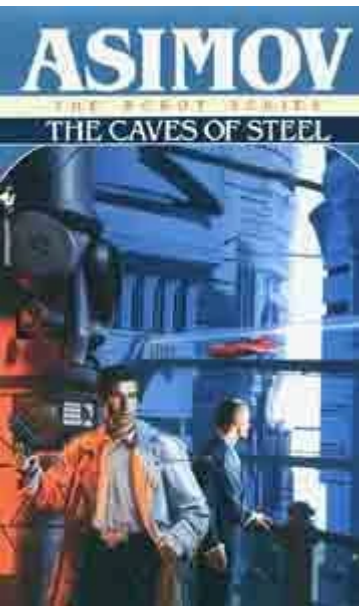


The Caves of Steel

Contributors to Asimov

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The Caves of Steel is a science-fiction novel by [Isaac Asimov](#). The book was first published as a serial in *Galaxy Magazine*, October to December 1953. A Doubleday hardcover followed in 1954.

It is essentially a detective story, and illustrates an idea Asimov advocated, that science fiction is a flavor that can be applied to any literary genre, rather than a limited genre itself.

Setting[]

Isaac Asimov first introduced [Elijah Baley](#) and [R. Daneel Olivaw](#) here. They would later become his, and moreso his readers', favorite protagonists. They live roughly three millennia in Earth's future, a time when hyperspace travel has been discovered, and a few worlds relatively close to Earth have been colonized—fifty planets known as the "[Spacer](#) worlds". The Spacer worlds are rich, have low population density (average population of one hundred million each) and use robot labor very heavily. Meanwhile, [Earth](#) is overpopulated (with a total population of 8 billion) and strict rules against robots have been passed. The eponymous "caves of steel" are vast underground city complexes, capable of supporting tens of millions each. New York, for example, encompasses the present-day New York City as well as large tracts of New Jersey.

Asimov imagines the present day's underground transit connected to malls and apartment blocks, extended to a point where no one ever exits to the outside world. Indeed, most of the population cannot leave, as they suffer from extreme agoraphobia.

In *The Caves of Steel* and its sequels, Asimov paints a grim situation of an Earth which has become pseudo-socialist to deal with an extremely large population, and of luxury-seeking Spacers who limit birth so that each may have great wealth and

privacy. However, Asimov did not find the lack of daylight grim: one of his anecdotes tells how a reader asked him how he could have imagined such an existence with no sunlight. He relates that it had not struck him till then that living perpetually indoors might be construed as unpleasant.

Summary[]



This article, **The Caves of Steel**, contains spoilers. **Be forewarned, plot and/or ending details follow.** Asimov says *you* decide.

The book's central crime is a murder, which takes place before the novel opens. (This is an Asimovian trademark, which he attributed to his own squeamishness and John Campbell's advice of beginning as late in the story as possible.) Roj Nemmenuh Sarton, a Spacer Ambassador, lives in the Spacer outpost just outside New York City. For some time, he has tried to convince the Earth government to loosen its anti-robot restrictions. One morning, he is discovered outside his home, his chest imploded by an energy blaster. The New York police commissioner charges Elijah with finding the murderer. However, he must work with a Spacer partner, a humaniform robot named R. Daneel Olivaw. Together, they search for the murderer and try to stop an interplanetary diplomatic incident which could mean Earth's destruction.

One interesting aspect of the book is the contrast between Elijah, the human detective, and Daneel, the humanoid robot. Asimov uses the "mechanical" robot to inquire about human nature. When confronting a "Medievalist" who fears that robots will overcome humankind, Baley argues that robots are inherently deficient. Being precision-engineered calculating machines, they can have no appreciation of art, beauty, or God; robots can only understand concepts expressible in mathematics. However, in the concluding scene, R. Daneel exhibits a sense of morality. He argues that the captured murderer be treated leniently, telling his human companions that he now realizes the destruction of evil is less desirable than the conversion of evil into good.

Characters[]

Elijah Baley

Julius Enderby

Jessie Baley

Ben Baley

Han Fastolfe

R. Daneel Olivaw

R. Sammy

Simpson

Anthony Gerrigel

Francis Clousarr

Vincent Barrett

Philip Norris

Mentioned[]

Roj Nemenuh Sarton

William Shakespeare

Winston Churchill

Gerhard Paul

Elizabeth Thornbowe

Joseph Klemin

Boris Baley

Lyranne Millane