

## The Lawyer and the Astronaut

**Jerry Lucas**

Amazon KDP

(269pp)

978-1-962730-16-7

*The Lawyer and the Astronaut is a visionary novel about interplanetary travel and life in the future.*

In Jerry Lucas's science fiction novel *The Lawyer and the Astronaut*, an otherwise ordinary couple signs onto a time-bending space program project for which mathematical, ecological, and scientific problem-solving are required.

A few days after getting fired from a job he loathes, Josh signs up to travel through space by himself to solve the question of whether or not a particular planet, five hundred light-years away, is habitable. One of the complications of his efforts is that he will be gone for a thousand years. The other pitfall is that he's just met the love of his life, Laura, who can't go with him to the planet in question. The company in charge of the mission, though, will allow Laura to drink a goo to preserve her body, putting her in a sleep state until Josh returns.

While the first half of the book describes Josh's experiences light-years away from Earth, the second half reveals what happens to Laura. Great literal and metaphorical distance forms between them as Josh navigates a planet far from Earth while Laura navigates Earth itself in the future. Both find their way to new occupations in time, with the question of whether they will find their way back to each other looming over the story.

The storytelling is systematic, leaning into mathematics and scientific theories at the expense of narrative tension. Considerable space is devoted to explaining how Josh solves problems while collecting data about the distant planet, pages fill up with breakdowns of trigonometry problems and coverage of how the ship's trajectory is adjusted, and there's copious information about how Josh tracks the various animals on the planet. Missy, the ship's computer, also works on complex astrophysics problems with Josh. Few complications generate real tension, though: Outside of an encounter with an intrusive reptilian species, it seems like almost any issue in space can be resolved within a few minutes.

Further, the book's vision of the future is limited; it's reliant on extrapolations from contemporary events, imagining human solutions to ongoing problems and addressing them at the same winding pace that it devotes to considerations of complex space travel issues. Indeed, the prose is at its most accessible when it's focused on imagining the life-forms on Josh's planet.

The theme of love now and love in the future is the unifying undercurrent of *The Lawyer and the Astronaut*, a musing science fiction novel.

CLARISSA ADKINS (November 23, 2024)

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