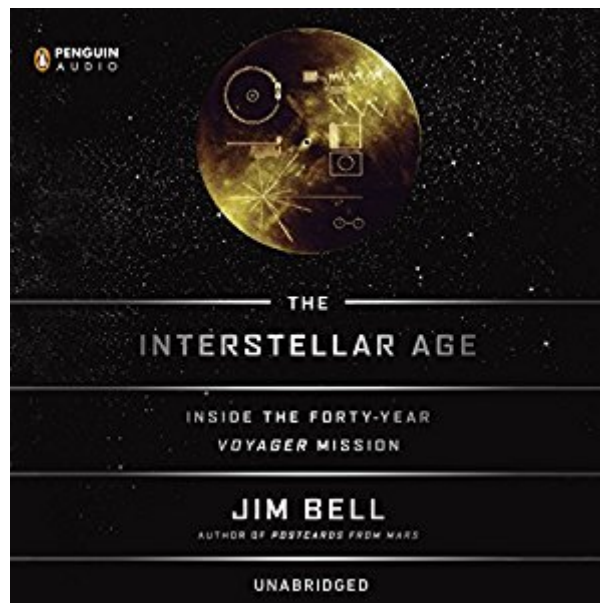




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The Interstellar Age: The Story Of The NASA Men And Women Who Flew The Forty-Year Voyager Mission



Synopsis

The story of the men and women who drove the Voyager spacecraft mission, told by a scientist who was there from the beginning. The Voyager spacecraft are our farthest-flung emissaries--11.3 billion miles away from the crew who built and still operate them decades after their launch. Voyager 1 left the solar system in 2012; its sister craft, Voyager 2, will do so in 2015. The fantastic journey began in 1977, before the first episode of *Cosmos* aired. The mission was planned as a grand tour beyond the moon; beyond Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn; and maybe even into interstellar space. The fact that it actually happened makes this humanity's greatest space mission. In *The Interstellar Age*, award-winning planetary scientist Jim Bell reveals what drove and continues to drive the members of this extraordinary team, including Ed Stone, Voyager's chief scientist and the one-time head of NASA's Jet Propulsion Lab; Charley Kohlhase, an orbital dynamics engineer who helped to design many of the critical slingshot maneuvers around planets that enabled the Voyagers to travel so far; and the geologist whose earthbound experience would prove of little help in interpreting the strange new landscapes revealed in the Voyagers' astoundingly clear images of moons and planets. Speeding through space at a mind-bending 11 miles a second, Voyager 1 is now beyond our solar system's planets. It carries with it artifacts of human civilization. By the time Voyager 1 passes its first star in about 40,000 years, the gold record on the spacecraft, containing various music and images, including Chuck Berry's "Johnny B. Goode," will still be playable.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Great inside view of the project, and accomplishments and challenges, with recent events reported

as well! As a former JPLr who had a part in the mission support, it has much meaning! Well done!

Very good book with a bit of history included.

The *Interstellar Age* is not a book about science per se, but it is a book about exploration and wonder. This is a comparatively easy to read 300 page work that takes the reader on a so-called Grand Tour of Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune, and beyond. Author Bell is clearly a disciple of Carl Sagan, and this is reflected in the optimistic style of the book. Bell weaves autobiographical elements into the fabric of the 40 year tale of the twin Voyager spacecraft, and he also presents insight into some of the key individuals who formed the Voyager team. Even better, Bell provides vignettes which provide us with pertinent historical backgrounds that helped create our own modern perspectives. Having just finished the book, I am in awe of the astounding creativity and precision that launched - and still maintains - the two Voyagers as they travel billions of miles away from Earth. Bell has done a very nice job informing the reader, without preaching at us. Not to say the author isn't opinionated, but he thankfully stays away from any hard-line stances. For example, Bell believes that Pluto still should be considered a planet and while he articulates his reasons, he doesn't dwell on it. As a layperson, I appreciate reasonably divergent views that engage my thoughts. Many fascinating tidbits (like an 8-track tape device being aboard the spacecraft) are scattered throughout the chapters, and such tidbits often boggle the mind (truth is indeed stranger than fiction). These nuggets of information resonated with me, and once again brought to life the incredible human achievement that the Voyager project represents. Special kudos must be given for several mentions of the Pasadena (California) based Planetary Society and its supporting role for space exploration. I first joined the Society back in 1980, and while my subscription lapsed too often in the intervening years, I am once again a proud member (and the author's acknowledgements made me even more proud). The last few chapters do engage in some science-talk, like discussion of solar winds, interstellar boundaries, and plasma density. Don't be frightened though because the author's conversational style and use of easy-to-understand examples makes everything seem clear. If I had one negative to report, it would be that there are only 8 pages of color plates present; the book could have easily supported more images. Overall, I enjoyed this book immensely and it has truly captured my imagination. Bell manages to make the reader feel like a part of the Voyager extended family, including reunions, remarkable achievements, and even several lucky breaks. And after all, on this particular Pale Blue Dot we are all family.

This book clearly and effectively describes the Voyager I and II projects and the spaceships that are completing these trips. It starts with the description of the start of the projects and its rationale - for the only time in 175 years, the planets Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus and Neptune will be lined up to allow one pass by space craft. The Voyager space craft were launched in the late 1970s and visited Jupiter and Saturn in the early and mid-1980s and Uranus and Neptune later in the decade. These were the space craft that viewed the moons, Titan and Europa up close, for the first time, and travelled close to the magnificent rings of Saturn for the first time. Uranus and Neptune were then visited for the first time also - all the time taking magnificent pictures of these planets and moons. The trips of these robotic space travellers opened up the eyes of mankind to the vastness of space and they are continuing their job as they leave the solar system and become interstellar travellers. Soon, we will not be able to hear from them, but they will continue to travel around the Galaxy for many years to come. These are mankind's successful interstellar travellers.

'The Interstellar Age' is an account of the Voyager mission through the eyes of the author, Jim Bell. There is information in the book about Bell's education and early times in the planetary science field, and there is mention of many other individuals who were associated with the Voyager program. The first few chapters are essentially a historical introduction to the project, as well as discussions of Bell's early days. The middle of the book investigates the Voyagers individual visits to Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus and Neptune (the latter two were only visited by Voyager 2). The last section talks about the future of the program, now that over 25 years have passed since the last planetary encounter with Neptune. All in all, the book is interesting, easily readable, and packed with a lot of great material about the Voyager program. But this is not a book which is just about Voyager - rather, it is a book about this program through the eyes of the author and there is a lot of autobiographical material contained within the book. At time, I hoped there could be some more detail about what the Voyagers actually saw when they visited the planets. It also felt like there was a great deal of material on the moons of the planets at the expense of the planetary material itself. I'm not sure if there are other good books about the Voyager program out there, so this is a good option if you want to learn about the program. Despite the less than optimal coverage of the mission and perhaps over-reliance on the author's personal experiences, the book is worth the read.

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