



Foundation's Fear

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Isaac Asimov's Foundation Trilogy is one of the high-water marks of science fiction. It is the monumental story of a Galactic Empire in decline, and the secret society of scientists who seek to shorten the inevitable Dark Age with the science of psychohistory. Now, with the permission -- and blessing -- of the Asimov estate, the epic saga continues.

Fate -- and a cruel Emperor's arbitrary power -- have thrust Hari Seldon into the First Ministership of the Empire against his will. As the story opens, Hari is about to leave his quiet professorship and take on the all but impossible task of administering 25 million inhabited worlds from the all-steel planet of Trantor. With the help of his beautiful bio-engineered "wife" Dors and his alien companion Yugo, Seldon is still developing the science that will transform history, never dreaming that it will ultimately pit him against future history's most awesome threat.

Foundation's Fear Details

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From Reader Review Foundation's Fear for online ebook

Steven says

This first entry into the Foundation (2) Trilogy by other authors is a mess. I would not have finished it except that I wanted to read the additional entries in the series. I had read reader reviews before I started this book, so I was prepared for it to have problems.

There are three major strands in the story. One is the attempt by the Emperor to nominate Hari as first minister. Cleon knows of Hari's work on psychohistory. This story winds its way through the 578 pages and is a relatively cogent, and readable story for most people, I think. There is intrigue and violence and plots and counter plots all involved in Hari's attempt to be confirmed in the position.

A second story involves simulated intelligences inside of computer systems named Voltaire and Joan of Arc. This begins in a big way around page 100 and continues on and off until the end of the book. I found this storyline uninteresting and distracting from the Foundation premise and story. I did not understand a purpose or point to this storyline. The author explains after another couple of hundred pages why the sims are important to the plot of this book. But by then I had lost all interest in them, and I think they could be removed entirely from the book, with no loss of coherence or plot development.

The third major storyline involves Chimpanzees. This storyline about pans as they are called in the book starts around page 327. I was actually looking forward to this storyline since I had read that the author introduced them as a tool for Hari's development of psychohistory. Although we see a connection between the pan episodes and Hari's theory development, here again I found this storyline distracting and merely an interlude away from the main story. Again here is a major section, which I feel could have been completely excised with a resulting improvement to the plot flow.

I give this book 3 stars, because of my strong interest in Asimov world and the other two entries in this trilogy. Also, as I mentioned I found one of the storylines interesting and worth my time. But if I did not have an ulterior motive in reading this book I would not have finished it, and it would have earned less stars from me. This is copied from my identical review in LibraryThing.

Daniel McGill says

How can you write a tribute to one of the greatest works of science fiction by one of the greatest science fiction authors and start out by throwing his physics out the window and replacing them with your own? Don't bother reading this one.

Paul, says

Benford was given a tough task: trying to flesh out Hari Seldon's conception of psychohistory. Benford's answer is the scientist propaganda of our day: that humanity can be understood more deeply by looking at our simian ancestors. Benford did wrestle somewhat admirably with the idea of the self as a self-organizing, emergent property of the complexity of the brain and with emotions as endemic to all animals.

However, Benford is not a very good writer, there were several times when I was simply unclear about who was talking to whom or what was going on. Plus, Benford's "solutions" including the idea of meta-knowledge, to psychohistory were not very insightful. And he didn't even set them up as insightful for Hari, which he could have done.

Finally, Benford really doesn't have a feel for the characters. I haven't read the Foundation books in a long time, but I could still feel the difference between Asimov's conception of Daneel and Hari and Benford's. And the random introduction of aliens really doesn't fit the universe. And Benford's subtle nods to later Foundation novels are ham-fisted and overdone.

All in all, it was an okay book, mostly because it made me want to read Asimov again.

Michael says

I've never ready any Greg Benford, so I didn't know what to expect. I found that Greg Benford does not write like Asimov. I also found that that doesn't matter.

If you're a fan of Asimov's Foundation series, as I have been since I first read it in high school, you will enjoy this book. It tells the story of how Hari Seldon came to be First Minister of the Empire. There is a lot of interaction between Hari and Dors, which I enjoyed. Bear writes with a playfulness that works well with the story. A good read.

Graham says

I was re-reading this book, as part of re-reading all of the Robot, Empire, and Foundation books in in-universe chronological order and this is the first time I felt like just stopping where I was. I hemmed and hawed about whether to include these non-Asimov books in the re-read, and I kind of wish I had decided against it, but I recall thinking more positively of the other books in its series, so... We'll see.

Mostly the problem with this book is the Joan of Arc and Voltaire sims. Endless streams of near-gibberish, as if someone had recorded everything said at a Renaissance Fair and run it through a randomizer, drag on and on for many pages. By halfway through I just started skipping nearly everything involving them and I don't feel at all like I missed out. The alternative was to just stop.

The rest of the book is mostly ok, except where Benford feels the need to 'correct' something he feels Asimov did wrong (gravitic elevators, hyperspace travel, etc.) or to use Seldon as a mouthpiece for his political and philosophical views, but it's not nearly enough to rescue this book from being an incredibly pretentious entry in what is otherwise a mostly very practical, straightforward series of books.

Ugh.

Danielle says

So it took me over a month to get through this disaster of a book, and I ended up skimming some of it just to get through it. If you haven't read the original Foundation books, SPOILER ahead.

The entire reason this book exists is to show, in detail, Seldon's ascent from academian to First Minister. There was an almost-interesting sidebar about how another species helped him form his theory of psychohistory. All in all, not a book worth reading.

The first part of the book starts out good: it's reminiscent of Asimov's original, the characters are believable, and I was just generally excited about reading more about Seldon. (The author was somewhat annoying in that he kept restating things and practically beating me over the head with some ideas. Not as bad as Dan Brown does, but not far off.)

That's where my love affair with this book ended and the hatred began. The next section delves deeply into new characters, "sims" (essentially computer-reproduced self-aware personalities) of Voltaire and Joan of Arc. BORING. Author rambles on and on and ON about what it's like to "live" inside the net. Philosophy abounds. It was like being dropped into a completely separate novel that didn't flow at all with the first part of the book.

The author did bring the two sets of characters together by the end of the book, but it wasn't interesting and by that point I really just wanted the book to end! It was obvious where it was going and there was no need to have 40 more pages in the book. Someone get this guy a better editor.

Karina says

The original series was so much better. I don't know what I don't like about this one: lack of action? or is it the things that the author introduces into this series: like computers, the Mesh, simulations, the theory of psychohistory... meh. don't know if I should keep on with the next books in this trilogy.

Peter Hutkins says

"is not canon"

This book is written in a much different tone than that of Asimov's, and that takes a toll on the feel. By taking the Empire and Robot legacies and projecting onto it, I think Benford creates a distraction from the Asimov universe, not a development or refinement. It leaves me with the same slightly-betrayed feeling as if Turner Classic Movies produced a colorized spinoff called "Casablanca: the Paris years".

This book contains complicated mishmashes of ideas and philosophical treatises (Spirit, souls, faith. Memes, logic, selves.) married with poorly described technology that seems weak advancement of our own (how many post-cyberpunk novels feature some sort of totally immersive Mesh/Web/Space where you can make things virtualize... just by thinking it! Equations in 3D space-- now they totally make sense! Wowsers!). Plot points happen and then pass (for reasons of "well, that had to be"). Dialogue... happens. Overall, not very engaging.

Pablo Fernández says

La saga decea a un punto que no le hubiese deseado jamás ni a mi peor enemigo. Fundación no merecía esto. Y no por Benford, que escribe muy bien, simplemente no es Asimov. Nadie salvo su creador debería tocar una obra. Menos un clásico.

Susan says

So this book is not badly written but after reading the whole trilogy I am disappointed. The original series seemed to be about humans and the societies they built with some help from a few robots. This series takes all of the choices away and makes the robots everything. From having Seldon being one of a set of genetically engineered people to see who would be able to provide what Daneel needed to Daneel having formed the entire empire and designed how Trantor was built out. It is ridiculous and makes humans into some stupid sub-species that really can't function. It ruins the Foundation story. Now I will be working hard to remove any information from this series from my mind so I can just remember Asimov's work unchanged.

JBradford says

I had not even known about the second Foundation trilogy until last month, when I became an instant fan of the author of the third book in the set — so much so that I purchased that third book after reading complementary comments about it about the Internet, but it occurred to me that it made no sense to read the third book in a trilogy before reading the preceding two, so I sought this one out at the library, despite the fact that I had noticed many of those reviewing comments expressing praise for the third book but seeming to have nothing but disdain for the first two. Now that I have read it and am ready to comment myself, I find myself absolutely befuddled at all the disparaging comments that have been made by other Goodreads readers about this novel. I am in fact more than tempted to rate this book at five stars, except that I keep finding myself giving as reasons for doing so things that have nothing to do with the content — such as that it is a brave new attempt to add onto an extremely popular and well-known work of the past. Something must be said about style, and I will admit that Benford's style and pace seem a bit heavy at times. Actually, there is so much in this book that I think it needs to be read again in order to be properly evaluated ... moreover, I am now convinced that, since this first book of the second Foundation trilogy apparently actually is conceived as a prequel to the first Foundation trilogy, that I must now go seek out that first trilogy (which I have believed to be hiding somewhere in one of the bookshelves down in my basement) and reread it, and then read the next two of the second trilogy, and then come back to this one again, and perhaps to all of them.

Some of the disparaging reviewers have complained that there is too much dialogue in this book. There is a lot of dialogue, but for the most part I found it very interesting dialogue. There is, for example, a terrific discussion in the second part (Section 13) about the distinctions between the soul, body, and ego — with the discussion made even more interesting by the fact that it takes place between a young scientist (who happens to have a hangover and is not quite willing to admit that he has an attraction to the female scientist who works with him) and a 1000-year-old artificial re-creation of the mind of one of our past philosophers, Voltaire. This is only a prelude to a longer debate that takes place between that same Voltaire and another even older artificial re-creation, Joan of Arc, with both of these re-created intelligences having been brought back from extinction purely for the sake of conducting a debate on the question of whether man-made

intelligences have a soul (a question which takes on added significance in view of the fact that we also witnessed incipient love affair between two low-level mechanicals as another side plot). Voltaire, held up as the perfect example of the rational man, comes prepared to argue that the soul does not exist; Joan of Arc, the epitome of religious thought and feeling, is selected as his most worthy opponent ... but these two artificial intelligences complicate the whole process by falling in love with each other. So what have these two and their discussion to do with the world as it existed before Hari Sedon created the foundation, you might ask — and the actual answer is ... probably nothing much, except that it gives Benford an opportunity to tell us many things about life in the world of the pre-Foundation empire as well as to suggest that some of the thoughts that came out of this debate were crucial to Seldon's developing concept of psychohistory.

Similarly, there is another extensive side plot in which Seldon and his rather remarkable wife take a "vacation" as a means of getting away from would-be assassins after a few attempts have been made on his life while waiting for the Galactic Council to approve the Emperor's nomination of Hari as the new First Minister. This vacation includes a visit to the planet of Panucopia, where the local treat is a mental excursion that puts the intelligence of the tourists into the minds of primitive primates, which we can take to be the relatively undeveloped offspring of baboons. These excursions normally extend for just a few hours, but the long hand of the forces behind the assassination attempts reaches out even this far, and Hari and his wife find their mental selves locked into the bodies of two of these pan creatures, with no way to get back to their own bodies, which are locked away in the visitor center. Again, some of the disparagers have questioned what this side plot has to do with the story — and, again, probably very little, although Benford has Hari subsequently attributing his perfection of the psychohistory formula to some of the elements what he learned while living as a pan. In addition, Hari's attitude toward life and the First Ministership clearly undergo a change because of this experience.

To me, these and other subplots do not seem a distraction at all. It is part of the grand, sweeping view of life in the Galactic Empire of 25 million inhabited planets, spread out in a disk like expansion from the forgotten home planet of Earth, now lost in the mists of time and legend. It is an inherent impossibility to summarize all that humanity, but Bedford does so by focusing in on a few key characters with the empire around them merely constituting a backdrop. All authors do this, of course, and in my humble opinion Bedford does it very well. When I pick up a novel that supposedly takes place 10,000 or so years in my future, I expect to find certain things very different, but I also expect to find a reasoned portrayal of how humanity fits into that different life, and this novel does that very well, indeed. The novel entertained me, amused me (which is not at all the same thing), and informed me — what more would we want from a novel?

It has been something more than 50 years, I think, since I read the Asimov's first trilogy, and I have to admit that most of its details are more than fuzzy in my mind, which is another reason why I intend to go seek it out and read it again. I do not recall, for instance, that Hari was married to a robot — in this case, a rabbit who is charged with the particular task of protecting Hari so that he can develop his psychohistory theory. I also do not recall that R. Daneel Olivaw, one of Asimov's greatest robot creations, was involved in that original trilogy. Whether old or new, however, I find these things portrayed in an interesting manner, and I found the novel increasingly interesting and tenacious as I went through it.

Mirek.Olech says

Had to finish after more-less third of it, because it was so boring...

Author is introducing new things that do not fit to existing universe.

Writing style is chaotic (although ideas may be interesting) and filled with technical language, that feels not justified by the plot.

Chris says

Terrible continuation of the Foundation series. What was the point of this book? I'm still wondering months later. There are so many boring side discussions that have no relevance that I found myself skimming towards the end. The plot never really develops, and although I liked the ending, it left me wondering why Hari didn't just make it happen 400 pages earlier. Thoroughly unenjoyable, even to a big Foundation fan. I hear that the next two (Chaos and Triumph) are good though.

Calvin says

TLDR: don't bother reading this book. It's bad sci-fi, unnecessarily length, full of a poor story and poor science.

I didn't like this book. I tried to like it. I rather enjoy the original Asimov trilogy, but I gave up on finishing Foundation's Fear.

Reasons I didn't like the book:

1) Foundation's Fear contains a contrived argument between sims (artificial intelligences) who represent Faith and Reason. Joan of Arc represented Faith, and Voltaire represented Reason.

2) Hari Seldon and Dors Venabili spend a significant length of time and pages on Panucopia. The recreational activity they take up is taking over chimpanzee bodies and controlling them via a form of digital mind control. The technology and this whole section seemed rather similar to the Avatar movie which came out years after the book and strikes me as being a potential source of inspiration for the movie. (Either that or "There's nothing new under the sun.") This in itself didn't wholly bother me, but they talk for pages and pages about the evolution of chimpanzees and what it may have to do with Hari's psychohistory theories.

Meanwhile, they become trapped in the chimpanzee bodies while doing the mind control and an evil man on the planet is trying to kill them.

At this point, I stopped reading the book. I'm glad I did. Looking at a summary of the book on Wikipedia reveals that I missed out on the Joan and Voltaire sims interacting with aliens who abandoned the physical world and took root in the Mesh (digital network) of Trantor.

Tim Weakley says

I really failed to get into this book. I understand that Benford wasn't trying to duplicate Asimov's style. It's just that as a work in this series it didn't grab me or add into the arc of the story. The entire aspect of the sims of Voltaire and Joan of Arc was not to my taste. The portrayal of Seldon and Daneel did not live up to the other books in the series even with a large gift of creative room for the author on the part of the reader.

Maybe the other "extar books" will be better.
