get a lot of the details wrong but the overall picture isn't all that far off. For instance, he predicts a cold war between France and Germany leading to the rapid development and science and technology; both sides create weapons so powerful that they could never be used, preventing what was apparently already referred to as the Great War. The rapid advance in technology also led to many innovations like automobiles, freeways, and suburbs.

The science is also dated, of course. This is pre-plate tectonics, and the reigning view of the way celestial bodies work is they start out molten like the sun, then gradually cool and shrink, with the shrinkage creating mountain ranges. Smaller planets cool faster, so Mars is already dead. The very large planets are still warm, which keeps them inhabitable despite being further from the sun. Once the planets cool, life proceeds in nearly the same way as on Earth; since Jupiter cooled enough to support life much later, it's in an earlier stage of evolution, corresponding to the Devonian period on Earth (though not exactly, I don't think the Devonian had dinosaurs) with plants and animals recognizable from Earth's geological record. Saturn is slightly more "advanced", as it's smaller than Jupiter.

(Side note: at this point I realized why landscapes of dinosaurs always have erupting volcanoes in the background--not just because one may have killed them, but also because according to the pre-plate tectonics theory of geology the earth was actually more volcanic back then, and has cooled and become less active over time. So of course there were erupting volcanoes all over the place back then.)

That covers parts 1 and 2. Part 3 veers away from the science into the metaphysical, and I didn't enjoy it very much. Part of Christian doctrine is that once you die, all the good and bad that you've done are tallied up and you can't change your condition with respect to God any more after that. I've never liked that doctrine, and part 3 expounds on it at length.

Perry Whitford says

Welcome to the future!

Welcome to a world where the infallible progress of science and the boundless benevolence of American ingenuity will lead to the straightening of the Earth's axis, bringing about an endless spring for everyone!

Welcome to, er ... the year 2000!

Well, that's the risk all science fiction writers run in predicting the future - trying to look clever but ending up looking like a fool. Astor, writing in 1894, does that a lot here. Take the discovery of 'apergy', a force akin

but opposite to gravity:

'Men had discovered and mastered the secret of apery, and now, "little lower than the angels," they could soar through space, leaving even planets and comets behind.'

But the bogus energy force of apery is the least of the problems with this book. What made it such a slog to read was the slavish regard afforded to any and every use of science, alongside the fact that in place of decent dialogue the characters merely spout scientific facts to each other in the driest, most tiresome fashion.

Then, laughably - incongruous even, considering the loftily learned tone of the author - when they journey to Jupiter it turns out to be little different from Earth at the time of the dinosaurs, with vast rivers and valleys, inhabited by oversized lizards and insects more at home in a Ray Harryhausen movie than a serious work of extrapolated science.

A Conan Doyle fantasy and a scientific lecture are all very well in themselves, but probably best not to merge the two if you want to retain an audience's attention. As the pages clogged with an endless litany of boring facts, the voyage of discovery became little more than a jolly hunting party.

Astor was one of the richest men in the world in his time, so it's credit to him that he cared enough about anything but indulging himself to be so informed and enamored of science. He truly believed human invention was coming close to faultlessness, and therefore close to God.

His faith was such that he couldn't wait to buy a ticket for the maiden voyage of the Titanic.

p.s. he did correctly predict one aspect of 21st century life though - speed cameras!:

'The policemen on duty also have instantaneous kodaks mounted on tripods, which show the position of any carriage at half- and quarter-second intervals, by which it is easy to ascertain the exact speed'.
