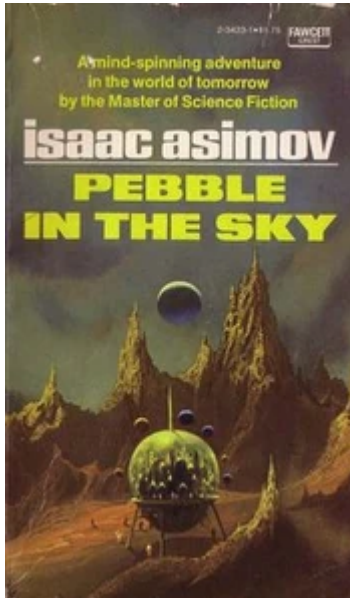


Pebble in the Sky

Contributors to Asimov



Cover for Asimov's *Pebble in the Sky*

Pebble in the Sky is [Isaac Asimov](#)'s first novel, published in 1950. It later became part of his Empire series. Although it has two prequels, [The Stars, Like Dust](#) and [The Currents of Space](#), they are only loosely connected.



This article, **Pebble in the Sky**, contains spoilers. **Be forewarned, plot and/or ending details follow.**

Asimov says *you* decide.

Summary[]

While walking down the street in Chicago, [Joseph Schwartz](#), a retired tailor, is the unwitting victim of a nearby nuclear laboratory accident, by means of which he is instantaneously transported tens of thousands of years into the future (50,000 years, by one character's estimate). He finds himself in a place he does not recognize, and due to apparent changes in spoken language, he is unable to communicate with anyone. He wanders into a farm, and is taken in by the couple [Loa](#) and [Arbin Maren](#) who live there. They mistaken him for a mentally deficient person, and secretly offer him as a subject for an experimental procedure to increase his mental abilities. The procedure, which has killed several subjects, works in his case, and he finds that he can quickly learn to speak the current language. He also slowly realizes that the procedure has given him limited telepathic abilities, including the ability to project his thoughts to the point of killing or injuring a person. These are similar, but much less developed, powers to those employed by [The](#)

[Mule](#) many millennia later.

[Earth](#), at this time, is seen by the rest of the [Galactic Empire](#) as a rebellious planet—it has, in fact, rebelled three times — and the inhabitants are discriminated against. Earth also has several large radioactive areas, although the cause is never described. (The prequels elaborate on this point.) Because the radioactivity makes large areas of Earth uninhabitable, it is a very poor planet, and anyone who is unable to work is legally required to be killed. Earthpeople must also be executed when they reach the age of sixty, a procedure known as The Sixty, with very few exceptions, mainly for people who have made significant contributions to society. This is a problem for Schwartz, who is sixty-two years old.

Although Earth is part of the Empire, with a resident Procurator (as in the Roman empire), with a military garrison, it is in practice ruled by a group of religious fanatics, called the Zealots. They have created a supervirus which they plan to use to kill or subjugate the rest of the empire and revenge themselves for way their planet has been treated by the Empire.

Schwartz, along with Affret Shekt, the scientist who developed the machine that Schwarz was treated with, his daughter Pola Shekt and a visiting historian Bel Arvarden, are captured but escape with the help of Schwarz's new mental powers, and are narrowly able to stop the plan to release the virus.

Dating[]

The 50,000 year estimate is at odds with the chronology given in Asimov's later novels, in particular [Foundation and Earth](#) and [The Caves of Steel](#). The latter novel indicates that the robot [R. Daneel Olivaw](#) was constructed some three thousand years after the founding of New York City. *Foundation and Earth*, in its concluding scene, establishes that Daneel survives into the Interregnum period, after the First Galactic Empire collapses. He gives his age as (roughly) twenty thousand years. The Galactic Era dating system, to which most of Asimov's [Foundation series](#) adheres, places *Foundation and Earth* approximately twelve thousand years after *Pebble in the Sky*. Adding up all the differences, Joseph Schwartz's time displacement transported him *only* eleven millennia into the future.

This sort of inconsistency occurs elsewhere in Asimov's fiction. It is probably to be expected, given that Asimov wrote the Foundation stories over several decades and did not fully link the disparate historical eras until the last years of his life. Furthermore, his characters almost always act with incomplete information, frequently enriching their understanding of Galactic history as the plot unfolds. In this context, such inconsistencies are not only expectable but also, to an extent, necessary for realism.

Themes[]

This book takes place in the same universe as the [Foundation series](#). There is even a reference to [Trantor](#), later the planet where [Hari Seldon](#) would invent [Psychohistory](#). Asimov returned to the radioactive Earth

theme in [Foundation and Earth](#), and he would explore it most fully in [Robots and Empire](#).

Characters[]

- Dr. Affret Shekt
- [Arbin Maren](#)
- Balkis, Secretary to the High Minister
- Prof. Dr. Bel Arvardan
- Colonel of the Chica Garrison
- Cori
- Creen
- Ennius, Prokurator of Earth
- Faroul, former Prokurator of Earth
- Flora, Ennius' wife
- Graz
- [Grew](#)
- High Minister of Earth
- Jennings (Institute for Nuclear Resarch, Chicago, 1949)
- [Joseph Schwartz](#)
- [Loa Maren](#)
- Marc Claudy, Leutnant in the Chica Garrison
- Messter
- Natter, Messenger for the Society of Ancients
- Pola Shekt, daughter of Dr. Shekt
- F. Smitko, a bacteriologist
- Dr. Smith (Institute for Nuclear Resarch, Chicago, 1949)

Characters Mentioned[]

- [Frankenn I](#)
- Hor Devallow
- Stannel II
- [Edard](#)

Places[]

- Bonair
- [Chica](#), former City of Chicago
 - Chica Hall of Correction
 - Chica Garrison in Fort Dibburn
- Everest, seat of the Procurator
- [Senloo](#), former City of St. Louis
 - Temple of Senloo, a patch unradiated earth within a radiated are from where the missiles are to be launched
- Washenn, earth Capital (former Washington?)

See Also[]

[List of Books by Isaac Asimov](#)