



## The Stars, Like Dust

*Isaac Asimov*

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## **The Stars, Like Dust** Isaac Asimov

Half a century before, the Nebular Kingdoms had been conquered by the cruel and domineering Tyranni, the war lords of Tyraan.

Now Biron Farrill's father had disappeared and Biron himself was marked for murder. He knew that his enemies were backed by the Tyranni. And that *they* were really responsible.

But why had he and his father been singled out for destruction?

The answer takes him through the cosmic reaches of the galaxies. It becomes a quest for the "Rebellion World"—the hidden planet that shelters a conspiracy against the Tyranni and holds the only hope of peace for man's future.

The quest is a dangerous one.

The stakes are either the end of the Tyranni...or the end of Biron Farrill.

## **The Stars, Like Dust Details**

Date : Published June 1st 1972 by Fawcett Crest (first published January 1st 1951)

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Author : Isaac Asimov

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## From Reader Review The Stars, Like Dust for online ebook

### Michael Battaglia says

Those who have often accused Asimov of being historically, shall we say, lax on anything resembling action may have felt a faint flicker of hope when reading the opening passages to this novel, where mild-mannered student Biron Farrill discovers late at night that someone has broken into his room and planted a radiation bomb. There's a few tense pages that make you believe that this is a lost thriller from the master of cerebral SF, a novel of far future espionage where no one is safe and danger lurks around every corner.

Then everyone starts talking about what just happened and that goes right out the window. I'm not saying this is a bad thing, part of the reason that Asimov is so highly regarded and beloved among SF fans is because he was able to make these talky novels work, that he could wring some semblance of excitement from everyone talking about action but not actually engage in anything that you or I might accidentally misconstrue as this elusive beast sometimes called "action". And the thing was, he was capable of it . . . I remember reading "The Caves of Steel" in the scenes where the cop is trying to elude someone on the moving sidewalks and being actively riveted.

In this case though, not so much. Granted, we're still very early in his career and while this one feels more like one of his novels than "Pebble in the Sky" did, all the kinks still haven't been fully worked out. People count this one as an "Empire" novel, even though there's kind of a reference to an Empire and Earth and whatnot, but it has precious little connection to anything that went before or after it.

Indeed, we mostly focus on a few random worlds held by the Tyranni (nice name). Biron's father is a Rancher on one of those worlds and without warning is captured and presumably executed. Biron is told that his father was planning a rebellion and he's got to get the heck out of Galactic Dodge before the people who got his father come after him. And therein lies the seeds for what could have been a breakneck chase across the galaxy as Biron attempts to uncover the conspiracy and figure out who is on whose side. Before too long he's hunting for a mysterious document and searching for rumored "Rebellion World" that could blow this whole plot wide open and give us a ground level view of galactic governments falling, finally being taken back by the people they've oppressed for so long.

We don't quite get that. Instead we get some typical tropes of both Asimov and SF of that era. We have people with multiple identities, a plot coupon sort of structure where people bounce from one location to another because the plot requires them to and the requisite lone pretty girl who the hero falls in love with (although she does acknowledge that as the only girl he doesn't have much choice, which is remarkably self-aware) simply because they have to. This of course later turns into a minor love triangle with the guy they can maybe trust or maybe not to add some melodramatic tension. In between, everyone discusses every permutation of the plot in every facet they can manage, with a twist I didn't necessarily see coming even if the hero did (Biron starts out in a way that could have been interesting, the young man finding his footing but by the end of it turns into the typically capable SF hero of this period). A lot of it feels very standard at points, even the final twist, which is meant to be shocking, winds up being quite telegraphed by kind of overselling the point halfway through and making you think maybe something is up (it also didn't help that I've read a fantasy series recently which uses a similar twist).

What I find most fascinating about this novel, and I wish he had devoted more to this, were the scenes featuring Tyranni commander Aratap. Far different than most any other SF I had read from this time, there's a focus more on mundane day to day activities and how boring it is to be a conqueror, like reading a story about your accountant set in the future. Asimov seems to be going out of his way to prove that being an overlord can be a dull slog just like your crappy job, and there's some real nice details that I honestly didn't

expect (Aratap fidgeting in a uniform he's used to wearing is a treasure). There's more focus on the bureaucracy and Aratap being a clever foil instead of simply overbearingly evil that raises this book above lazier stuff from this era. It's an almost British sensibility, akin to what Robert Holmes would be doing in his "Doctor Who" scripts almost twenty years later. If nothing else, it makes the book worth it and shows that even when Asimov was fully vested in the cliches of the day, he was still working to find interesting angles. Worth a peak.

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### **Geoff says**

Not the greatest Asimov book but it was an easy read and got me out of my reading slump. Certainly a book of the 50s, so beware if that kind of sci-fi isn't your favourite

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### **Ms. Smartarse says**

Biron Farrill is a senior student at the University of Earth, the planet now highly radio-active. He has also barely escaped a nuclear attack, good thing he didn't throw out his radiation counter . His father on the other hand, was definitely not as lucky. The late Rancher of Widemos had been imprisoned and executed for high treason.

Advised by the mysterious Jonti, our hero embarks on a top-secret and mysterious adventure to avenge his father. More specifically, to stage a coup d'état that would overthrow the evil lords of Tyrann.

An excellent story, about the quest to find the mythical salvation against the threat posed by the Tyranni. I loved the whole world-building aspect, and was constantly on the edge of my (metaphorical) seat, to find out just what happens next. I loved our heroes' logic in tracking down the mythical saviors, and their entire plan to shake off their followers.

What, however, completely pissed me off where the characters. With the exception of Aratap, everyone sounded as if they were taking part in an overly dramatic play. There was the typical hot-headed youngster (Biron), the pretty spoiled princess (Artemisia), and the crazy uncle who claimed he was only acting (Gillbret).

Might as well have just had some random puppets on a string, for all I'm concerned. They hardly even seemed real, with all their exaggerated reactions. Ironic really, that the one character I did like, was supposed to be peculiarly opposed to exhibiting any kind of emotion. More like peculiarly grown-up, among a bunch of rambunctious teenagers.

### **Score: 3/5 stars**

Excellent story, great world building, dismal character development. I will, however read the other two novels in the series, because I definitely want to see more of the (future) Galactic Empire.

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Review of the 2nd book: The Currents of Space

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## Jerry says

Not what I'm used to from the grandmaster of science fiction.

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## Leonardo says

Not really sure how to rate this one. Originally published in 1952, this is one of the first novels by Asimov. Chronologically, this is set between the Robot novels and the Foundation novels. Having read Robots and Empire prior to this one, one can see how they tie the timeline, but the connection is very mild.

What surprised me a bit was the tone of this novel. I've read 6 Asimov novels prior to this one and was expecting some elements that had become familiar. All the robot novels (and a lot of the short stories too) have at the core of the story some form of conundrum. The stories, for the most part, would follow the protagonists in their path to deducing it in a logical way. This structure was used to show the positronic brain idea and how the robots affected society, but mostly in a way that highlighted human questions and human issues.

This novel has very little of this. It's way more pulpy, and although there is some deducing going on, the novel as a whole is way more straight forward. This is by no means bad, just different. And although the big reveal at the end was a bit lame, the light adventure was fun.

My only true complain was with the protagonists. I'd say that for 80% of the novel, Biron is utterly annoying. He acts like a twelve year old for too long and only by the end of the book he feels a tiny little bit developed. Artemisia was even worse. Maybe it's a product of the time period it was written, but shes was very poorly written. And their "romance" was quite silly, to say the least.

Overall, nice pulp adventure filled with silly, paper thin characters.

I miss partner Elijah. :(

EDIT: I just discovered that this was Asimov's least favorite novel, so there's that to consider. This is from his official FAQ:

*"His least favorite novel was The Stars Like Dust. It was scheduled for serialization in Galaxy, then edited by Horace Gold. Gold absolutely insisted on including a subplot about the characters ransacking the Galaxy for an ancient document which would utterly revolutionize their political order. In the end, it turns out that the document is "gur Pbafgvghgvba bs gur Havgrq Fgngrf" (rot-13 coding added as spoiler protection, as if this sub-par novel could be truly "spoiled" by giving away plot points).*

*Asimov loathed the subplot and bitterly resented being forced to add it. He offered to his editor at Doubleday, Walter Bradbury, to remove it for the hardcover publication, but Bradbury liked the subplot and insisted it be left in."*

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Example 2:

"I agree with you there, Gil," said Biron. "just let's go somewhere where I don't have to listen to her clacking. Talk about women on space ships!"

Example 3:

The trip, he decided, could be quite wonderful if she would only learn to behave herself. The trouble was that no one had ever controlled her properly, that was all. Certainly not her father. She'd become too used to having her own way. If she'd been born a commoner she would be a very lovely creature.

Example 4:

"A supply of clothes for the lady," said Biron.

Rizzett wrinkled his forehead. "Yes, of course. Well, that will be her job."

"No, sir, it won't. We'll supply you with all the necessary measurements and you can supply us with whatever we ask for in whatever the current styles happen to be."

Rizzett laughed shortly and shook his head. "Rancher, she won't like that. She wouldn't be satisfied with any clothes she didn't pick. Not even if they were the identical items she would have picked if she had been given the chance. This isn't a guess, now. I've had experience with the creatures."

Forgive my digression. If this sort of thing bothers you, it only gets worse. In the course of a couple of days, strong, willful Artemisia faints, coquettishly tries to play males off against each other, faints, is rescued, and marries our rather unlikeable hero. And don't give me that cultural relativity, "but he was writing in the 40s and 50s" nonsense. It doesn't make it any easier to read through in the 21st century.

Boring. Pass. Go start with Foundation.

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### **Simona Bartolotta says**

Gli ultimi capitoli sono stati tutti un unico, grande brivido che si è propagato lungo la mia schiena con un'intensità pari a quella che, nella mia fervida e indubbiamente esagerata immaginazione, potrebbe avere una scossa elettrica. Fantastico.

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## Bill Wellham says

I seem to have given it more stars than most readers... Should I re-evaluate? Not sure.

This book just has nice memories for me, as I read a very tatty old paperback held together with elastic bands and tape. One of those books that you have no idea where it came from. I was about twelve years old; and as such, my mind was very accepting of stories about space travel, heroes, heroines, strange planets etc. I had been spoon fed on Star Trek and Dr Who!

I wanted to review it now, so I flicked through the pages and scanned some chapters. I can see why everyone says it is not Asimov's best (by a long way), and I can imagine that it has many shortcomings; but I think there is still a place for 1950's SF. It must be read without too much skepticism.

I feel sometimes that the SF of the last three decades, as much as I like it; has maybe spoilt my love of laser gun waving heroes and amazing rocket ships.

It also shows how Asimov evolved from magazine stories to Trilogies and god-like status. It is always worth reading the early works of great writers, and forgive them for their shortcomings.

This is a space romp, with a slightly dull middle, and a nice ending. But it will always have a place on my shelf.

Nice one Isaac!

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## Antonio says

Tras finalizar las tres novelas centrales del 'Ciclo de Trantor' y la 'Serie de los Robots', toca ponerse con la 'Trilogía del Imperio Galáctico' en esta andadura por las obras más relevantes de Isaac Asimov. Y el comienzo, como mandan los cánones, viene con 'En la arena estelar', una obra que resumiré en un par de puntos, uno positivo y otro negativo.

Empezando por la parte mala, ésta viene relacionada con el propio encaje de esta novela en el universo y el futuro ideado por Asimov. La realidad es que 'En la arena estelar' es una obra anterior a la primera novela de la Fundación, al menos editada como tal. En este aspecto se aprecia que Asimov no tenía su universo definido y da más bien la sensación de que introduce esta obra en la saga casi con calzador. Sí, se puede intuir (con imaginación) cierta relación con la saga pero se encuentran algunas incoherencias muy importantes.

Sin embargo, la novela es muy entretenida por si misma... y este es su gran punto positivo. Nos sumerge en una aventura intergaláctica con viajes espaciales, conspiraciones, planetas y sociedades bien definidos, personajes interesantes... que conforman una historia que engancha de principio a fin con esa cualidad tan 'asimoviana' por la cual te hace dudar de todos e introduce giros argumentales muy sorprendentes.

Sintetizando... personalmente los hechos protagonizados por Biron, Artemisa y compañía entretienen mucho pero como parte de una saga tan 'perfecta' como es ésta queda a un nivel muy bajo. Y es que ni siquiera el propio Imperio que da nombre a esta trilogía se menciona en la obra.

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## Simon says

So, my plan to re-read the all the Asimov books that make up our future history in the Foundation Universe continues with this, the first of the Galactic Empire novels. Although, it has to be said, this is the only one of his books in this universe that I hadn't read before.

The galactic empire novels, like the "I, Robot" stories, the first two Elijah Baley novels and the original "Foundation" trilogy were originally published in the 50's. When Asimov began, many years later, to attempt to weave the robot stories into the same fabric as the Foundation stories by constructing a unified vision of a future history, these were retrospectively deemed to have occurred some time in between the robot and foundation stories, at some point during the reign of the galactic empire. Besides that there is really nothing that ties this in with anything else and it completely stands alone.

The book started weakly for me, presenting a seemingly dumb and uninteresting protagonist getting entangled in a galactic conspiracy after finding out his father has been executed. It starts out in the territory of hum-drum action thriller (which, let's face it, isn't Asimov's forte) but does improve later on as the plot thickens and begins to develop in more interesting ways. I really didn't like the conclusion though when we find out exactly what this secret weapon was that was hidden on Earth for so long. Very Twee and again re-enforces how this just doesn't really fit in as part of the "Foundation Universe".

I can't help wondering what Asimov might have written had he written any new Galactic Empire novels when he returned intent on unifying the books. That never happened though and we'll just have to be content with what we have.

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## Steve says

Ah boy. Man, Asimov disappointed me a bit with this book; fortunately it was short enough to where I could make it through without throwing in the towel.

The Stars, Like Dust is often regarded as the first book in the Empire series, though as far as I know it really doesn't have much to do with the other books in the series, or really much to do with the Robot, Empire, and Foundation series as a whole. This story surrounds Biron Farrill whom at the beginning of the book is studying at a University on Earth when thanks to a man named Jonti he is made aware of a bomb that has been planted in his room. He is then made aware of his father's death. His father holds a high position as the Rancher of Widemos. Jonti convinces Biron to travel to the strongest Tyranni controlled planet, Rhodia. This is where he hears rumors about a rebellion against the Tyranni and it becomes his goal to find the rebel planet. Oh, the Tyranni is an empire of few that have found a way to rule 50 planets, despite being well underpopulated.

On the surface this seems like decent Asimov fare, but there are some real glaring flaws with this book. First, I almost couldn't believe this was Asimov's writing, it just felt so - uninspired. I've only read the Robot series before this, but some of my favorite aspects of those books were the characters (namely R. Daneel and Elijah) and the commanding dialog. Here in Stars the characters are incredibly boring to me and the dialog is very flat.

Also, the plot here starts to feel really clunky. We have a lame contrived love story and more lame twists, double-crosses, double-double-crosses, double-double-double-crosses (you get the point) than I care to read about. For the first time Asimov's prose feels very amateurish. I actually had to re-read pages because I often found myself so bored that I would just glance words rather than really read them, it was just that bad for me.

The book does start to pick up a little bit towards the middle, middle-end and when I finally started to see some redeeming value he throws in one doozy of a hokey ending.

So, there's a few interesting moments but as a whole this book didn't work for me at all. I wasn't too surprised when after reading this book I did a little research and found that this is Asimov's least favorite book, so far this is my least favorite Asimov book. All is well though, I'm certainly not going to give up on Asimov and I look forward to forgetting this one and moving on.

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## Davyne DeSye says

Very enjoyable...

This is one of Asimov's very early science fiction novels and is quite a reflection of his times. Having been written in 1951, it reflects the societal fear at the time regarding a possibly upcoming World War III and destruction of the planet by nuclear weapons.

In this book, the planet Earth is only one of many that has been settled by humankind, but – unfortunately – large portions of its surface are highly radioactive and everyone wears (or carries) radiation detectors (in the form of watches, jewelry, clothing, etc.) in case they inadvertently wander into a high-radiation zone. There is a hint that this is because of some long-past war.

Interestingly, though the story begins on Earth, most of the story actually takes place off planet. The Tyranni are the despotic rulers of a group of planets near the Horsehead Nebula, and naturally, a rebellion is in the works. Our young hero, Biron (who is on Earth), is flung into the rebellion when his father is killed on their home planet of Nephelos. Another (and possibly high-ranking) member of the rebellion, Jonti, hustles Biron off Earth and sets in motion a chain of events that seems at every turn to be endangering Biron's life rather than protecting it – making Biron suspect that his benefactor is not the man he pretends to be. Somehow, Biron manages to evade the traps and dangers that surround him. He embarks on a search for the mysterious “rebellion world” that is theoretically located in the Horsehead Nebula and allows Jonti to accompany him on the search, with much reservation, but in the hopes of learning who Jonti really is and what his motivations truly are. Events at the end of the book wrap back to Earth – at least tangentially – in a (to me) surprising way.

It is an action-adventure novel typical of the 1950s science fiction, full of blasters, space ships, planets, and, as is also typical of the times, some great science and scientific explanations that do not bog down the narrative.

I also enjoyed the “About the Author” section at the back of my edition. Asimov's sense of humor is displayed throughout. For example:

“He [Asimov] remains as youthful, as lively, and as lovable as ever, and grows more handsome with each year. You can be sure that this is so since he has written this little essay himself and his devotion to absolute objectivity is notorious.”

This is now considered Book 1 in the Galactic Empire series, although at the time it was written, it was simply a standalone novel. Highly recommended to those who enjoy books from the Golden Age of science fiction.

## Sesana says

I'm trying to read all of the books that eventually fell under the umbrella of the Foundation series, in internal chronological order. Which brings me to this, one of the first novels Asimov ever published. In some ways, it shows. The pacing is far from smooth, and the characters tend towards the wooden. The romance, between Biron and Artemisia, is rushed and unconvincing. And yet, it's still a quick and entertaining read. So far, I've yet to be truly disappointed in any of these books. That's good, as I still have a long ways to go.

It's important to note that this was originally published in 1951. I doubt Asimov would have made some of the choices that he did if he'd written this book in 1991. An Earth devastated by nuclear war was a frighteningly viable future in 1951, for example, and I have a feeling that the ending would have a different reveal if written today. Or, as the Wikipedia article implies, not be there at all. It's good to know that Asimov didn't like that plotline any better than I did.

Although it's flawed, more so than the other novels I've read by Asimov, I still thought it was well worth reading. Maybe if I weren't planning on reading the entire Robots/Empire/Foundation series, I'd feel differently.

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## Ken Doggett says

Luckily this was a quick read, because it was not a very rewarding one; I had trouble getting into the book, and almost quit midway. I do not recommend this book for modern readers. It has almost no characterization, so you're held at arm's length from the story, and the story itself is less than credible. On the one hand it's almost too convoluted to follow all of the unlikely twists and turns, and on the other its final conclusion, while probably significant at the time it was written, was too simple to fit the story. In fact, an episode for the 1960s Star Trek series used the same device to end one of its less credible episodes. The writing was stilted, and in places awkward. A few more edits and smoother writing might have made the goings-on in the story a little clearer, the characters more lifelike. I know that this was one of his early books, and part of the lead-up to the Foundation series, and I know that he eventually became one of the Science Fiction giants because of his imaginative writing. However, if you're new to Asimov, this is not the book to start you off. I rate it at 2 out of 5 stars.

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## Sandy says

Isaac Asimov's very first novel, "Pebble in the Sky" (1950), was the opening salvo in what would later be known as his Galactic Empire trilogy, and was set some 50,000 years in Earth's future. It may surprise some potential readers to learn, then, that book 2 in the series, "The Stars, Like Dust" (the use of a comma after the word "Stars" is not present anywhere in my 1963 Lancer paperback, but Asimov's later autobiography, "I, Asimov," does present the book title with the comma, so don't ask me!), takes place a mere 10,000 years in the future, or a good 40,000 years prior to the events in book 1! Thus, the book can be viewed as a very loose prequel of sorts, although the galactic backdrop is the only story element that the two books share. This second novel of Asimov's originally appeared in the January – March '51 issues of Horace L. Gold's "Galaxy Science Fiction" (a 25-cent, digest-sized periodical) with a different title, "Tyrann," and was then released in book form later that same year. It is another highly readable, fast-moving space adventure from this beloved

and, ultimately, superhumanly prodigious author, but one with a number of problems, as will be seen.

In the book, the Galactic Empire consists of only some 1,100 settled planets, as opposed to the 200 million colonized worlds of book 1. Some 50 years prior to book 2's commencement, the short and stocky human colonists of the planet Tyrann had conquered 50 other worlds in the neighborhood of the Horsehead Nebula, and if there were ever any doubt as to how the author felt about those space conquerors, let's just say that he calls their race the Tyranni. At the beginning of "The Stars, Like Dust," a 23-year-old resident of the Nebula world Nephelos, Biron Farrill, who is about to graduate from an Earth university, awakens in his dorm only to find that a radiation bomb has been planted near his bed. He survives this murder attempt and later learns that his nobleman father, the so-called Rancher of Widemos, has just been put to death for his participation in an insurrection plot against the Tyranni. Urged by a mysterious benefactor, Sander Jonti, to go to the subject world of Rhodia and speak to that planet's Director, Hinrik V, Biron travels by starship to seek an audience there. Hinrik, as it turns out, is something of a mentally deficient imbecile, but Farrill is soon aided by the Director's brother, Gillbret oth Hinriad, and by Rhodia's princess herself, the beautiful Artemisia. The three steal a Tyranni armored cruiser and set off in search of the "rebellion world" that Gillbret claims to have once visited, all the time playing cat and mouse with the Tyranni commissioner of Rhodia, the dangerously perceptive Simok Aratap. But the discovery of that legendary rebellion world is not the only thing on Biron's and Aratap's minds. A mysterious ancient document containing the details of a highly powerful weapon of some sort has vanished from Earth, and the discovery of that relic is of vital concern to them both, as well....

Writing in his "Ultimate Guide to Science Fiction," Scottish critic David Pringle calls "The Stars, Like Dust" "a minor Asimov space yarn," and that does indeed seem to be the general consensus. As a matter of fact, Asimov himself would later call it the least favorite of all his 40 novels, 38 of which had been in the sci-fi realm. This, it seems, was largely due to the number of rewrites the publisher demanded of him (Doc Ike hated doing rewrites, apparently), as well as the fact that Asimov loathed the subplot revolving around the ancient document that editor Gold compelled him to put in. To be fair, that subplot is a relatively minor thread in the story's weave, and the revelation of its exact nature is one that very few readers will predict. That big reveal does come as something of a surprise ending, akin to the one revealing the First Speaker's identity in the author's classic 1953 novel "Second Foundation." In both books, that surprise is reserved for the very last paragraph; do NOT peek ahead!

As for the rest of it, I will confess that this reader was a tad confused during the book's first half, and that was undoubtedly deliberate on the author's part. This is the sort of book in which most of the characters have hidden agendas ("Am I too complicated for you?" Aratap asks at one point), and few are what he/she seems at first blush. Thus, it is difficult to discern many of our main characters' motivations. Fortunately, things begin to clarify around the book's midpoint--"It all hangs together," as Jonti declares around that halfway section--but Asimov still reserves many surprises for his final chapters. In hindsight, the book is very clearly written (not for nothing was Asimov later dubbed "The Great Explainer," after penning over 400 books of nonfiction), but purposefully ambiguous in spots. You may feel the need to read the book over again once you're through with it, to admire how deftly the author has written both honestly and misleadingly at the same time. Asimov, of course, was also known for his books that combined both sci-fi and mystery (I am thinking most especially of 1954's "The Caves of Steel" and 1957's "The Naked Sun," as well as his two unalloyed mystery novels, 1958's "The Death Dealers" and 1976's "Murder at the ABA"), and "The Stars, Like Dust" can almost be seen as a warm-up of sorts to those. It is not just a whodunit, but also a whydunit, and the complexity of the plot here is perhaps the novel's single greatest selling point.

Asimov also throws in many little grace-note touches to please his readers, including a long-distance communication beam attuned only to the intended receiver's mind; the haunting image of how the radioactive Earth appears from far off in space; the monorail elevators that cover the surface of Hinrik's palace; Gillbret's uncanny invention, the visisonor, which creates both images and music in the wearer's brain; and those nasty neuronics whips, which would still be in use 40,000 years later, in book 1. Another

interesting touch for this reader: the fact that the Tyranni nemesis Aratap (actually, he might be the most likeable character, strangely enough, in the entire book!) wears contact lenses. Now ubiquitous, contacts, as we know them today, only became generally available to the public in 1949, and thus were still fairly cutting edge when Asimov wrote his story.

The book, naturally, is hardly a perfect affair, with characters who are somewhat unfleshed out and a princess who is kinda lame/wishy-washy/namby-pamby. Asimov even seems to make some slight goofs in this, his second novel. For example, at one point, he tells us that the Tyranni have conquered two dozen planets in the Horsehead Nebula; later, that figure is given as 50. He tells us that our Milky Way galaxy has a diameter of some 30,000 light-years, whereas today, we know that it is more like 100,000 to 180,000 light-years. And in one section, Artemisia quotes from an old poem that turns out to be from English poet Richard Lovelace, circa 1649. But once the reader learns the nature of that secret document at the book's end, the likelihood of anyone being able to quote by heart a 17th century Earth poet becomes highly minute. But these are quibbles. "The Stars, Like Dust" remains a hugely pleasing page-turner, despite everything. For this reader, it would appear, even minor Asimov is preferable to so much of the dross being churned out today. And now, I think it's high time for me to be heading on to book 3, 1952's "The Currents of Space." Stay tuned....

(By the way, this review originally appeared on the FanLit site at <http://www.fantasyliterature.com/> ... a most ideal destination for all fans of Isaac Asimov....)

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### **Lisa (Harmonybites) says**

Isaac Asimov is one of my favorite writers--truly. I used to joke he was my spiritual father, because his non-fiction pro-reason, pro-science essays had such a huge influence on me. And I love his fiction. Especially his short stories, which hold up well and I'd enthusiastically recommend a collection of them: "The Dead Past," "Nightfall," "The Ugly Little Boy," "The Last Question" are amazing science fiction. So is his *Foundation* series by and large and his Robot novels and stories, and I remember loving *The End of Eternity* and *The Gods Themselves*. But this novel even Isaac Asimov himself pointed to as his least favorite, and reading it I can understand why.

This is very early Asimov--only his second novel and book. Published in 1951, this was written before Sputnik, let alone a manned space program. Piloting a spacecraft is quaintly called "spacinautics" in this book. There are blasters and "neurotic whips" and "Nebula Kingdoms." In other words, this is the world of pulp and reads more like a Buck Rogers episode than classic Asimov. His hero, Biron Farrill, is more notable (and noted) for his muscles, not his brains, and his love interest, Artemisia, is described as "smoldering" and "spirited." And their romance is, well, proof that not just women can write treacly love stories and they don't all inhabit the Romance aisle. And did I mention this is *very* early in Asimov's writing career? Oh, the melodrama! The over-fondness for the exclamation point! He'd get much, much better over the years.

What saves this from one star, besides that I don't think I can bear rating something by Asimov so low? Well, there are glimmers at times of the Asimov to come, in how he injects the science into science fiction, and how the interplanetary intrigue foreshadows his *Foundation* series. The ending did make me smile. But if this novel had been by an unknown, I think I would have given up on the book a few chapters in. If this is your first Asimov, please, please don't hold this against him. He really is one of the greats of science fiction--you just wouldn't know it from this book.

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## Brian Schwartz says

The Stars, Like Dust works on a level not achieved by *The Currents of Space* or *Pebble in the Sky*. It does not try to be a complex spy thriller told in less than 200 pages. Nor does it get weighed down in heavy politics or distracting and ineffective subplots. *The Stars, Like Dust* is pure space opera loaded with shootouts, space trips, mysterious planets, and evil bad guys.

This is not, in and of itself, the definition of good science fiction. Subplots, intrigue, complex schemes and thick character development are all ingredients of great general fiction and genre fiction. But when an author tries and fails to effectively incorporate these elements into the story, the result is drudgery for the reader. When an author tries, and succeeds to tell a simple, but exciting, story, that's reading gold.

This is not to say *The Stars, Like Dust* was a great story telling achievement. It had a couple serious flaws. The first was the introduction of a mysterious document Biron was supposed to secretly obtain on Earth that was so powerful it would help foment revolution. This is the book's only subplot and mercifully, Asimov dismisses his own foolishness until near the end when the characters have an, "oh yeah, what about that?" moment.

That document is, of course, the U.S. Constitution. While I am as reverent of the Constitution and its principles as anyone, I hate to see it inserted into science fiction. I can't help but remember William Shatner's melodramatic reading of the Preamble in the *Star Trek* episode, *The Omega Glory*. That is a painful memory. This subplot didn't need to be there.

Of course, there is also the dated sexism in the story. Biron's love interest, Artemisia, is the consummate female lead in these pulp era science fiction stories. She is a bystander. She is a passive narrative voice. She has no active role. Today's readers are a little more demanding of their heroines.

Asimov's early works deliver for me just what I want them to: good stories that are well-paced and well told. Writers who cut their teeth on pulp magazines work hard to economize words and tell stories that move to economize on space. Asimov, like Bradbury, Matheson, Dick, and the other greats who emerged from this format, rank among the great story tellers and I love them!

Although it was the third written, *The Stars, Like Dust* is the first in the chronology of the *Galactic Empire* series that lies between Asimov's *Robots* series and *Foundation series*. It takes place centuries before the rise of Trantor as the rulers of the galaxy. The beauty of the *Galactic Empire* series is, it need not be read in chronological order by story or by publication date. The novels each stand on their own.

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## Alina says

Well, you can see from his writing that his 'scientist' side was stronger than the 'writer' one: he clearly writes better robots than humans :)

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