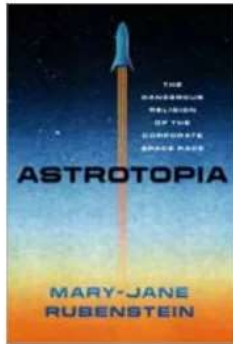


Astrotopia

Mary-Jane Rubenstein
University of Chicago Press
£15 • PB



Elon Musk does not come out well in this book. Nor does Jeff Bezos. These facts alone make for a compelling read, but they only constitute Rubenstein's opening gambit. Her target is far

broader, as she tells an at first depressing story of how the giant, international corporations that now dominate and control life on Earth are trying to do the same with space.

The first half of the book makes for alarming reading. For many of us, astronomy is about a sense of wonder, curiosity and awe, about learning and understanding. This is not, as Rubenstein argues, the view of the corporations now taking over space exploration from governments. Instead, they consider space exploration in the same way that

European colonists saw terrestrial exploration: as a source of resources to make the rich richer. The second half of the book thankfully gives a more uplifting message, one of hope and of new ways to view both our Earth environment and that of space.

Astrotopia keenly analyses current trends in space exploration in a way that feels fresh and original. While Rubenstein acknowledges arguments that ask why billionaires are spending so much on space exploration when they could solve world hunger and/or climate change, she does not conclude that space should not be explored. Rather, the argument is that we explore space with care and respect. This is an excellent book that makes so much sense of the recent history of space exploration, while leaving a strong sense of hope for the future. ★★★★★

Emily Winterburn is an astronomy historian and author