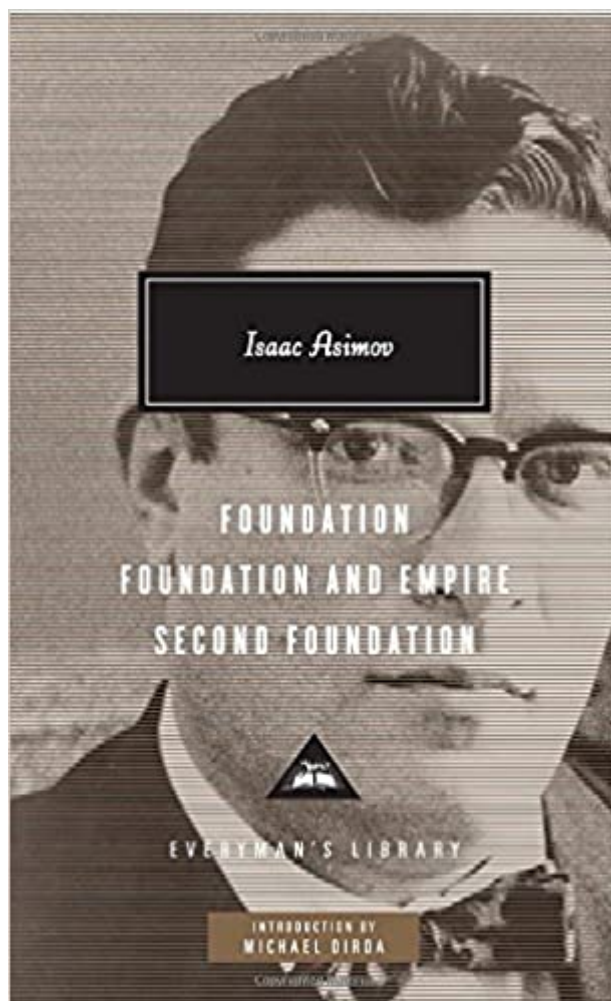


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Foundation, Foundation And Empire, Second Foundation



Synopsis

Isaac Asimov's seminal Foundation trilogy is one of the cornerstones of modern speculative fiction in a single hardcover volume. It is the saga of the Galactic Empire, crumbling after twelve thousand years of rule. And it is the particular story of psychohistorian Hari Seldon, the only man who can see the horrors the future has in store—a dark age of ignorance, barbarism, and violence that will last for thirty thousand years. Gathering a band of courageous men and women, Seldon leads them to a hidden location at the edge of the galaxy, where he hopes they can preserve human knowledge and wisdom through the age of darkness. In 1966, the Foundation trilogy received a Hugo Award for Best All-Time Series, and it remains the only fiction series to have been so honored. More than fifty years after their original publication, the three Foundation novels stand as classics of thrilling, provocative, and inspired world-building.

Book Information

Hardcover: 664 pages

Publisher: Everyman's Library; Reprint edition (November 2, 2010)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0307593967

ISBN-13: 978-0307593962

Product Dimensions: 5.2 x 1.4 x 8.3 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.5 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars 2,186 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #53,619 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #103 in Books > Science Fiction & Fantasy > Science Fiction > Anthologies #357 in Books > Literature & Fiction > Genre Fiction > Political #4823 in Books > Literature & Fiction > Literary

Customer Reviews

Isaac Asimov (1920–1992), one of the "Big Three" science fiction masters of his time (along with Robert Heinlein and Arthur C. Clarke), is best known for his Robot, Galactic Empire, and Foundation series. Michael Dirda is a Pulitzer Prize-winning critic for The Washington Post and the author of the memoir *An Open Book* and of four collections of essays: *Readings*, *Bound to Please*, *Book by Book*, and *Classics for Pleasure*.

From the Introduction by Michael Dirda: It is late summer, 1941. A young Jewish intellectual, an admirer of Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, suddenly finds himself musing about

historical determinism, individual initiative and the ideal society. Why did Rome fall? Was the Christian religion a means of preserving ancient culture? What forms of government and economic system are best for mankind? Democratic representation with capitalistic competition? Enlightened despotism? A meritocracy of the best and the brightest? Having come of age in 1930s' New York, the young intellectual would have heard fervent Trotskyites on street corners proclaim that history advances through class struggle and through the conflict between evolving political and economic ideologies. He already knew that Arnold Toynbee, in *A Study of History*, contended that civilizations have their seasons — they rise, grow stagnant without sufficient challenges, eventually decay and fall. Still other thinkers, among them H.G. Wells, were convinced that the world should be governed by scientists, with rational benevolence. Wasn't that the theme of the recent movie, *Things to Come* (1936), with its vision of a perfectly ordered, chrome-bright "world of tomorrow"? Still, all these systems and theories made historical change seem a cut-and-dried affair, quite logical, utterly inevitable. Yet where was the individual in these grand schemes of Marx and Toynbee and Wells? If only impersonal forces determined the course of events, how did one account for a Hitler? — An upstart from nowhere, he had manipulated the German people with a mesmerist's power, promulgated a manifest destiny for his chosen elite, declared a Thousand-Year Reich. Clearly, the so-called Führer viewed himself as a Great Man, able to reshape his time as did Alexander and Napoleon before him. Such overreachers truly make history, don't they? So Isaac Asimov, a twenty-one-year-old Columbia graduate, must have thought and wondered when he sat down at his typewriter that summer of 1941. However, what the young writer eventually produced was neither a turgid sociological tract nor a summa of world history. Instead, through a series of stories, Asimov tracked the breakdown of a smug conspicuously rich and stultified civilization, while also portraying the efforts of a highly committed group of activists to hasten the birth of a new and more glorious future society. In effect, he took the central myth of the 1930s and '40s — lived out and believed in by Communists, Fascists, the International Brigade and New Deal Democrats alike — and re-imagined it, with spaceships, in a galaxy far, far away. Science fiction is, after all, the art of extrapolation. By the time Asimov brought his much loved series to a halt in 1949, he had written eight stories and novellas depicting the collapse of a Galactic Empire, the war-torn feudal period that followed, and the mysterious Foundation established to preserve civilization in a time of barbarism. Gathered together into book form — what SF fans call a "fix-up" — the stories required three volumes: *Foundation* (1951), *Foundation and Empire* (1952) and *Second Foundation* (1953). At the 1955 World Science Fiction Convention this trilogy was enthusiastically voted "the greatest all-time science-fiction series." Period. In the

view of many, the assembled sequence also represents a watershed in literary history. A noted SF editor Donald Wollheim quickly realized: "Stories published before Foundation belong to the old line, the stories published after belong to 'modern' science fiction."*Isaac Asimov (1920-92) grew up in Brooklyn, the son of Russian Jewish immigrants. Something of a whiz kid, he graduated early from high school and attended Columbia University, first as an undergraduate and later as a biochemistry graduate student. After earning his Ph. D., he taught for many years at Boston University before giving up the academic life in 1958 to become a full-time writer. As a teenager, Asimov had been a devoted reader of the pulp magazines at his father's candy store: Wonder Stories, Amazing Stories, Astounding Science Fiction. In their pages one could follow the galactic adventures of E. E. "Doc" Smith's "Skylark of Space," shudder at "The Human Pets of Mars" and fight alongside "Tumithak of the Corridors." Before long, the teenaged Asimov began to crank out his own short stories; the first to be published "Marooned on Vest," appearing in Amazing in 1939. After many rejections, he shortly thereafter broke into Astounding — the premier magazine in the field — with "Trends" (originally titled, with a kind of clairvoyance, "Ad Astra" — i.e., "to the stars"). That "yarn" appeared in the same July 1939 issue as A. E. van Vogt's first story ("Black Destroyer," almost certainly a partial inspiration for the film Alien) and only a month before Robert A. Heinlein's first story, "Lifeline." thus began the Golden Age of Science Fiction, which would last until roughly 1950. Asimov developed quickly as a writer. He sold "Robbie," his first robot story, to Super Science Stories in 1940 (where its title was changed to "Strange Playfellow"), and his later ones to Astounding. Asimov always claimed it was John. W. Campbell, Jr., that magazine's legendary editor, who devised the central "Three Laws of Robotics" during a conversation at the end of 1940:

1. A robot may not injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm.
2. A robot must obey the orders given it by human beings except where such orders would conflict with the First Law.
3. A robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the First or Second Law.

By 1941, Asimov was ready for what would prove his annus mirabilis. On March 17, when this still very young writer was visiting the Astounding offices, Campbell unexpectedly quoted a passage from Emerson: "If the stars should appear one night in a thousand years, how would men believe and adore; and preserve for many generations the remembrance of the city of God . . ." What, the magazine editor wondered, would happen to people who suddenly saw stars for the first time? Asimov said he didn't know. Campbell answered: "I think they would go mad. I want you to write a story about that." According to the first volume of his autobiography, In Memory Yet Green, Asimov began the story on March 18, 1941 and finished it on April 8. "Nightfall," as he called it, was then published as the cover story for the September issue of

Astounding along with the conclusion of Robert Heinlein's short novel *Methuselah's Children* and in the company of Alfred Bester's now classic "Adam and No Eve." Since that day, "Nightfall" has been judged, over and over again, to be the greatest science-fiction story ever written. Happily neither Heinlein nor Bester would ever complain about this, since the former quickly established himself as the best science-fiction writer of all time and the latter's 1956 novel, *The Stars My Destination*, is widely and rightly, viewed as the best single SF novel ever written. Having formulated the Laws of Robotics and then written "Nightfall," one might assume that young Asimov would devote the rest of his time to his studies. Hardly. That fall Astounding also brought out the first two Foundation stories. Years later, Asimov recalled the genesis of the series: On August 1, 1941, I took the subway to Campbell's office after class was over. On the way down I racked my brain for a story idea. Failing, I tried a device I sometimes used. I opened a book at random and then tried free association, beginning with whatever I first saw. The book I had with me was a collection of Gilbert and Sullivan plays. I opened it to *Iolanthe* to the picture of the Fairy Queen throwing herself at the feet of Private Willis, the sentry. Thinking of sentries, I thought of soldiers, of military empires, of the Roman Empire of the Galactic Empire aha! . . . "Why should I not write of the fall of the Galactic Empire and the return of feudalism, written from the viewpoint of someone in the secure days of the Second Galactic Empire? I thought I knew how to do it for I had read Edward Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* from first page to last at least twice, and I had only to make use of that. I was bubbling over by the time I got to Campbell's, and my enthusiasm was catching. It was perhaps too catching for Campbell blazed up as I had never seen him do. "That's too large a theme for a short story," he said. "I was thinking of a novelette," I said, quickly, adjusting my thoughts. "Or a novelette. It will have to be an open-ended series of short stories." "What?" I said, weakly. "Short stories, novelettes, serials, all fitting into a particular future history, involving the fall of the First Galactic Empire, the period of feudalism that follows and the rise of the Second Galactic Empire." "What?" I said, even more weakly. "Yes, I want you to write an outline for the future history. Go home and write an outline." There Campbell had made a mistake. Robert Heinlein was writing what he called the "Future History Series." He was writing various stories that fitted into one niche or another of the series, and he wasn't writing them in order. Therefore he had prepared a Future History outline that was very detailed and complicated, so that he would keep everything straight. Now Campbell wanted me to do the same. Heinlein, however, was Heinlein and Asimov was not Heinlein. I went home dutifully, and began preparing an outline that got longer and longer and stupider and stupider until I finally tore it up. It was quite plain that I couldn't work with an outline. (To this day I cannot for any of my stories, articles, or

books, whether fiction or nonfiction.) On August 11, therefore, I started the story I had originally intended to write (with modifications that resulted from my discussions with Campbell), and the heck with possible future stories. I'd worry about them when the time came — and if the time came. Since the First Galactic Empire was breaking down (in my story), certain scientists had set up a Foundation on a world at the rim of the Galaxy, purportedly to prepare a vast encyclopedia of human knowledge, but actually to cut down the period of feudalism and hasten the rise of the Second Empire. I called the story — drum roll, please — "Foundation." Later in his autobiography, Asimov notes that he submitted "Foundation" on September 8 and on September 17 received a check for \$126. From then on, Foundation stories appeared periodically, if irregularly, until the end of the 1940s. When they were collected, Asimov added one more to form a new introduction, and also changed most of the titles.

This review is specifically of the Kindle edition, published by Ballantine/Bantam. The Foundation Trilogy is a wonderful piece of work, but the Kindle edition butchers it! Someone has decided to water down Asimov's prose, eliminating some of the more enjoyable passages of the book. Here are some examples, found by comparison with an old Bantam Doubleday hardcover edition. Several pages into chapter 3, Salvor Hardin is arguing with the Encyclopedists about the decline of the Empire. Original: "If you ask me," he cried, "THE GALAXY IS GOING TO POT!" Kindle: "If you ask me," he cried, "THE GALACTIC EMPIRE IS DYING!" In chapter 5, Hardin is again meeting with the Encyclopedists and discussing the threat received from Anacreon. Original: The message from Anacreon ... boils down easily and straightforwardly to the unqualified statement ... "You give us what we want in a week, or we beat the hell out of you and take it anyway." Kindle: The message from Anacreon ... boils down easily and straightforwardly to the unqualified statement ... "You give us what we want in a week, or we take it by force." I'm going to be asking for a refund.

This story hasn't held up to time. First off, things like geographical limitations on communication and people smoking cigars and reading newspapers marks it as passé. The complete absence of female characters until the novel is 3/4 over, when the first female character is a servant who is used to model jewelry, seems quaint. And the simplistic nature of "psychohistory" and its predictions seems, well, childish when one has been exposed to chaos theory and the concept of antifragility. There are some fun twists in the plot here and there, but overall, it's mainly a period piece from the "Golden Age" of Sci-Fi.

Foundation and Empire by Isaac Asimov is a science fiction novel originally published in 1952. It is a classic piece of mid 20th century literature, and a breakthrough in its genre. It is the first of five sequels and one prequel in the Foundation series. The basic premise revolves around a group of scholars intent on writing an encyclopedia to preserve science who are exiled from the capital of a galactic Empire to a remote planet. They are led by a man named Hari Seldon, a mathematician and psychohistorian who predicts the future of civilizations and has declared that the Empire will eventually fall, leading to a long period of barbarism for all humanity. The original Foundation (#1) book has several parts that are spread over different centuries after the group is exiled and after they have formed their new society, called the Foundation, on the remote planet. Foundation and Empire centers around a man, Toran, and his wife, Bayta, as they travel through the ever-changing galaxy, as the Empire dissolves and the Foundation struggles to survive. The time period for this sequel is 300 years after the time of Hari Seldon. Also introduced in this sequel is a psychologist by the name of Ebling Mis, a strange and peculiar clown called Magnifico, and a powerful conqueror known as The Mule. In my previous review of the original Foundation (#1) book, I said "the characters are flat, the plot is laborious, and the themes are shallow.", but just by reading the first few pages of Foundation and Empire, my opinion of the series completely changed. As I also stated in my first review, I could not judge the entire collection having read just one of seven books in the series. Foundation and Empire in a word, is "genius", and it is no wonder why the Foundation series serves as a benchmark for its creativity in the science-fiction genre. It delivers a comprehensive study into what human civilization would look like spread out over the entire galaxy, with interstellar travel easy and commonplace. The fact that it is presented as a series is also notable and sets a standard for other works in the field. Indeed, Foundation and Empire has characters that come alive on the pages, a plot that unravels with non-stop intrigue, and a surprising (but somewhat predictable) ending that will have the reader eagerly anxious to read the rest of the series. I rate Foundation and Empire as highly recommended and a must-read for all sci-fi fans. 5 out of 5 stars.

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