



The Space Trilogy

Arthur C. Clarke

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Islands in the Sky, first published in 1954, sees Roy Malcolm win a trip to the Inner Station, a space station rotating 500 miles from Earth.

The Sands of Mars, set in the 21st century, has a group of pioneers struggling to change the face of this inhospitable planet.

Earthlight is set in a human colony on the moon.

This omnibus edition of Arthur C. Clarke's early novels shows the author of 2001: A Space Odyssey exploring space and time in adventurous and thoughtful ways. Although the course of recent history has been different, these novels offer a glimpse of what-might-have-been, as envisioned nearly 50 years ago by the greatest sci-fi writer of them all.

The Space Trilogy Details

Date : Published May 2001 by Gollancz (first published April 2000)

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Author : Arthur C. Clarke

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Genre : Science Fiction, Fiction

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From Reader Review The Space Trilogy for online ebook

Rob Wiltsher says

I'll let you know when I have read it...

Raj says

This volume collects three short novels by Arthur C. Clarke under a general 'colonising the solar system' theme.

The first, Islands in the Sky (4*), is one that I remember reading as a teenager and being disappointed by. Upon re-reading, however, I really enjoyed it. Part of the problem that I had with this book first time round was the cover blurb, which made it sound awfully exciting. And, with the best will in the world, it isn't. A teenager wins a TV gameshow trip to anywhere in the world, and through a legal loophole manages to wangle his way to the innermost of the space stations that girdle the earth. The book tells of the various adventures that he had there. This is all good, enjoyable stuff, but it's also a book where problems are solved with solid Clarke-ian engineering, by sensible men who probably smoke pipes. I wish I could go back and warn my younger self to ignore the blurb on the back and appreciate the book for what it is.

Then we have The Sands of Mars (4*), about half of which isn't actually set on the red planet at all, but on the ship taking our protagonist there. There's a lot of description of life on a spaceship, the sorts of problems that might occur, then similar sorts of things on Mars itself. Again, very solid engineering and science, apart from the big whoppers of life and (something Clarke ruefully acknowledges in the foreword), there being no mountains on Mars! This book also has more of a story than 'Islands in the Sky', introducing politics between Mars and the homeworld.

The final book, Earthlight (5*) is the best of the three. It retains an everyman narrator, in common with the others, but has a much stronger story, with conflict brewing between Earth and the Federation that comprises Venus, Mars and the outer moons. Central to this conflict is that heavy metals are rare in the solar systems, and that Earth is hoarding them, preventing the colonists from getting access to them. However, a discovery on the moon could change everything, and war may be inevitable. While being set mostly in a lunar observatory, full of scientists, this book is still pacier and more political than the other books, and filled with some marvellous turns of phrase.

All three books here were written before the start of the space age. While they get some things right, there's obviously a lot that they got wrong, most notably the extent to which human space exploration and colonisation throughout the solar system would have progressed. Still, all three books are optimistic visions of humanity achieving greatness despite the odds, and very enjoyable reads.

Prashanth says

I rather love Mr.Clarke's works, or that's what I thought after the explosive and intelligent Space Odyssey series and the Rama series. Mr.Clarke is one of the best, no doubt about it. But as with the rest of humanity,

he is (or was) constrained by the present. He gracefully accepts the limitations when thinking in hindsight, and still the books are a good read for this time and age.

1. Islands in the Sky

Humans deployed in space, and a 'young adult' (whatever that means) goes there as a winning prize from a competition. Surprising that the company sponsoring the prize did not load it with enough fine-print. Clarke himself says that this is perceived as an young-adult fiction. I would say rightly so. The treatment of the story, the jumping from one instance to the next as in a diary, the inherent simplicity that gets applied to all situations (like maintaining a space ship by the apprentice group) all makes one wonder what the point of the story is. Man, was I in a hurry to get on with the rest of the book.

2. Earthlight

The lone source for heavy metals is earth, and that ensures some friction b/w earth and humans on outer planets. Moon has also now been discovered to possess the heavy metals, and so some guys decide to bomb the mining station. There is a spy in the midst (no prizes for guessing that), an accountant who thinks he is a counter-spoof, and a super nova that has nothing to do with anything else. There's the nuclear bomb from the out-worlders - a few guys get killed, everyone calls it a day and go back to their business. Oh, and moon becomes all important for the future of mankind.

3. Sands of Mars

Can't help but draw up parallels between this group of Mars pioneers and their not-so-distant American counterparts. Martian life is amusing read, and the oxygen releasing plants/pet-like creatures that can be taught tricks are convenient enough for humans. One of the fundamental aspects that most of us assume is that earth-like conditions are necessary for any life. For scientific reasons and not to get clobbered by the sheer-immensity of it all, this is a necessity. But, how can we explain the same thing in SF? At the end of the day if you feel the protagonist is a pampered half-wit, I cannot blame you. There are times when a person seems to be always at the right place at the right time, but this seems to be testing limits.

Dan says

If I could give this 2.5 I would, but this one gets rounded down. The third story, "Earthlight", is pretty solid, but the first two are more science and engineering daydreams than narratives.

Tim says

I bought this omnibus quite cheap, for about 10 EUR. Of course, it was during a sales period. As I was looking for something by Arthur C. Clarke, I picked this one and *The City and the Stars*. And as the stories in this 'The Space Trilogy' omnibus are each quite short, I decided to read them before tackling his other classic, also while trying to take into account that these stories were written at least 60 years ago.

'Islands in the Sky' was mediocre. A young guy wins a tv-quiz, gets to travel into space, although that wasn't part of the deal. And then you learn that the lad, Roy Malcolm (16 years old), did his homework with regards to Earth's "legal" boundaries and the Tycho Convention. Thanks to his uncle, who works in the legal sector, the small print was decoded. So Roy travels to the Inner Station and learns all about the life out there. As his

stay is short, he also tries to have some adventures, next to learning about research that is conducted in the station.

It felt like a YA-story, mainly because of the main character, but the scientific elements about space and what not, do make the story a bit more digestable.

'The Sands of Mars' starts in roughly the same way as 'Islands in the Sky', but the story is, in general, better. Matt Gibson, a writer, leaves Earth to begin a new life - that's his goal - on Mars. But he has to earn the trust of the human Martians. Meanwhile, his task is also to keep Earth up to date with regards to happenings and what he experiences, as a reporter would do. Mars is set to become a second Earth, but as Gibson isn't told everything, he has to find out for himself what's going on.

This one, too, is more for entertainment, for in-between. It's definitely not that exciting, whether or not the time of writing is taken into account.

And last, but somehow not least, 'Earthlight'. It started well, I noticed a change in writing style, a bit more serious, and chapter sizes (smaller, better arranged, in a way), but at about 80 pages before the end, I didn't feel like finishing this story of intrigues, espionage, etc. I find it very difficult to connect to the characters (they're so flat, so devoid of emotion), to the events, the politics. Sure, the science in the story is again fairly alright, but it's only one part of the story and not enough to make the reading more exciting.

In short: I was a little deceived, thinking that the great Sir Arthur C. Clarke had written nothing but very good and recommended Sci-Fi. I still have, as mentioned in the first paragraph, 'The City and the Stars', which I hope is a much better book. The reading will, for obvious reasons, be for much later. Fans of mr Clarke will probably be more interested in this omnibus, 'The Space Trilogy', or will perhaps appreciate his earliest works more.

For those, like me, new to Clarke's works: start elsewhere. Avoid this trilogy until you really want to read it. It's almost like when "discovering" a band: unless they're really new, it's best not to start with the earliest albums or demos.

Nicholas Whyte says

<http://nwhyte.livejournal.com/2699804.html>

Islands in the Sky

good wholesome stuff, with boys becoming men in space: our protagonist gets to stay in the big low-orbit space station, where the entire crew appear to be English and male, and experience a few other adventures but also learn some important lessons about life and about engineering (though nothing much about other matters, the only women in space being an actor making a movie in orbit and the members of a friendly family of Mars colonists). The most striking difference for me between Clarke's 1952 future and what has actually happened is that the cost of space flight has proven to be so high that economies of scale have pushed us much more to unmanned spacecraft and also to international collaboration than he anticipated, though I am sure he approved of both developments.

The Sands of Mars

a Clarke novel that I definitely had not read before - and I thought I had raided the Belfast library system of its entire stock of his works when I was a teenager. Though bound second in my omnibus volume, it was Clarke's first published novel, dating from 1951. It's set a few years after the establishment of a Mars colony; the journalist protagonist (who is also an sf novelist) is being sent as what we'd now call an embedded member of the team, to write up what is going on in humanity's new outpost; the details of how journalism is technically done have dated far more than the rest of the book - there is a loving detailed description of a fax machine, an unimaginable technological advance in 1951, archaic for us in 2016. It's also a rare case of Clarke attempting to inject some emotional energy into his story, with one of the crew members turning out to be the protagonist's long-lost biological son, who then falls in love with the only girl on Mars; characteristically, having laid out the situation, the author doesn't dwell on it (and didn't really try this kind of narrative trick again in his career). He's on much more comfortable political ground when the discovery of a new form of Martian life upsets the balance of relations between the Martian base and its Earth master's, though here again his viewpoint is firmly rooted in what's good for the human colonists rather than the indigenous Martians. Still, I enjoyed it, and I'm surprised that this took me decades to track down.

Earthlight

This 1955 novel did disappoint me a bit. It's the story of a counterespionage accountant on a lunar observatory at a moment of interplanetary conflict between Earth and The Rest Of The Solar System; obviously the Moon becomes a critical location in that conflict (and equally obviously there are Cold War parallels in the author's mind). There are some vivid observations of base life in the observatory (where again all the staff are white men) and the high-tech battle at the climax of the plot is well described. But otherwise the whole thing is a bit subdued, and the framing narrative of the protagonist's mission gets a particularly unconvincing resolution.

Tazio Bettin says

Islands in the Sky - ah, the untruthful blurbs. Sixteen-year-old roy Malcolm wins "a trip to the Inner Station orbiting Earth, butundreamed-of danger and excitement turn his greatest ambition into a nightmare". Nightmare? What nightmare? The whole story aims to show how life might function in an orbiting station, which it achieves while failing at being a story. Dull, from start to end. Barely anything happens, it's just description after description of space life routine. There are a few short moments of excitement but they also fail at reviving a dead progression of events that don't sum up to a story.

The Sands of Mars - and here is where I abandon this book. The first five chapters are just a repetition of the things that appear in Islands in the Sky, with nothing really happening. Point taken: Clarke is not for me.

Kiril Valchev says

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Nicolas says

Trois courts romans composent cet ouvrage.

Iles de l'espace

Un voyage assez pédagogique dans l'espace très proche. Le personnage principal nous y décrit avec minutie à quoi ressemble la vie dans une station spatiale, ou le paysage qu'on y voit. Pas mal du tout pour un roman écrit en 1954 !

Les sables de mars

Là encore, un roman inattendu de nos jours alors que le propos en est simple : un auteur de sf est le premier passager de la première liaison vers mars. Aussi bien le voyage que son séjour lui réservent des surprises émotionnelles et environnementales.

Également un très bon récit

Lumière cendrée

Dans ce roman, un comptable est envoyé faire du contre-espionnage dans une base scientifique située sur la lune.

C'est peut-être le moins bon roman des trois : moins d'unité dans le récit, un peu trop d'explosions (que l'auteur regrette d'ailleurs dans sa préface) et une conclusion à mon avis pas nécessaire.

Malgré ce dernier roman un peu inférieur, ce recueil m'a paru particulièrement satisfaisant. En effet, les

hypothèses scientifiques tiennent globalement la route, et le tout reste lisible avec plaisir 60 ans après l'écriture.

Frederi Mandin says

Lots of good ideas, but I'm not really taken by the characters or the stories.

It doesn't seem to find its own genre : not really Space Opera, not very hard science, just plain science fiction. In the end I don't think I should have read the whole trilogy, just the separate books, at separate times.

Alex Andersen says

Interesting to see what sci-fi was like 60 years ago and some of it stays remarkably fresh even after all this time.
