

★ **An Astronomer in Love****Antoine Laurain****Louise Rogers Lalaurie, Translator****Megan Jones, Translator**

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The fates of a girl who loves the stars, a real estate agent, an envoy for the king, and a taxidermist are plied by the goddess of love in Antoine Laurain's scintillating, era-crossing romance novel *An Astronomer in Love*.

Venus does not often cross the sun—twice a lifetime, if you're quite lucky. In 1760, Guillaume (an astronomer who almost became a priest) thus feels blessed by the opportunity to chart this rare passage and estimate, on behalf of the French Academy and at the request of the king, Venus's distance from Earth. His voyage takes him across the Indian Ocean, where he faces down gales and confronts his deep loneliness head-on. He learns to fish, swim, and catalog shells. He begins his scientific tome. And when a storm prevents his first viewing opportunity, he learns to handle disappointment too, digging in for an eight-year wait—his last opportunity to fulfill his charge.

Two-and-a-half-hundred years later, a real estate agent, Xavier, is called upon to retrieve a locked box from an apartment that he recently sold. Inside, he finds Guillaume's brass telescope, which he sets up on his balcony to bond with his son. But peering through it, he begins to hope for a second connection—with the woman across the way, who looks as lonesome as Xavier feels, and whose apartment houses a stuffed zebra.

True to form, Laurain's latest love story is an unusual one, snagging attention with its sensuous references, historical knowledge, and taste for serendipity. There are pink pearls and iron rains; there are guns shot toward the sun. Its most bombastic events are forwarded with shrugging self-awareness, disarming disbelief; its tragedies are cutting, and its triumphs are irresistible.

Cinematic and enchanting, the romance novel *An Astronomer in Love* arranges piquant, connected matches for two couples who live hundreds of years apart.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (July / August 2023)

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