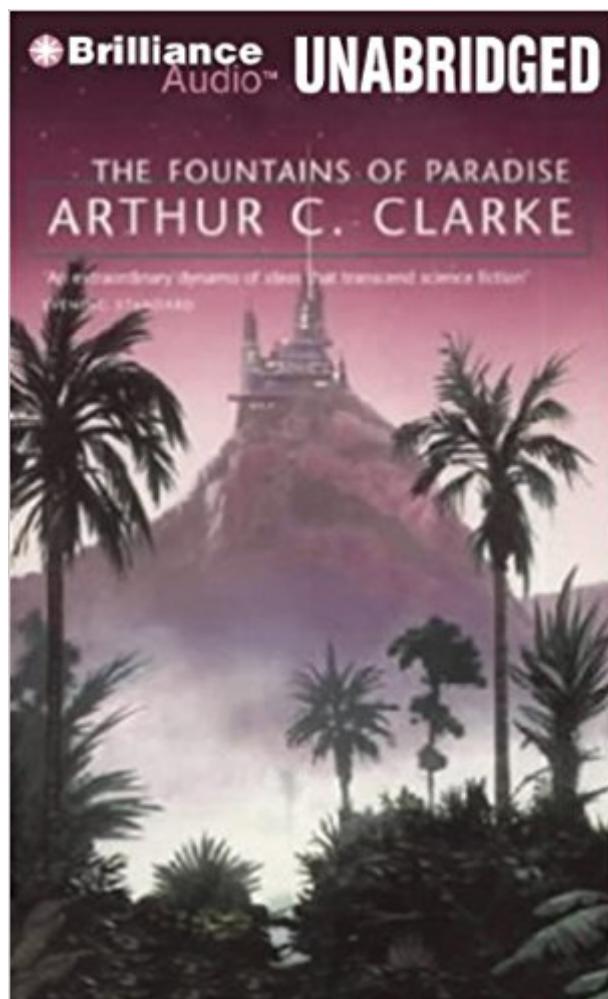


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The Fountains Of Paradise



Synopsis

In the 22nd century visionary scientist Vannevar Morgan conceives the most grandiose engineering project of all time, and one which will revolutionize the future of humankind in space: a Space Elevator, 36,000 kilometers high, anchored to an equatorial island in the Indian Ocean."An amazing listâ "genuinely the best novels from sixty years of SF." â "Iain M. Banks"Delightfully written and at times almost unbearably exciting." â "Kingsley Amis"His enthusiasm is combined with his considerable literary and myth-making skillsâ |the result is something special." â "Sunday Telegraph"A superbly crafted novel that may be his best." â "Tribune

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Customer Reviews

Published in 1953, 1952, and 1979, respectively, this trio of novels follow Clarke's recurring theme of humans thrusting themselves into space and then not necessarily liking what they find. The religious images that run throughout Clarke's work also are present here. Copyright 2001 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

"Clarke once again sounds his grand theme...man is most himself when he...challenges the very laws of the universe." -- -The New York Times Book Review --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

It's hard to say which of Arthur C. Clarke's sci-fi novels is my favorite, but since I've read The Fountains of Paradise three times, it's a good choice. The 1979 book won both the Hugo Award

(1980) and Nebula Award (1979) for Best Novel, one of fewer than two dozen novels to accomplish that feat. The story is set in the 22nd century, when space travel has become routine and humans have colonized the Moon and Mars. The main plot describes the building of space elevators, innovative structures that were first proposed in 1895 by Russian rocket scientist Konstantin Tsiolkovsky. In the story, structural engineer Dr. Vannevar Morgan is the chief proponent and designer of the space elevator. For technical reasons, the Earth station must be located at the top of a mountain where an order of Buddhist monks live, and they don't want their lives disturbed. The island where Earth's space elevator is proposed to be built is named Taprobane, and the mountaintop where the terminal would be located is named Yakkagala. These are fictitious names, but Clarke could not set the space elevator on his beloved island of Sri Lanka (formerly Ceylon), since it's not on the equator. So in effect, he moved Sri Lanka southward about 500 miles. (To see the actual mountain, gardens, and other features that Clarke describes so vividly in his book, google "Sigiriya." Wikipedia has some nice photography, as do several travel sites.) A fascinating subplot is the story of Starglider, an autonomous interstellar space probe operating on general instructions programmed into it by its makers 60,000 years ago. Starglider understood basic English and Chinese, which it had learned from television and radio broadcasts from Earth. (Remember Carl Sagan's novel *Contact*, published in 1985? The extraterrestrials also picked up broadcasts from Earth.) Interestingly enough, at the time the novel was written, no existing materials were strong enough to build a space elevator. In the story, something called a pseudo-one-dimensional diamond crystal was used. Today, newer materials like carbon nanotubes or boron nitride nanotubes may be the answer. And yes, scientists and engineers are now seriously looking at the possibilities of building a space elevator. I read *The Fountains of Paradise* when it was published in 1979. Arthur C. Clarke was already well known, having worked on the film "2001: A Space Odyssey" with Stanley Kubrick in 1968, and having his first Hugo and Nebula award-winning novel *Rendezvous with Rama* in 1972. I've read - and enjoyed - all of Clarke's bestsellers, but *The Fountains of Paradise* is still my favorite, and I recommend it to all sci-fi fans.

If you enjoy sci-fi which gets down to very detailed explanations of how something might be accomplished, this book may be for you. Several passages read more like an engineering guide than a novel. While I appreciate attention to detail and some basis in reality, I felt overwhelmed and less than entertained by that portion. It felt like the novel was trying to be many things and thus failing to be anything completely. The engineering portion came roughly halfway through the book. At the start, it alternated between two interesting stories - an ancient tale of King Kalidasa who had

grand designs including the titular fountains, and the story in the 22nd century of engineer Vannevar Morgan approaching the retired diplomat Rajasinghe about his design for an elevator to the stars. Both tales were interesting and I was eagerly anticipating the two would continue until they connected. I was disappointed to soon find the tale of Kalidasa abandoned. Soon a third major storyline was introduced with flashbacks to a time when Earth was contacted by an alien space probe. The passage teases about an alien race which is more advanced than the people of Earth; however, this storyline too is basically dropped until much much later when it is resurrected in a somewhat inexplicable manner. The saving grace of the book for me was the large final segment which details the building of the space elevator. The reactions of people to the idea was interesting and the extended sequence regarding an accident where Morgan has a chance to be heroic was the best part. It contained some good tension and a tragic but satisfying outcome.

Arthur C Clarke is my favorite author. He focuses more on possible technology and less so on characters and ridiculous drama with those characters. This is what I love about him. The "Fountains of Paradise" definitely fits that bill. A space elevator is an amazing idea because it will make spaceflight economical and safe. From that elevator a ring of habitable space can be created. More elevators created to reach that ring finally creating a large wheel around our planet. If we don't destroy ourselves with differences in race, religion, or nationality, I believe this will happen. It only makes sense as the next step in our need for satellites and launch platforms for space probes and an emerging business of space tourism. Satellites would no longer need to be rocketed to space which carries pollution and high risk to an expensive delivery system. Anyway, getting back to the book. The story of an engineer, Morgan, and his first triumph of a bridge built connecting Europe to Africa via the Gibraltar straight (also an eventuality) has his next career step in a bridge from earth to geosynchronous space above the earth. The beginning of the book deals with trying to use the only part of earth that can be used for the base of the elevator but unfortunately it is used by a Buddhist monastery. Morgan's personal story is nothing out of the ordinary and is used as a vehicle for the true star, the space elevator. The third portion of the book uses a small emergency of the elevator getting stuck as some story material. Morgan to the rescue regardless of a heart condition. I think what may have made this just an ok novel for me is previously reading "3001" where such a system of space elevator and habitable ring around the planet is explored at its fullest eventual potential. To me "Fountains" was a stripped down version of this, rightly so as "3001" is much in the future to "Fountains". Regardless, this book will one day be as one of Jules Verne's stories predicting submarines or spaceflight!

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