



A Heritage of Stars

Clifford D. Simak

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A knowledge-hungry young man sets out on a quest to locate a legendary spaceport in a far-future society that has reverted to primitive tribalism

More than a thousand years have passed since humankind intentionally destroyed its treacherous technology, choosing to revert back to a primitive tribal state. In this society the rusting brain cases of long-inert robots are considered trophies, and the scant knowledge that has survived is doled out to an inquisitive few in monastery-like “universities.” It is at one such center of learning that young Tom Cushing first reads of the legendary “Place of Going to the Stars,” rumored to exist on a high butte somewhere in the western part of the land. Driven by enthusiasm and an insatiable need to track the myth to its source, Tom sets out on an amazing trek across what was once called “America,” teaming up with a witch, the world’s last remaining robot, and other odd companions. But all the astonishing discoveries and dangers they encounter along the way will pale before the revelations that await them at journey’s end.

Clifford D. Simak, award-winning science fiction Grand Master, offers a breathtaking vision of the future that is both dystopian and hopeful in equal measure. In *A Heritage of Stars*, he boldly displays the heart, intelligence, and awesome imaginative powers that have established him as one of the all-time greatest authors of speculative fiction.

A Heritage of Stars Details

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From Reader Review A Heritage of Stars for online ebook

Rose says

I am SOOOOOO disappointed. This was my Simak year - his books were finally converted over to e-book format and I had been looking forward to reading them for years. It all started so well. I thought City was great. So too was Way Station. This was my third and was hardly worth wasting the time to read it.

I have all kinds of problems with this story:

It takes place 1000+ years from now. People are scratching out an existence on a world much different than what we live in now. The planet and it's creatures are the same but we humans are not. Sometime about a thousand years prior, humans began destroying all machines..ALL of them. They called this The Collapse but we never found out why it happened. Simak's view on humans seems to be that we cannot survive well without machines so they aren't very many of us left. All buildings and houses have been either destroyed or are in a state of disrepair. Apparently without machines, we are incapable of maintaining or creating structures to live in. People also somehow reverted back to barbarism.

One of the central characters is a robot that escaped being destroyed during The Collapse. If Simak hadn't told me he was a robot, I never would have guessed. He didn't speak, act, think or anything else like a machine should. He had a bad memory and got lonely, murders bears, and likes to go on long walks exploring.

All the women were described as hags. Without machines, it seems the women of our species just fall apart.

The small group of people we are following came upon two members of an alien species described as being 6 foot tall spheres covered with eyes. Even though they are living with no technology, most like barbarians, they weren't scared of this at all. They walked right up to them and started a discussion.

I'll stop here. I could tear this book apart chapter by chapter but I won't. These were just the first few things that popped into my head. Overall, it was unbelievable, ridiculous, and generally a very bad story. NOT recommended for anyone

Susan Rainwater says

On the whole, Simak's "quest" books don't do a lot for me. *The Fellowship of the Talisman*, *Enchanted Pilgrimage*, and *Destiny Doll* all fall into the "quest" category, as does this book, *A Heritage of the Stars*.

A ragtag group of thrown-together individuals – in this case, a scholar, a witch, a robot, two sensitives, and a psychic horse, travel to the Place of Going to the Stars to see what it's all about. And, frankly, it's not about much.

I love Simak in top form, I just don't think this was in the same class with his best work.

Jim says

This is a hard book to review, because it's both not very good, but very interesting if you're an old time science fiction fan. This is the second time I've read it, and it was much more enjoyable the second time around.

I wrote an extensive review at Worlds Without End.

Michael says

This book is about a man living in a post/apocalyptic Earth. I don't usually like post/apocalyptic stories but I ran across a used copy of this book and being a big fan of Clifford D. Simak and never having read this book I decided to buy it and read it. I enjoyed it very much. It was quite different from other post/apocalyptic books I had read before. The cause of the collapse of mankind is very different than is usually the case in these type stories. There is also an assortment of interesting characters, too many to describe here. If you are a fan of Clifford D. Simak or of post/apocalyptic stories you should read this book.

This is a quote from the book that I like very much.

"Of all combinations, stupidity and arrogance is the worst that can be found."

Clifford D. Simak

A Heritage Of Stars

Booknerd Fraser says

This late Simak is almost identical to the novel that followed it, and not very good

Mcgyver5 says

nice and short without much room for a sophisticated plot or description or character development. It features travels over some of the geographic features of a Minnesota of the distant future. The tone reminded me of the CS Lewis Space trilogy. It touches on interesting themes like alien intelligence and even a sort of historical dialectic. For example, it posits that our technological society is missing something and that its eventual destruction and combination with new factors might allow the human race to rise again and reach new heights.

Ron says

"The best legends may be the best guarded. So sacred, perhaps that no one ever spoke aloud of them."

Simak is a great story teller, but a mediocre science fiction author. Why? Because he gets so many details wrong. Yes, he wrote (and won awards) in the 60 and 70s, and his stories therefore didn't anticipate the subsequent computation and communications revolutions. What he didn't forecast isn't the problem: it's what he did--wrongly. (See Quibbles)

“Intellectual curiosity would be, almost by definition, a characteristic of any civilization.”

This tale is set fifteen hundred years after the Collapse of human technology, when humans have reverted to a near-Stone Age culture. Partly offsetting that loss is the blossoming of latent extrasensory talents. Most of the conditions he posits makes more sense three to five hundred years after the Collapse. Few remnants, certainly not maps and paper, would survive 1500 years.

“The arrogance of one way of thought served to strangle all other ways of thought.”

Quibbles: Loose pages in a library table drawer for a thousand years? Myths “must” have “some foundation in actual happenings”? “Now little enough to pillage” fifteen hundred years after the Collapse? Anything to pillage? Trading food for “trinkets”? Tools, maybe, but not beads. “Still standing steel fence”? Neither rusted away nor stolen for its precious metal?

“Who in this environment needs physics and chemistry?”

Fun read, but only as popcorn for the brain.

“Space is an illusion, and time as well.”

Kirsten says

Another solid and excellent classic science fiction novel by Mr Simak. Why (oh why) did it take me 'til my 50th year to discover this author? Where was he hiding? After all, I practically lived in the sci-fi section of my local used bookstore until my 21st birthday. I just don't get why I never found him.

I've read three of his novels now and have been enthralled by each and every one of them. This one reminds me of two books: *A Canticle for Leibowitz* and *The Fellowship of the Ring*. Those are two completely different books, I know. But this book is very reminiscent of both.

Like *Canticle*, it is a tale of what happens when human civilization falls apart. Like *Canticle*, some human knowledge has been preserved. The twist is how mankind falls apart. He just sort of dismantles civilization. No bombs, no floods, he just decides to give up on technology.

Like the *Fellowship*, we have a group of mismatched loners who join up and go on a quest, a hunt for a myth. A myth that may be real. *The Place of Going to the Stars*.

I really enjoyed this book and am continually amazed by the author and the profound truths he sneaks in his books.

Mark says

I'm a sucker for novels about dystopias (*Nineteen Eighty-four*, *The Handmaid's Tale*), the end of the world (*Lucifer's Hammer*, *The Road*), or how humanity continues to scrape by several generations after the "end" of the world (as we know it, anyway). The first book I read, long ago, that fits into this latter genre was John Robert Russell's *Sar*, which was engrossing to a pre-teen but, if I'm being honest, mostly because of all the sex the main character was having. The second, and far better, book in this genre that I read was Leigh Brackett's *The Long Tomorrow*. The ultimate example, of course, is H. G. Wells's *The Time Machine*. Most recently, I read Jack McDevitt's interesting but ultimately unsatisfying *Eternity Road*.

I learned of Simak's *A Heritage of Stars* through yet another book, Albert Goldbarth's *The Kitchen Sink: New and Selected Poems, 1972-2007* (Goldbarth uses a phrase with a typo in it from the first printing of *A Heritage of Stars* as part of his book's epigraph), which I'm still poring through as I write this.

So where does *A Heritage of Stars* rate in the "long after the end of the world" pantheon of books? Far better than *Sar*, somewhat better than *Eternity Road* and Andre Norton's *Daybreak 2250 A.D.*, but probably not quite as good as *The Long Tomorrow* or Walter M. Miller's *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (though on par with other, less easily categorizable books such as Larry Niven's *A World Out of Time*).

Like many of these types of a books, *A Heritage of Stars* is about the protagonist's quest to find some remnant of the long-dead technological age. In this case, Tom Cushing is seeking the Place of Going to the Stars, a possibly mythological city perched on top of a butte in the American West. Along the way Cushing is joined by an old witch, the last surviving robot, a man who communes with plants and trees, and his daughter, who seems to be immersed in a perpetual trance. This set-up may sound a bit corny in 2012, but Simak tells a good story and rounds out his characters in a way that elevates them above their cartoony labels.

What I was happiest about was the payoff. The Place of Going to the Stars is, of course, not exactly what Cushing was expecting, but what it turns out to be is even more interesting than a defunct interstellar launching pad (or at least it was to this reader). For a pulpy novel written in the late '70s, I enjoyed this one quite a bit.

Monica says

‘Herencia de estrellas’ es hablar de una distopía, con más forma que contenido y, sustancialmente, con mensaje Filosófico relevante de fondo, dentro de la sci fi clásica. La obra de Simak es tranquila, pausada, de tono ensoñador y costumbrista al mismo tiempo. Se encuentra a caballo entre la fábula y la fantasía, hablándonos de la búsqueda del país de las estrellas (El Otero del Trueno en la narración) por parte de sus variopintos protagonistas principales, cada cual más especial y distinto: un chico huérfano, un caballo, una bruja, un robot, una serpiente y un par de seres sensitivos. Así pues, partimos con la travesía Mística-significativa, pero asequible, (que abarca casi toda la obra) de unos supervivientes - descendentes después de la debacle tecnológica- humana que acaeció a finales del 2000 a causa del déficit social y el techo causado, precisamente, por el llamado mal desarrollo humano. Simak nos hace reflexionar acerca de un colapso humano debido a la indignación del pueblo, que destruye todo hasta quedar en la era primitiva de nuevo. La obra la divido en tres principales partes:

En su primera parte, se nos expone la historia del artífice de tal travesía previo a la aventura: Tom Cushing,

un chico huérfano que ha vivido bajo la protección de un matrimonio en la parte Universitaria del primitivo mundo futuro, en dónde se guardan los escritos que se pudieron conservar y se albergan personas mayores que intentan transmitir su conocimiento de las cosas. Allí Tom se le revela un escrito que habla de un lugar de ir a las Estrellas, en dónde se encuentran las posibles respuestas de sus antepasados más evolucionados previo al cataclismo, los cuales viajaron más allá de nuestro astro y exportaron conocimiento Alienígena u similar. En todo el tramo se nos exponen las bases de fondo significativo- argumental de la narración.

En su segunda, la más extensa, se nos narra la Travesía en sí, presentándonos a todos los protagonistas corales y sus vicisitudes e inquietudes: Tom, el chico de curiosidad inherente e idealismo impecadero, Meg, la joven con corazón pero rechazada por el temor y desconocimiento de los otros seres que habitan el actual mundo (agrupados entre Tribales, Nómadas, Guardianes y Universitarios), Rollo, el gentil y solitario androide y único superviviente de su especie, así como el Caballo y Serpiente trémula, que encuentran comprensión y aliento en los 'seres humanos' por fin, además de un abuelo y su nieta, seres sensitivos que tienen la capacidad de comunicarse con todo lo vivo en el planeta. En su particular viaje, compartirán experiencias, información y amistad, además de varias pruebas vitales.

Su última parte, la más 'reveladora' pero no la más importante (por lo menos para el autor), es el final de su ruta y la consecución de su viaje, que deriva en una charla con el señor y dueño del Otero del Trueno: A Y R, y su acuerdo con los únicos seres que han logrado traspasar y llegar a dicha fortaleza.

Éste libro es un claro ejemplo de aquello que se dice: 'el fin es importante, pero quizá lo es más el camino'. Es pues, una Odisea aleccionadora que debe disfrutarse mientras se acompaña a sus protagonistas a lo largo de sus páginas, ya que el que espere una consecución cerrada o contundente, hallará la decepción cómo respuesta. Simak habla de la esperanza frente a la desolación y la vuelta a comenzar, además de un camino alternativo hacía éste, alejado del desarrollo anterior a la catástrofe.

La obra, debido a su tardía escritura, bebe de las fuentes de: Jack London (con la base argumental de su gran obra: La peste escarlata, en un mundo de vuelta a sus comienzos y su debacle tecnológica y social), Heinlein (por él mismo: y su teoría de los multiseres inteligentes en un mismo organismo vivo), y por ende ,el mago de Oz., Le Guin (por su fondo más fantástico que de Sci fi, adornado con sumas descripciones. Pero prefiero mil veces más a Simak narrando) y hasta Silverberg (con sus cerebros hibernados, albergando información vital para la civilización. No obstante, el de Simak es más coherente y lógico). Cartas a su favor es que quizá Cameron bebió de ésta para basar, en parte, el argumento de su primer éxito: Terminator, en referencia a un mundo futuro en el cual la tecnología es totalmente erradicada por rábida y a los Androides, como consecuencia evolutiva lógica de ésta. Y, así mismo, hay una distopía reciente (y presumo que no es la única) que bebe de las fuentes de ésta obra de Simak: la de Verónica Rossi, con todo ése mundo dividido entre la tecnología y los primitivos, y sus seres que sentidos sumamente desarrollados.

Así pues, una historia serena pero disfrutable (si logras sumergirte y captar su onda) y de claro fondo filosófico más que sentenciador (y eso que contiene un buen puñado de ideas, no totalmente innovadoras pues algunas beben del gran Heinlein, no para desarrollarlas sino para reflexionarlas), de tono encantador y que mezcla con bastante logro la Fantasía clásica con la Sci fi futurista. No está nada mal para ser setentera; una época algo decrepita en calidad dentro de éste maravilloso género.

“Cuando existe la esperanza, hay que aferrarse a ella incluso a su más ínfima expresión. Aceptas cualquier indicio de ella, por pequeño que sea; lo mimas; lo cuidas; no permites que desaparezca”

Robert 'Rev. Bob' says

This was written in 1977, but it feels a lot older than that; there's a definite Golden Age style to it. The plot is

simple enough: about 1500 years ago, humans smashed most of their technology, purged the knowledge of how to rebuild it from their libraries, and has been living in a generally savage state ever since. The main character was raised in a university that seems more like a monastery, which may be the only place of learning left on the planet. He comes across a vague reference to a starport, decides to look for it, and the book is the story of his journey.

As I would expect in Golden Age SF, the characters are rather flat, but they're not the point. The book exists to tell more of a philosophical story, to ask what might come after technology, and whether humanity could claw its way back from a self-imposed primitive state to a new semblance of civilization. In the 1500 years or so since the unexplained revolt, there hasn't been any progress of note; will our hero's journey lead him to the catalyst his people need?

There are a couple of clunkers in the storytelling. For one thing, the "History" that is quoted a few times is described as written in small script to conserve paper, but its author is rather more verbose than I would expect in that case. There are also references to discovered notes; if paper is so precious, who would waste it on notes? An old man met on the journey refers to "cleaning his clock" as slang for beating someone up; is that really an idiom that would survive 1500 years of no technology more advanced than spears and bows? All the same, these are rather minor flaws for this type of work, and I am inclined to forgive them in the name of nostalgia.

In the end, the question remains unanswered...but there's hope, and that's more than there had been before. I could easily imagine "A Canticle for Leibowitz" taking place in another part of this world, and it treads rather similar ground. It's a nice book for those of us who cut our teeth on the Golden Age classics, but modern readers may well find it lacking.

Lysergius says

Thousands of years into the future man has completely destroyed a technology-based society and lives a tribal existence, worshipping the 'brain'-cases of long-rusted robots. Here and there pockets of knowledge remain, and young Tom Cushing lives in one such university. His imagination fired by reading of the fabled 'Place of Going to the Stars' in an ancient manuscript, Tom sets out on a long odyssey to find out if the legend is true. His journey encompasses excitement, danger and some strange and colourful companions who commune with plants, can sense life and include the very last robot. But nothing he meets along the way compares with what he and his motley group find at Thunderhead Butte, the Place of Going to the Stars, their journey's end. Here wonder abounds almost as at the edge of the universe. A new challenge, for man to rediscover his destiny, to fulfil his heritage and recover his lost knowledge.

Jim says

Thomas Cushing is an expert at hoeing potatoes--an important job as the time is thousands of years after the Collapse of technological civilization. Thomas lives on the University of Minnesota campus, a walled-in and protected pocket of knowledge. The outside world is a violent and barbaric place (the barbarians call the residents of the university "eggheads"). But Thomas has the possibly insane idea to go out into the dangerous outside world in search of a legendary "Place of Going to the Stars." He thinks there must be a way to jump-start civilization!

When I first read this story, I thought it was implausible--that we would ever lose our science and technology. But now I am not so sure, not so sure at all. Too many people deny the facts--the reality- of science and prefer to cling to their religions and superstitions. Too many people prefer to be ignorant and believe in charlatans. Can we go back to the Dark Ages? I think we are well on our way now....

Xabi1990 says

Leído antes de 1992 y que anda por una estantería en la edición de Martínez Roca SF, es todo lo que puedo decir y que su nota fue 6/10.

Si tenemos en cuenta que por aquellos años en total leí 7 libros de este autor y que todos y cada uno se llevaron ese raquítrico 6/10 eso debe significar que no me enamoré del autor, no.

Voy a cargarles pero solo la nota, hale.

Andrew says

It strikes me as a bit pedantic.

But that is an inevitable result of the scope of the thematic idea Simak explores. How can you talk about the nature of man without just a bit of what? Verbosity, perhaps, because man is a creature of words. Ideology, perhaps, because man is a creature of ideas.

Simak basically asks the question, "Does society actually reflect man's nature, or did we take a wrong turn somewhere?"

You may not agree with his answer, but you must admit it is an intriguing question.
