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Dana Stabenow

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Earth's first space colony is overrun by spacepirates, politicians and saboteurs. One person dedicates her life to keeping her beloved colony safe: Esther "Star" Svensdotter. She's dealt with all kinds of human troublemakers, but the rules change when the colony receives its first contact from aliens.

Second Star Details

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Author : Dana Stabenow

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From Reader Review Second Star for online ebook

Nick says

A good adventure story with a couple of minor weaknesses. The basic premise is that mankind has done a rush job of hurrying into space after receiving an apparent SETI message. The building of an L-5 colony, mining endeavors in the asteroid belt, a lunar colony and a Martian outpost all result in a remarkably short time, coinciding with major political turmoil on Earth. What could possibly go wrong? Well, there are the effects of the radically changing world view on religion, philosophy, politics...extremists who don't WANT humans to go to space, military folks who don't want the power structure to change, and...well, what about those mysterious aliens, anyway?

Oddly, all that worked better than the romance story contained within the plot, which felt very rushed. Also, I found a few of the plot points to depend a bit too much on coincidence, but the story was enjoyable overall.

Djrmel says

Stabenow builds a very interesting world where this planet has reached its sell by date and off earth stations are being built for colonization. The resources come from the Moon and asteroid belts, the projects are expected to pay back their start up costs with interest, and no one is expecting Utopia, just a place they can safely call home. Where the book falls very short is that there's way too much telling in the first half - literal telling of characters explaining things to each other that they certainly would have already known, but the reader needs to know to get on with the story. The worst offense of this is a brand new security chief who apparently took the job knowing nothing about living off Terra. Then there's a very obvious bias against military leadership that we're supposed to accept without any proof that the military's ends won't justify its means. And finally, every body lies. Without lies, the story couldn't have happened, couldn't have had its big action scene, and worst of all, couldn't have a happy ending. A brave new world built on lies is not a brave world at all.

Dava Stewart says

As usual in a Dana Stabenow story, the characters make the story enjoyable in Second Star. There were a couple of things that bugged me a bit: the characters had to work too hard to explain what things were for and who people are. I hate when characters say things to each other so that the reader knows what's going on that people would never actually say in real life. I would never say to my daughter, "When your dad gets home from working at Push Hard Lumber, where he has worked for eleven years, we'll eat dinner." There's a little of that going on in Second Star, which leads to my second criticism - the whole thing is just a bit too technical. It's set on a man-made habitat orbiting the Earth (or Terra, as it is called in the story), so there must be some technical jargon. But when the jargon disrupts the story it's a distraction and that happened a couple of times.

All criticism aside, it is not a bad book. It entertained me on a road trip. I continued thinking about it for a couple of days after I finished reading it. Should I happen across the second book in the series I'd read it.

J.L. Dobias says

Second Star (Star Svensdotter Book 1) By Dana Stabenow

Perhaps the title of this comes from everyone's favorite quote from Peter Pan by James M. Barrie.
"Second to the right," said Peter, "and then straight on till morning."

And then; perhaps making use of the often added Star. "Second Star to the right, and straight on till morning."

Stronger evidence; is that this quote shows up in the book.

I've always loved Robert A. Heinlein all the way from his juvenile series of space novels to his controversial Stranger in a Strange Land. And his somewhat more speculative later years of connecting his alternate universe into a whole.

In her introduction Dana mentions his juvenile books as being an inspiration- and I've no doubt that they are. But this story really reads more closely to his Man Who Sold the Moon.

One thing that this story has over the old Heinlein stories is that the Female protagonist is very strong and independent. Esther Natasha Svensdotter or Star as she likes to be called- takes no crap from anyone.(Although it is interesting that in Heinlein's Glory Road there's a Star who turns out to be Empress of many worlds. She is a strong willed woman but we see her mostly through Oscar Gordon's viewpoint.) Part of reason for Star to be the way she is may have to do with the environment of the space station and her own insistence on having no weapons on board. She's appointed herself the judge, jury and in some instances the executioner. Swift punishment, which we are graphically shown at the beginning, to those who endanger the rest of the residents.

This type of character is very typical of many of those aboard ships, stations and colonies in Heinlein's work. This type of discipline shows up in many science fiction novels and seems to carry over from the romantic notions of how early sea faring shipboard discipline was handled.Though it seems efficient and swift and can be justified it still can have it's tole on the conscience and it is handled well in Star's own reactions after the fact.

This story begins with Star returning from a visit to Earth. She definitely hates getting her land legs and is happy to be returning to her domain. This trip back to the Lagrange Point Five or Ellfive is a neat way of introduction to the level of technology involved in this universe. There's a lot of information here for someone who claims to not be all that scientifically inclined and this is all coming from first person report from Star who has to be knowledgeable to all of this jargon. This seems sometimes to be a bit much but really it's just the world building to bring us up to speed to Star's universe and the various players in the universe.

What I enjoyed is the between the lines build up of Star's character. She's all woman, but she's not your woman of the bygone ages and maybe even a few clicks above the women of the time that this story was written. She's earned her place and for that she has a loyal team on Ellfive who would march through hell for her.

It's the whys- for why Ellfive is up there that reminds me of The Man Who Sold the Moon. Even down to the

why Star is there on Ellfive. Star is almost like Harriman of TMWSTM. He wanted to own the moon and would do anything to get there. He's ruthless and devious and almost a bit dishonest. Star thankfully diverges from this in that her motivations always seem genuine and honest. Although, how she got up there seems to have shades of the same type of deception involved in TMWSTM only in this case the more egregious parts of Harriman's character have been portioned out to secondary characters associated with Star.

Another divergent element would be that Harriman- despite his successes- was never able to -hands on- do what he wanted to do, which is go to the moon himself.(His board of directors thought he was too valuable by that time.) Star is out there living the dream. Of course her dream is not all glamor, which is well displayed in the description of the mundane everyday workings of things aboard Ellfive. This might be a problem for some readers who don't recognize that when dealing with stories that are attempting to portray real Science in the fiction there are often a lot of mundane things that are done to help keep everyone alive. It also helps portray the fragility of the relationship of man to the environment of space.

This novel has a very good balance of those elements to help drive the story. This apparent lengthy narrative path also helps introduce all the characters and their dependent relationship to each other. And, it ultimately helps introduce the conflicts that exist, which will eventually be the threat that drives the plot.

Star has several contentious groups she has to deal with - one is the Space Patrol who seem to be acquiring bases and equipment floating in space in the name of national security. Star has some past with Gray, the head of the patrol. It seems that part of that has to do with is his trying to acquire Ellfive as one of his bases. Then there's a strong element of politics on earth, the Alliance Congress, which are often a driving force that might be influence by the Patrols past successes in obtaining strategic targets in space. And, there's the fringe element of the Luddites who hate technology.

As we come into the story Star has recently lost her head of security- a man who was causing more trouble than good and seems to have vanished mysteriously. A replacement,Caleb O'hara, has been sent to her but not soon enough to assist in an initial crisis from a Luddite who intended to blow something up. Star is forced to take care of that situation and a portion of the rest of the next few chapters is getting the new man up to speed.

Along with some few problems being caused by the space patrol causing station docking schedules to bottleneck she has to deal with issues the patrol are causing with the local merchants and longshoremen. And her station's master computer Archy -created and maintained by Stars brother-inlaw Simon- is showing signs of possibly getting out of hand. (Reminiscent of some of the AI's in Heinlein's work) Archy may be exhibiting signs that he's going a step above the simple AI he is supposed to be.

Added to this mix now will be some supply problems that are occurring between the Lunar facility and Ellfive. Someone may have their hand in that and it might turn out that there are things afoot that Star is unaware of.(All part of a big plot.)

As if that might not be enough there's another thread in the story that again parallels The Man Who Sold the Moon. Just as Harriman sent diamonds aboard the ship to the moon-as an experiment(while hoping to have people mistakenly believe he found them on the moon and is trying to hide the fact.) It would seem that the reason that Ellfive was created was in response to a signal that came from Betelgeuse intimating that there are aliens out there. Everyone had gotten into the mad rush to get out in space to meet the aliens. But the question is what really was that message and why haven't they heard any more. Might the message be a red herring.

And then just as in TMWSTM when the ship came back it had more diamonds than Harriman sent. While everything is creating a turmoil on Ellfive what's to be made of the newest message from Betelgeuse?

To go any further would really be giving spoilers. But, for me it's never so much the science or the plot as it is the characters.

I always loved Heinlein's characters- in spite of some of their outdated 50's mentality. And that's where this story grabbed me. Star is a standout protagonist with her flawed group of Ellfivers behind her all the way. They really drove this story for me much more than the various elements of the plot.

If you love Science Fiction or you're just looking for strong characters to relate to; this is a good novel for that. It delivers a good plot with some interesting themes; though because it was published back in 1991 and in the story the message from Betelgeuse arrives in 1992 it's a bit dated and now seems to fall into the category of alternate universe.

It's a good beginning to Star's story and I'm glad there is more story to tell.

Dana Stabenow is not Robert Heinlein (I say that meaning it to be a plus)- don't expect her to be (no one is) and you will be happy with this book.

J.L. Dobias

Bee Halton says

I prefer her crime novels

#amreading: I am a huge fan of Dana Stabenow ever since I first laid eyes on her Kate Shugak series. The first Star Svensdotter book needed a while though to catch my enthusiasm.

Much too much science in this fiction at first in my opinion. No idea why I kept on reading. Well, I have an idea: It is another of her enigmatic female main characters that just kept me glued to the book.

After Stabenow has described the space world in the book in all those scientific and Latin expressions the story fully kicked off with an interesting love story and a failed take over of her world.

And, of course, there is extraterrestrial intelligence involved. Nothing more exciting than that.

If you love science fiction that takes the science part serious that's the series for you. If you love science fiction more for the excitement allow yourself to get through the initial struggle with her world building and you won't be disappointed either.

Darlene says

Oh my. No plot, no problem? Trying to be Asimov or Heinlein without the machismo? Ancient science? Strong Fem main character seemed only to be impressed with her own mind. Only one character I liked and

she came and went somewhere about 70% into the book. I gave an extra point for trying to be a sci-fi. Sorry. Wish I could say more for it. I wanted to be able to share this with my sci-fi friends but nah. Don't bother.

Deb says

I definitely understand why this first science fiction novel by one of my favorite authors sank without a trace when it was first published. Star Svensdotter is in charge of getting ELLFIVE, an artificial star, ready for the first wave of Terran colonists. Between sabotage by anti-colonist terrorists, political intrigue from rival Terran groups, and a possible invasion from non-Terran life forms, Star has her hands full. I had a hard time keeping the story straight. There was too much technical information also. What I did find interesting was the vision of an alternate Earth history, and the references to some of my favorite books of my youth. In some ways the novel reminded me of the Andre Norton books I loved as a kid. I also liked the Librarian. The fact that the protagonist was female was also appreciated. I don't know if I will read the other Star Svensdotter books or not.

Laz the Sailor says

I just re-read this book, and while I enjoyed the space-opera feel, and all the references to the Masters (Heinlein et al), it really isn't that strong. It's almost YA, but they'd never get the references to past authors and astronauts.

These books were Stabenow's first efforts, and I am glad that she wrote them, as it started her off into her Alaskan mysteries with Kate Shugak.

Thom says

Plenty of similarities to "The Moon is a Harsh Mistress" and a few to Star Trek: the Next Generation. Quite a few characters in this book, most of whom are fairly flat. The story was good, if a bit predictable. The science seems pretty accurate, but it's been a while since I read about colonies in space. Overall I enjoyed the story and will read the next one in the series. 3½ stars.

Despite the author being a woman of genre fiction, this is not one of the books I am reading for that challenge in 2013.

L says

I love first contact stories. And this one is grand! I never knew that Stabenow wrote any sci fi. Apparently she didn't write much of it and this one is introduced with apologies re errors of science, which would matter more if I had been in the mood for hard-science sci-fi than I was. I read for character and story and Stabenow provided both with room to spare. I couldn't put this down. Not at all.

Kogiopsis says

I gave this book a shot on the word of an Alaskan friend who's a fan of Stabenow's work - though I think she likes the mysteries, not this stuff. Maybe those are better. I certainly hope so, because this book just wavers back and forth between 'mediocre' and 'terrible', and even for a first novel it strikes me as weak.

The one strength of the novel - despite Stabenow's introduction explaining that she was worried most about getting it wrong - is actually the scientific research that went into it; even when I couldn't follow it all, and even though it was often dished out in infodumps, it was clear that she'd put a lot of time and energy into getting the tech right, or at least logical. It is also abundantly clear that she didn't want to leave much of that out of the reader's sight - hence the infodumps.

This book's primary writing flaw is one of 'too much of a good thing': in this case, straightforwardness. Too many infodumps on tech or people; characters who are similarly straightforward and uncomplicated, as nuanced as cardboard cutouts. Stabenow makes an effort to have a diverse cast, which is nice, but it goes little further than food/accent/looks. There is little sense of 'culture' to this book except for Star's - which is, of course, the secular Alaskan Libertarian-ness with which she (and at a guess, Stabenow) was raised.

Then there's the 'romance'. Honestly, this is also a problem with Star's character - in that the 'romance' arc undercuts her characterization at critical points. For someone brusque, professional, in control and strict, she never chastises her love interest (who is also her employee) for his forward behavior when they've only known each other for days. He brazenly flirts with her and touches her, and she barely even *responds*, let alone point out how unprofessional his behavior is. Whether it's welcome is one thing - Star's character as it's established doesn't seem to be one that would permit this guy's behavior, and yet she does. In fact, she tolerates his repeated violations of her rules and orders, and even praises him for some of them. His behavior, to her, is above reproach. To me, as a reader, it was completely out of line. *He picked her up and shook her* when she criticized him for making a rash decision. What the fuck?

(view spoiler)

I'm guessing by the fact that this book 'sank without a trace' according to the author bio (what a terrible decision to include that in end of the book in question) that this isn't representative of Stabenow's entire body of work, but *damn* if it doesn't make me less inclined to find out any time soon.

Greg says

This is a good old fashion, Heinlein'sk science fiction novel. The best way to mentally approach this novel is as an alternate-history science fiction story.

Imagine an event happened in the 80's that jump started our drive into space, where we didn't have the lost 30+ years we have now, but instead drove the world into space to stay, with permiate bases on the Moon, Mars and L5 (where this story is based).

There's conflict, love, fights and loss... with a dash of aliens thrown in too.

If you like Heinlein Robert a., Arthur C. Clarke or Varley John then you'll very likely enjoy this story too

Carolyn F. says

Audible Audiobook & Kindle book

Marguerite Gavin did a great job on the book I love sci-fi and if you throw in a romance, it's even better. I'm planning on reading more of this series.

Deborah D. says

Space opera, twists on our space program and a struggle for Independence from Earth

The characters were varied, not cookie cutter.

I was surprised how near-future the setting is.

A few character back stories surprised me, which is as expected from Dana Stabenow!

Chris Wolak says

I'm not an experienced reader of sci-fi, but I love Dana Stabenow's Kate Shugak mystery series so when I stumbled across a free e-copy of Second Star I had to give it a try. You can download it free here:

<http://www.stabenow.com/e-books#star1> (I just checked today--12/4/2011--and it is still free, as are the first books in Stabenow's two mystery series which I highly recommend.)

Although I'm a great admirer of NASA and think we need to do more with space exploration, reading sci-fi tends to shut down my brain for some reason. Is it because I just don't know that much about space flight, the solar system, etc to know what's "real" and what's not? Could be. I'm also not a fan of magical realism so perhaps I just like my novels grounded in 'reality.' I do, curiously, like horror. Hmm. Anyway, I do want to explore the genre and intend to read more sci-fi in 2012.

I enjoyed the characters in Second Star and may eventually pick up the other two novels in the trilogy. There are definite similarities between some of the characters/ideas in Second Star and the Kate Shugak series, which I found appealing rather than distracting. The writing/flow of the novel is a bit uneven, but not enough to take away from the reading experience. This is, after all, Stabenow's first published novel and I do think it's a quality story. I may have just noticed some unevenness from being familiar with Stabenow's more recent, experienced writing.

