



## Journey Into Space

*Toby Litt*

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## **Journey Into Space** Toby Litt

A vast generation ship hurtles away from a violent, troubled Earth to settle on a distant planet orbiting an alien star. Those who set out on this journey are long-since dead. Those who will arrive at their destination have yet to be born. For those who must live and die in the cold emptiness between the stars, there is only the claustrophobic permanence of non-being. Life lived in unending stasis. Then the unthinkable happens: two souls - Auguste and Celeste - rebel. And from the fruit of their rebellion comes a new and powerful force which will take charge of the ship's destiny. "Journey into Space" is science fiction at its most classic and beguiling: timeless, vast in scope and daring in execution.

## **Journey Into Space Details**

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Author : Toby Litt

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# From Reader Review Journey Into Space for online ebook

## Simon Mcleish says

Warning: this review is going to contain lots of spoilers, without which it would be hard to say what I want to say about it. Please don't read if you don't want to know the plot of the novel.

This review first appeared on my blog here.

Toby Litt is, incidentally, someone I used to vaguely know (I had rooms on the floor below him for a year when we were students). Some of his novels I like a lot, and others not at all. *Journey Into Space* is the first of his books which I have read which comes between the two extremes. Or, rather, it moves from one to the other, as the story progresses.

*Journey Into Space* is divided into five sections, each shorter than the previous one, which gives an overall impression spiralling into a central point because of the way the plot develops across them, as well as because of influence the decreasing length has on the reading experience. The whole thing is set on that standard science fiction location, the generation ship on its way to colonise another world, inhabited by a very small community. (In-breeding, something which concerns some of the other writers of this type of stories, is simply handled by gene technology.) The plot covers four generations of life on the ship, not starting at the launch but several generations into the journey.

The first section is the most unusual in science fiction terms. It concerns the meetings between two teen-aged cousins, who share their ideas about Earth, a world they have never seen except in the records carried by the ship and messages received by it. The main way they do this is through "describing", where each tries to make the other feel what it would be like to experience something - rain, grass, the presence of animals - they have never known themselves. The theme here is nostalgia, and how we look at a past we can never actually see fully. This might feel like an extended creative writing exercise ("Produce 500 words describing grass from the point of view of someone who has never seen it in reality"), but it is effective at generating a mood which is shattered at the end of the section - Celeste gives birth a child (in a strange passage using a series of images derived from the describes, while the pair are shunned for their incestuous relationship).

In the second section, the child, named Orphan, takes over as the centre of the narrative. He charms his way into becoming the captain of the ship, despite not being terribly bright, and becomes regarded as something of a king and god. He institutes a perpetual, hedonistic party, where everything is done on his slightest whim (though he is manipulated into making decisions by others who have more interest in running the ship). This section seems to be a commentary on a different aspect of today's world, where we are living in the moment without a care for the traditions of the past or for the effects our way of life will have on generations to come. The main problem with this section is that Orphan, as depicted, does not convince the reader that he has the charm he is credited with.

The third section follows the life of Orphan's third child, imaginatively named Three, from spoilt child to ascetic obsessed with being able to write on paper in the old fashioned way, and centre of a new religion, proselytised by her nephew. It is in this section that news reaches the ship that humanity on Earth has destroyed itself. In the final two sections, the nephew takes over the ship after Orphan and Three die; the ship then returns to earth, receiving a signal to indicate that there have been some survivors, before being deliberately crashed into the earth to obliterate defective humanity (leaving just two survivors, in an escape pod, who know that there is no way they can properly survive). This nihilistic section is much less clearly

linked to commentary on twenty first century humanity. It seems perfunctory, and poses a fairly common conundrum - how does the narrative survive and who adds the final words describing the death of the last two humans orbiting earth? It may be that this ending is meant to provide some positive message of hope: somehow, some remnant of human civilisation has continued - but it isn't effective in this way for me, being swamped by the nihilistic theme of the book, which seems to be that the human race is better destroyed than allowed to continue.

The message of Journey Into Space (assuming I haven't just completely misinterpreted the novel, and there is one) is made so much the centre of the novel that other aspects of fiction writing suffer, especially characterisation - Celeste and Three are the only individuals given much in the way development. Apart from the descriptions which form part of the game between Celeste and August, there isn't much filling in of the background; like a lot of modern science fiction, Journey Into Space assumes that the reader will be familiar with the basic idea of a generation ship, for instance.

While there are some interesting ideas in Journey Into Space, parts of it simply don't work, and it generally feels under-developed.

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### **Anton Roe says**

overall an interesting story but struggles due to a bizarre pace. sometimes moving quickly through generations at other times dwelling for many pages on a single incident. a great idea just maybe lacking a bit in the delivery - perhaps better as a short story??

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### **Mike Melton says**

Years after finishing this book, I continue to think about it. Toby Lott takes a lot of risks with this book and not all of them work for me, but the thing about taking a lot of risks is that some will work, and when they do, they're extraordinary. Nice work on this one.

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### **Jerome Turner says**

First of all, look at the author. Toby Litt is not a scifi writer and in this case, he's someone who has worked through a few different styles, but I think you could say falls under the same umbrella as China Mieville, which he calls 'new weird' I think.

So don't expect classic sci-fi.

This book I nonetheless enjoyed. The story arc was a little unsatisfying and unpredictable (in a bad way), but there was enough intrigue, and I enjoyed the tone, the setting, the colouration.

Also, see 'Dark Eden'.

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## **Robert says**

Toby Litt is one of my favourite authors, largely as a result of *Corpsing* - a crime novel I really, really enjoyed. His other novels are all different, but all interesting, even if they aren't always quite as delightful.

When I found out that he'd written a science fiction novel about a Journey into Space, I got quite excited. I like scifi/speculative fiction, and I was curious what this literary author might do with the idea.

*Journey into Space* is quite an experimental novel. Set aboard a ship that will take several lifetimes to reach its destination, with 100 human colonists on board, none of whom have ever seen Earth, and none of whom will be alive when the ship reaches its destination, there is a lot of room for interesting, original, and quite dark writing.

We start with two teenagers and their game of imagining and describing Earth to each other. At first, it is alienating, but it becomes more powerful - and especially once they do single sentence descriptions, there is something poetic about it all. Over time, we follow them and several other generations until the ship arrives somewhere.

On some levels, I would have enjoyed the book a lot more if it never outlasted one generation. There are several big turning points (one of which is told in a ten page metaphor - highly experimental, but ultimately, deeply unsatisfying), several big characters, but the book never really feels consistent. There are big ironies in it, and a dark sense of humour, and bleakness, and humanity, but somehow, each time the plot accelerates by many years, it feels like a little human detail is lost. This is not, ultimately, a story of lost generations, but a story of progression up to a specific point. By giving us the global view, Litt takes away from his own premise, and gives us a pessimistic and unhappy, somewhat preachy novel.

I really wanted to like it, but ultimately, once the focus shifted to different characters, along with the time and the generations, the novel lost something, which it never recovered.

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## **jeand99 says**

Planet Earth turns slowly. Every day it turns around one time.

A few days ago (January 9, 2010) the first sexrobot Roxxxxy made her public debut. It's a female – don't worry the designer is working on a male too. She has a program to learn the owner's likes and dislikes. Is able to talk about sports and cars, can carry on a discussion and expresses her love to you. Her vocabulary is being updated via Internet. She has five personalities: (1) outgoing Wild Wendy, (2) reserved and shy Frigid Farrah, (3) a young naive personality, (4) Mature Martha and (5) adventurous SM Susan.

Products like this fill my mind with hundreds of questions. Are there only five personalities of a woman? Will she interrogate you afterwards when you turned the robot off? Will she complain when you don't clean her after having sex with her? Is there a future for sexparties where you can change your partner, our personal Roxxxies? Can she feel when she is being raped? How will she respond when you don't talk to her for weeks? Can she learn me languages? Can she improve my language and be my teacher on a given subject

too? Is there a button “random question, mood, behaviour or (dis)like”? Will she be moody too when she has her period? Does she recognize my smell? Will she be able to give birth to our kids and make it possible to reproduce me and her into an third personality? How does she respond to my boss, the postman and my friends? Is she sensible for celebrities? Can she be jealous? When will be the first divorce because a wife feels neglected by him because of his Roxxxxy?

Well, well what a great future for (wo)mankind. Buy one if you want to but I'll not buy one. For me it's the "wrong" track for the species 'homo sapiens sapiens'. Is living your life really that hard? What is wrong with a partner whose behavior is not always predictable? Why do you need affirmation or a mirror that much? Why do you want to be in control of having sex? Why do you want to be in control of your partner? Why do you want to be in control of life? It's an illusion! It's a dangerous dream! Everyone whose mindset is set into this way of life can't bear natural disasters (earthquake, waterflood, illness, invalidness etc) or wars between groups of human beings. Can't bear!

Roxxxxy brings me to Toby Litt's (1968-) book '**Journey into space**' (2009). It's a Science Fiction (SF) book about a group of 100 'homo sapiens sapiens' who travel in a vessel to a place 3 or 4 human-generations far away. They travel with 1/4th of the speed of light. Halfway they get the message that humanity killed herself (caused by discussions about "Jerusalem"). All that exists of Earth is what "IT" has archived. The spaceship turns back to planet Earth finding out that 250 people survived. They look "horrible". The book ends with the vessel as kamikaze bomb. Everyone dies.

I disagree with Litt's future (SF) concept of love and reproduction. For me love is the cornerstone of our (dis)behavior. Sometimes the lack of love is the cornerstone of our (dis)behavior. We can't separate love and reproduction. We can reproduce our species without love. We can't live our lives without love, the need of love, the longing for love, the fact that we fall in love. Love is undividly incorporated in everyone of us. There will be no future on Earth or somewhere else in the univere without human beings that fall in love or are in love. We will not allow it to be taken away from us. Chemicals will not cure this "disease". Love is the motor of our species' evolution and it allways will be.

Planet Earth turns slowly. With or without us.

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### Chris says

I love sci-fi but sadly this book didn't make the grade. I have recently adopted the 'Rule of 50' if after 50 pages I am not enjoying the book I just put it down. It seems to be a good rule of thumb.

The idea of a spacecraft on a century-long voyage to colonise a distant world caught my imagination but once the characters were introduced I almost instantly lost interest. They are bland and quite irritating. The endless 'Describe' sessions between the two main characters really got on my nerves and were totally unnecessary to write about in such detail.

Call me a prude but I hate explicit language or sex scenes in novels unless the language is integral to the story or the sex scene is tastefully written. It seems tacky and unworthy of literature. The erotic segments in this book are vulgar and crass and totally out of place. I don't expect to have to read the word c\*\*\* when referring to a 15 year old girl's genitals! There are at least a dozen different words the author could have used which leaves me wondering what the hell he was thinking. Perhaps the author is just a vulgar person.

Thank goodness I didn't buy this rubbish and borrowed it from a library instead.

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### **Alec Watson says**

A bit short, could have been longer, but still kept me turning the pages.

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### **Stephen Thomas says**

#### **FUN WITH EXTINCTION**

This is a well-crafted book with evocative prose and nicely-rounded characters. Litt's style is unobtrusive and yet distinct in its lucidity. Together these factors make *Journey Into Space* an interesting, if somewhat dissatisfying, read. The main letdown is that the story covers too much ground in too few pages. Several generations pass during the course of the novel and in each case just as we start to become involved with the characters they're sidelined in favour of the next generation. In order for the story arc to reach completion this progression is necessary, but the rapidity with which it occurs lead to disappointment for this reader. I don't like to appear too critical of this novel as it's really quite good. Litt is a talented writer. This work, however, required more development than he appears to have been able to commit to. A doorstop novel was needed here, or maybe a short series, but either approach would have required Litt to examine his society in much greater depth. Perhaps he didn't have the will to do this. It's a shame: it could have been so much more.

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### **Marloes says**

generationship

The story got more and more bizarre. I liked the beginning.

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### **Ed van der Winden says**

Tried to read this book a couple of years ago, but got bored. And still, the ending of the first part is somewhat longwinded. However, this time around I persevered and found the book very satisfying. Only about 250 pages, it manages to be a parable of the whole of human history (including our future). Not very uplifting, mind you, but it is both exciting and moving.

Each book of Toby Litt I have read or seen, seems to be totally different. I like that in a writer. And it is fun that he is working his way through the alphabet in order as the first letters of his book titles.

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### **Ben Babcock says**

*Journey into Space* frustrates me. I didn't like it very much. Its characterization is fractured and shallow. It is brief where it should be verbose, tarries when it should be moving on. About the only thing it has going for it is the fact that it takes place on a generation ship. This is where the frustration sets in, because as much as I didn't enjoy this book, I can appreciate how Litt depicts some of the pitfalls of a generation ship. He uses it as an effective device for illustrating the ability for a group of humans to enter catastrophic failure mode. It's kind of depressing.

This slim novel follows three generations aboard the ship. August and Celeste are cousins born in flight. Like everyone else in their generation, they have never walked on a planet. All they know is the kilometre-long *Armenia*, the ship they call home. Unlike others in their generation, however, August and Celeste have taken the obsession with life on Earth to a new level. They've invented a game where they mutually construct a planet, roughly modelled after New England, using only words. Its a hypnotic, addictive process made all the more powerful by Litt's careful attention to the descriptions. I've had to teach descriptive writing to some students as part of their coursework requirements, and I would have loved to quote some pages from this book to show how it can be done. Litt goes on, literally for pages, as he builds a picture of a scene where the only thing happening is *weather*. No people, no intelligence. Just weather.

August and Celeste don't settle for weather, though. They end up having sex, having a baby, and there are complications as a result of their consanguinity. The second part of *Journey into Space* follows the first few years of baby Orphan's childhood, letting us see how the small ship (and the people back on Earth) react to news of August and Celeste's incest and try to punish the two accordingly. As the book goes on, Orphan becomes a singularity, a presence that simultaneously destabilizes yet unites the crew as it faces numerous setbacks. Ultimately, the crew aboard this ship engages in an atavistic retreat into sex, religion, and nihilism in an attempt to combat the oppressive sense of loneliness and futility that has taken over their mission.

On one level, the regression of humanity modelled in the crew of the *Armenia* is sickly fascinating. It's a kind of cautionary tale: despite our hubris and technology, we are not all that advanced. It's also a reminder that we are fragile, as a species. We depend on the Earth to keep us alive—space travel is a difficult, all but untenable endeavour with an ambiguous endgame, if any. Generation ships are perhaps a practical but not realistic method of surmounting the obstacles to interstellar travel. The major challenge of generation ships, according to *Journey into Space*, is that you can take the human out of the planet, but you can't take the planet out of the human. It all begins when August and Celeste become obsessed with describing Earth, and I can't really blame them.

It's an interesting tangent to the nature-versus-nurture discussion. One can certainly socialize a human being to become accustomed to a particular environment. My life in Canada, or now in the UK, is very different from someone who lives in Ecuador or rural China. Transposed, I would be very hard-pressed to feel like my situation is "normal". So, to some extent, one's nurturing influences one's ability to operate in a particular environment. Nevertheless, it seems like our versatility exists within a range of parameters, and that range is pre-programmed for "planet". Kilometre-long ships just don't cut it.

Litt makes some good stabs at the issues inherent in generation ships. Likewise, his exploration of failure modes of humanity is often fascinating. There is a certain satisfaction to watching the descent into madness. But his characters are little more than veneers over stock types—and he makes no secret of this. This is curious.

I hate showing off my genre snobbery, but *Journey into Space* reads like a literary fiction author intruding into science fiction. Litt grasps the generation ship motif as an effective setting for his tale. Genre fiction, particularly science fiction, often suffers complaints that its characters are thin and mostly stock, there only

for the author to abuse as they explore the concept *du jour*. Literary fiction authors know better, of course; they are all about character. These conventional stereotypes would expect Litt to produce a deep, intense novel about a generation ship with multiple, detailed character sketches across all three generations. We get the opposite.

There is certainly something to be said for beautiful prose and memorable description. However, beautiful prose alone does not suffice for me. I also need characters who can make the story come alive. Three almost does this in the last act, with her incredible patience in learning how to make paper and ink. But it's not quite enough. *Journey into Space* is a technically accomplished, well-written novel, but it isn't all that satisfying as a story.

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### **saps says**

Immensely thought provoking. Flawed but well worth reading.

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### **Mark says**

This was OK, but sadly I enjoyed it a lot less than I hoped to.

It is clever, there's some nice takes on society and future societies, but overall it left me thinking that it was wanting to be more than it was.

I get the impression the writer would like to be Douglas Adams: but he's not.

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### **Our Frank says**

Set phasers for existentialist crisis! Plenty of navel-gazing in this deep space thinker.

Time/space/distance and the physics of every action having an equal and opposite reaction are played out in the confines of a spaceship full of settlers travelling away from a doomed Earth.

At less than 250 pages, this is not a long read but is similar in scope to Asimov's 'Foundation' series. As with Asimov's chief characters, Litt's 'family' lives are focused on - sometimes briefly - their frustration, the onboard ennui and a search for a *raison d'être* documented.

I wondered where it was all going and the conclusion doesn't disappoint, it's just...given the choice of a generational ship and nuclear holocaust...I'd need to think about it, y'know.

