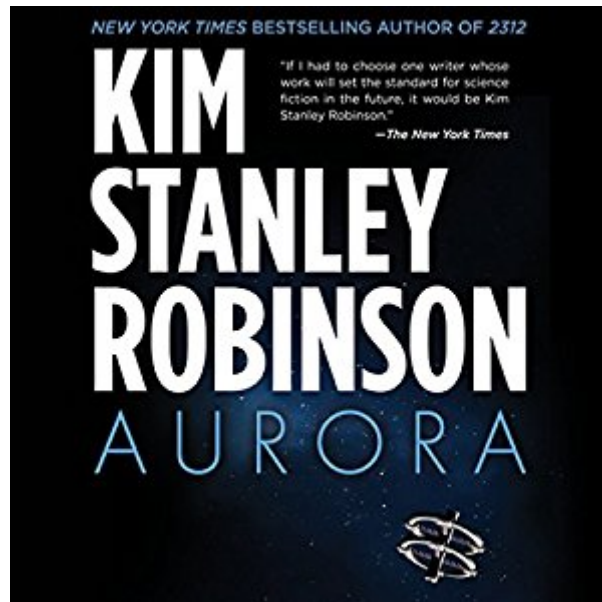


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Aurora



Synopsis

A major new novel from one of science fiction's most powerful voices, Aurora tells the incredible story of our first voyage beyond the solar system. Brilliantly imagined and beautifully told, it is the work of a writer at the height of his powers. Our voyage from Earth began generations ago. Now we approach our new home. Aurora.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Aurora, by Kim Stanley Robinson, has major issues with pacing, characterization, and to some extent, plotting. Which would seem to make this review a no-brainer - not recommended. But if one can overlook issues of plot, character, and pace (and granted, that's a Grand Canyon-level overlook), there's a lot here to often admire and sometimes enjoy, and a reader who perseveres will I think not only be happy they did so, but will also find Aurora lingering in their mind for some time. (Note: While I don't think anything revealed ahead will mar the reading experience, it's pretty nigh impossible to discuss this book substantively without some plot spoilers. So fair warning.) Generations ago, a starship left Earth with plans to set up a colony in the Tau Ceti system. Aurora begins in the final stage of the journey, with the ship only a few years out. Early on we're introduced to a young teen, Freya, daughter of the ship's chief engineer, Devi. The novel moves quickly through the years as Freya grows older, documenting the problems the ship faces as landfall nears: a host of mechanical/environmental issues (power plant problems, crop failures, etc.), biological obstacles (especially island devolution), and social problems. With landfall, new issues

arise as the ship's population lands a small number of early settlers who begin building the colony and preparing it to receive the rest of the ship. Eventually, the colonists come face to face with the basic question of viability "is this mission even possible? This problem " the social division it causes and its eventual compromise solution " drive the second half of the book.

"Aurora" is probably the closest Kim Stanley Robinson has come to the feel of his Mars trilogy. As in "Red Mars", KSR takes his own approach to a classic SF theme, in this case, the colonization of a planet outside our solar system using a multi-generational starship. In many ways, there is no writer on Robinson's level for such a story " at least, I have never experienced anyone else who has examined both the scientific and social challenges in such a thorough and logical manner. This is as "hard" as hard science fiction can be, and loaded with fascinating explorations of topics ranging from the Fermi Paradox to the nature of prions. There are no "deus ex machina" surprises in the form of warp drives or alien civilizations " everything is believable and logical " coldly logical, in fact. I enjoyed "Aurora" more than any other book Robinson has written since the Mars series. The style and pacing has been criticized by some, but I found the framing (the story is narrated by the starship's computer) valid and certainly much more readable than a lot of recent experimental styles. (Spoilers Below) In truth, I enjoyed the first half, maybe two-thirds, of "Aurora", but the last third was so depressing that I believe it actually made me feel moody throughout the days I finished the book. I don't usually like to spoil in a review, but this book takes such a turn that I feel disclosure of its nature is necessary. First, the book is mistitled, as "Aurora" is the name of the planetary body the colonists attempt to settle. That implies the story focuses on that place, but in fact, less than 10% of the book involves it. A more apt title for this book would be, "The Failed Mission to, and Attempted Return from, Aurora".

I was super-disappointed by this book. The headline is that it's about interstellar colonization, but we only spend a few chapters there at another star. Instead the book is about dumb and unlikable characters making bad decisions and getting away with them, ideas cast aside without full consideration, and gross physical errors. (Spoilers after this point) Characters matter. The author does create good characters -- interesting, driven, well-formed characters. But then he kills them all off about a third of the way through. Instead we are left with Freya, whose every decision is a dud. And then when her poor, knee-jerk, uninformed decisions are about to starve her and the people who inexplicably followed her to death, they all get magically saved by earth technology. I was

sooooo looking forward to Freya's lack of foresight having consequences. Silly me I guess. Sure, fly your interstellar starship around without understanding it at all, I'm sure it will turn out fine. No need to worry!The denizens of the generational ship are supposedly drifting genetically, losing cognitive ability and physical size and other characteristics with each generation. But even that can't explain why after 170 years of travel they give up at the first sign of a challenge at Tau Ceti. Nobody even tried to study the amazing new life forms they found, or to try to develop a defense against them. You'd have to devolve awfully far to be intimidated so easily by what might end up as a minor hurdle.But even then, no matter how bleak things might be at Tau Ceti, no matter if there's a chance of dying while building a new civilization, it is completely, utterly, and bafflingly irrational to instead choose certain death by heading back to Sol.

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