# LAN'S LANTERN 34

Isaac Asimov

# LAN'S LANTERN 34

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## Dedication

To Maia, as usual,
and
Isaac Asimov, the First
of the "ABCs of SF"
-- Long may he continue
to write.


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Business manager: Maia Cowan.


# Isaac Asimov

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___ I thought you would be interested in this

___ This is your last issue unless you do something.

# From the Editor

# *Mutterings*

by Lan

I sit here at the computer keyboard surrounded by pieces of Lan's Lantern #34, the Asimov Special, the one you hold in your hands, and listening to filk tapes. This is the last thing I need to write before pasting the final pages together. And I am weary. It has been a long process of putting this issue together, but the end is definitely in sight.

I keep going back over what I have in this issue. Most of the items are very nice and complimentary. There is an occasional critical piece, but in thinking about it, why not? Even if someone is criticizing an author, what the person usually has done is spend time reading the work carefully, and then making some value judgements. The fact that a person, like Greg Hills in his article, "The Future of Seldon's Plan," has devoted a lot of time and energy into researching and writing such a piece shows a certain amount of devotion to the author. One need not like everything an author does, and keeping a balanced view is healthy. Greg has something to say, and he says it well.

Others, as I said, have commented in their own ways about Isaac Asimov, as I have. Asimov has drawn people into SF, he has enabled others to understand science clearly, he has brought people together in friendship over a common love. Others have chosen art as their medium of expression. I must thank all the artists who sent me work. I hope that I did justice in the placement of those pieces. And that my printer will do justice in the final product.

A special thanks must go to PL Caruthers-Montgomery, who worked for several hours on calligraphing the titles to the articles. I realized that I left her name out of the contributors' column in the Heinlein issue (Lan's Lantern #33, which is sent out together with this one), and I apologize profusely for the omission. Her work has enhanced these two Special Issues immensely. Of course, after I sent PL the list of titles, I got a couple other things in the mail; and I found Alex Bouchard's contribution on disk that had gotten shunted to the side for a while. (His Heinlein contribution, which I found on the same disk, AFTER #33 had been printed, will appear in a special section on LL #35.)

To all who are receiving these two issues, it is quite obvious that I am late in producing them. I apologize to Isaac Asimov for not having this out in the year of his Golden Anniversary. I wish I could apologize to Robert Heinlein, but that's not possible. I do hope that his widow Virginia will accept my apologies in his stead.

I think that wraps it up now. I hope you all enjoy these zines; let me know what you think.

--Lan
12 May 90 |*|

# My Debt to Mom and Dad

I owe my parents two very special debts; my mother, for introducing me to mysteries, and my father, for introducing me to science fiction. I began on mysteries, plowing through Christie, Queen, Wolfe, and Sayers. The passion for mysteries has remained lifelong, and I've even written one myself (St. Oswald's Niche, Ballantine, 199?). When I was eleven or twelve, I started noticing what Dad was reading. I asked him to recommend some SF. I now realize that Dad's appetite for SF was rather like that of a pig's: he read everything voraciously, garbage and gormet-quality alike. Many times he'd comment as he read, "God, this is really stupid." But he'd keep reading it anyway. Fortunately for me, he recognized that some writers were consistently better than others, and he steered me to Asimov, Sturgeon, Clement and Herbert, for starters.

Now Sturgeon's themes can be heavy-going for a twelve-year-old, however much I appreciated them later in life. And while Needle and Dune quickly became favorites, I didn't avidly track their authors in the library.

Then there was Asimov.

"Oh, I know him! I've read his Black Widowers stories in Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine," I told Dad, I also had used one of his introduction to physics for a sixth grade science report. So I came to Asimov's SF the long way--through his mysteries and his non-fiction.

I became a rabid fan from that point on. The Foundation books went to the top of my list of best-loved books, due in large part to Arkady Darrell, one of the finest adolescent heroines in any galaxy. (I can't wait to introduce her to our three daughters!) When I was fourteen, I went on an exhausting 73-day trip to Europe, courtesy of my gradnmother, who was visiting old friends and relations. Thank goodness I packed a sack of Asimov books, including the Nightfall collection, which I nearly committed to memory on that trip. (A few years later, in a high school communications class, I adapted the story as a "radio script" which my group then performed live for our classmates. Our group's director cast me as Aton 77--some roles were necessarily made females--and the teacher gave us As.)

My hunt for all things Asimovian then led me to the first collections of Hugo winners which I initially read purely for the introductions by Asimov. What did I know? A Hugo? What's a Hugo? I soon found out and those collections became my guided tour to the greats of SF. I fired questions at Dad, who suddenly remembered other great names, after some prompting from the Hugo books. "Heinlein? Oh, yeah, he's terrific. Anderson? Sure, I've read lots of his stuff. Clarke's good too--remember 2001?"

Where did I go from there? I kept right on reading, and I'm still reading and loving it. I'm married to an SF writer. And at NOREASCON 3, I finally (if only briefly) met Dr. Asimov himself.

My Dad's gone now, but I still owe him that debt for introducing me to Asimov's work. I just wish he could have known that one day I'd be introduced to that man himself.

--Laura Turtledove
September, 1989 |*|

by Laura Turtledove

# Asimov and the Integrated Story

Writing a critical piece about Isaac Asimov is a difficult task for me. I've simply been a fan of his for too long. But when I decided to give it a go, I started rereading some of his works. I began with The Foundation Trilogy, moved on through Foundation's Edge and Foundation and Earth, then backtracked and read (ih order) I, Robot, The Caves of Steel, The Naked Sun, Robots of Dawn, and Robots and Empire. All this reading took approximately one month. How could I read all that so quickly? It's very easy, with Asimov's work, to get caught up in the flow of the story, losing the objective edge necessary for critical review. Even so, I did notice things that I hadn't noticed before.

Like many of his contemporaries, (Robert A. Heinlein being another excellent example) Dr. Asimov has trouble giving his characters complete dimensionality. By themselves, the characters seem shallow and wooden. In part, this may be a matter of changing times, making the dialogue seem rigid and simplistic. For instance, Dr. Asimov's character may swear, but not using the vernacular currently popular. There are no four-letter words in Isaac Asimov's stories. When he started writing, stories containing such language would not have been printed, nor was it anywhere near as acceptable in society as it is today to use that type of language. But this is not the complete cause of the problem.

These stories are not simple tales designed to amuse; they are similar to medieval morality plays in that their purpose is to educate and instruct. Morality play characters are meant to represent a particular character trait, not be real people. Now, before I'm swamped with millions of little pointing fingers on how this isn't true. let me state that, yes, this is a generalization, and is not quite true since both Asimov and Heinlein are better writers than that; but the underlying idea is true.

This does not mean that Asimov's characters can't be identified with, for indeed they can. The heroes and heroines in his writing are true heroes; they are good, well-intentioned characters. What Asimov does so well is to make his characters an integral part of the society in which they exist. As such these characters are either representative archetypes or are crucial pivots in moving the society forward.

Society, that is really what Asimov's books are about. Isaac Asimov paints a broad canvas of future history, without the niggling little details that make many look upon history as a chore to be suffered in school. Even better, Asimov's history is history with a personal touch. The incomplete excerpts from the Galactica Encyclopedia at the beginning of the chapters in Foundation set up each situation as history, very cut-and-dry. Then the story which follows tells us the details--the story behind the history.

It is also the treatment of technology which made Dr. Asimov's earlier works so readable, and which also distinguishes them from the later books. The technology is simply there. Details are only given as necessary to understand how they effect the story, and those details are such that anyone, no matter how non-technically minded, could be expected to understand. For example, in the original Foundation Trilogy the mechanics of how the ships travel from planet to planet is not explained. It is not important to the story and is taken as a given. Part of what makes these three books better than Foundation and Earth is that in the latter, too much time is taken out of the story to explain the mechanics of the ships' operation: how control panels work, about hyperspace, and so on.

This has been an all too brief look at some of what distinguishes the novels of Isaac Asimov, both for good and ill.

--Alexander R. Slate
May, 1989 |*|

Alexander Slate

# Isaac Asimov: The Foundation of SCIENCE FICTION

An essay by Alexander Bouchard

Isaac Asimov, possessor of a Ph.D. in Biochemistry from Columbia University, Professor of Biochemistry at Boston University School of Medicine, multiple Hugo winner; about as close to an automatic writing machine as exists in science fiction today. (Also in the rest of the mundane world as well, but that is not for this article.) Respected, even beloved, he is one of the eminences grises of the field; no Worldcon, it seems, would be official without his presence.

He was born in Russia in 1920, and emigrated with his parents not long after. They settled in the New York City area, where Isaac grew to manhood. He made his first professional sale in 1939, to John Campbell's Astounding. He was a member of the Futurians, a loosely-knit group of professionals and aspiring professionals in the New York area. He received his doctorate just before World War II, worked in a war-related plant in Philadelphia, and continued to write. During and just after the war, he put out the stories and collections he is perhaps best known for; the short story "Nightfall", and the stories which, collected together, form his Foundation Trilogy. His robot stories, which stated the principles now known as Asimov's Three Laws of Robotics, and which are in the collections I, Robot and The Rest of the Robots, are classics against which all robot stories that came after must measure themselves. And now his latest works, Foundation's Edge and Foundation and Earth, are tying together the seemingly disparate worlds of the Robot stories and the Foundation series, along with the historic Earth of Plainclothesman Elijah Baley and his Spacer robot partner, R. Daneel Olivaw of Aurora from The Caves of Steel and The Naked Sun.

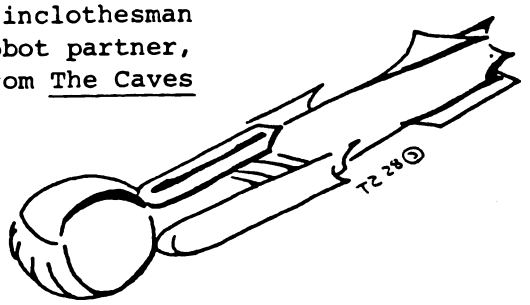
Any way you look at it, this is a monumental task. It seems the Good Doctor has become conscious of how little time we all have, said knowledge dating from his triple bypass operation, and he has decided to get as much as possible of what he has in his brain down on paper before the Black Camel kneels for him, as it has for so many giants in the field already, most recently, Robert Heinlein.

Asimov has never been in the forefront of the "New Wave" tendency of specializing in the inner view; he presents grand sweeping panoramas of politics, intrigue, and passion, populated with human characters who triumph over the evils of the day in spite of (and sometimes, because of) their human frailties. He is as comfortable discussing cosmogonic theories as delineating an argument between two fully-fleshed characters. The cosmic issues of Good and Evil don't frighten him, nor does putting in science for the reader to absorb by osmosis, as the story progresses. This is a man who is comfortable with what he does, how he does it, and *why* he does it. This is a quality all too often absent from writers of **any** sort. In Asimov, this is a part of the package.

He may take the predicaments in which he places his characters quite seriously, but he doesn't take himself too seriously. He doesn't pretend to be giving you the Gospel According to St. Isaac; it's a story, meant for you to read and enjoy.

We need more like him. I can't say as we're going to get any more like him, but we do need more.

Alexander Bouchard
1988 |*|



# The Non-Metallic Isaac or It's A Wonderful Life



Astrophysicists (to start with a scientific word) classify the universe into three chemical categories: hydrogen, helium, and metals.

The first two are the lightest of all the hundred-some known elements. Anything heavier than helium, the astrophysicists blithely call "metals." Hydrogen and helium make up roughly ninety-eight percent of the universe's composition. To an astrophysicist, the universe consists of a lot of hydrogen, a considerable amount of helium, and a smattering of metals.

Now, although Isaac Asimov is known throughout this planet (and possibly others, we just don't know yet) as a writer of science fiction, when you consider his entire output of written material--all the four-hundred-andcounting books and the myriad of articles, columns, limericks, and whatnots--his science fiction is actually a small percentage of the total. As far as Asimov's production is concerned, science fiction tales are his "metals." Science fact is his mettle.

It is the "non-metallic" Asimov that I want to praise.

Remember the classic movie, It's A Wonderful Life? The one where an angel shows suicidal James Stewart what his home town would be like if Jimmie's character had never been born?

Think of what our home planet would be like if Isaac Asimov had never turned his mind and hand to writing about science.

We narrowly missed such a fate. There was a moment in time when a youthful Isaac faced a critical career choice: go on as a researcher or plunge full-time into writing. He chose writing and the world is extremely happy with the result.

Knowing that science fiction, in those primeval days, could not support a wife and family, Isaac chose to write about science fact and to make that his career, rather than biomedical research.

But suppose he had not?

Suppose, faced with that career choice, Isaac had opted for the steady, if unspectacular, career of a medium-level research scientist who wrote occasional science fiction stories as a hobby.

We would still have the substantial oeuvre of his science fiction tales that this anthology celebrates. We would still have "Nightfall" and "The Ugly Little Boy," the original Foundation trilogy and novels such as Pebble in the Sky. We would, to return to the metaphor, we started with, still have Isaac's "metallic" output.

But we would not have his hydrogen and helium, the huge number of books that are non-fiction, mainly books about science, although there are some marvelous histories, annotations of various works of literature, and lecherous limericks in there, too.

If Isaac had toiled away his years as a full-time biomedical researcher and part-

by Ben Bova

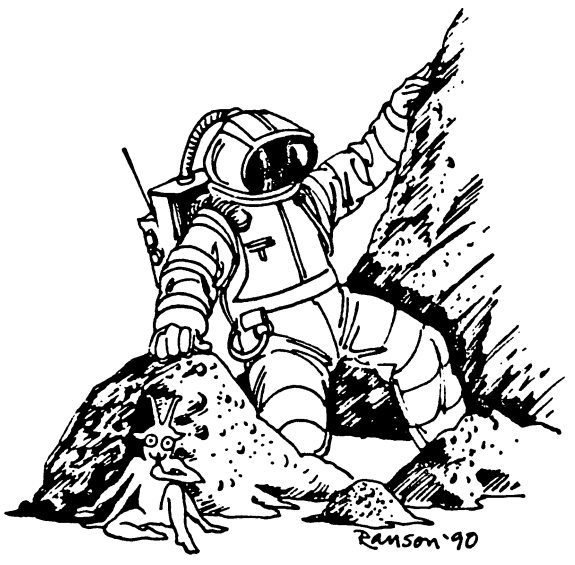
time science fiction writer, we would never have seen all those marvelous science books. Probably a full generation of scientists would have chosen other careers, because they would never have been turned on to science by the books that Isaac did not write. Progress in all fields of the physical sciences would have slowed, perhaps disastrously.

Millions of people all over the world would have been denied the pleasure of learning that they could understand the principles of physics, mathematics, astronomy, geology, chemistry, the workings of the human body, the intricacies of the human brain--because the books from which they learned and received such pleasures would never have been written.

Entire publishing houses would have gone into bankruptcy, no doubt, without the steady sure income that Isaac's science books have generated for them over the decades. And will continue to generate for untold decades to come. The wood pulp and paper industry would be in a chronic state of depression if Isaac had not turned out all those hundreds of books and thousands of articles. Canada might have become a Third World nation, save for Dr. Isaac Asimov.

To make it more personal, I would have never started to write popularizations of science if it had not been for Isaac's works--and for his personal encouragement and guidance. The gods themselves are the only ones who know how many writers have been helped by Isaac, either by reading his books or by asking him for help with science problems that have them stumped.

Blighted careers, ruined corporations, benighted people wandering in search of an enlightenment that they cannot find--that is what the world would be like if Isaac had not poured his great energies and greater heart into nonfiction books about science.




A final word about a word: popularization.

In the mouths of certain critics (including some professional scientists) "popularization" is a term of oppobrium, somewhat akin to the sneering "pulp literature" that is still sometimes slung at science fiction. "Popularizations" of science are regarded, by those slandering bastards, as beneath the consideration of dignified persons.

Such critics regard themselves as among the elite, and they disdain "popularizations" of science with the same lofty pigheadedness that George III displayed toward his American subjects.

To explain science is probably the most vital task any writer can attempt in today's complex, technology-driven society. To explain science so well, so entertainingly, that ordinary men and women all over the world clamor for your books--that is worthy of a Nobel Prize. Too bad Alfred Nobel never thought about the need to explain science to the masses. I'm certain he would have created a special prize for it.

Isaac Asimov writes about science (and everything else) so superbly well that it looks easy. He can take any subject under the sun and write about it so lucidly and understandably that any literate person can grasp the subject with hardly any strain at all.

For this incredible talent he is sometimes dismissed as "a mere popularizer." As I have offered in the past, I offer now: anyone who thinks that what Isaac does is easy is welcome to try it. I know I have, with some degree of success. But easy it is not!

Thanks be to the forces that shape this universe, Isaac decided not to be a full-time researcher. He became a full-time writer instead. While he is famous for writing science fiction, his "non-metallic" output of science fact is far larger and far more important--if that word can be applied to writing--than his deservedly admired and awarded fiction.

If all this adds up to the conclusion that Isaac Asimov is a star, well, by heaven, he is! One of the brightest, too. |*|

# Asimov and the Soviet Union

by Tom Jackson

Everyone knows that Isaac Asimov is a popular and respected writer in the United States, but it's nice to know that he is well-liked in the land of his birth, the Soviet Union.

Asimov is aware of his popularity in the U.S.S.R. and seems to be pleased about it. In Memory Yet Green, the first volume of his two-volume autobiography, describes his birth on January 2, 1920, in Petrovichi, Byelorussia, and his family's emigration to the United States in 1923. Asimov explains that his parents never spoke Russian to each other and that he grew up learning English and Yiddish. He laments, "Yet how I wish I could speak a little Russian, too."

References to Asimov's Russian heritage crop up elsewhere in the autobiography. Asimov's first wife, the former Gerturde Blugerman, was persuaded to go on a blind date with the author by a friend who described his as a "Russian chemist with a mustache." In the second volume, In Joy Still Felt, Asimov describes a cold snap in Massachusetts in 1957 and adds:

> On the coldest day, when the milkman showed up, he looked so darn cold that I got out of the house, walked down to the curb, and took the milk from him to save him the trip. As it happened, I was in my short sleeves. Actually, this wasn't too quixotic, for there was no wind at all and I was only out for a minute or so, not long enough for the natural heat of my clothing to vanish altogether.
>
> The milkman stared and said, "Are you crazy?"
>
> I grinned and said, "No, Russian."

This is spoken like a true Russian. Soviets are proud of their ability to withstand cold weather and have been known to eat ice cream on the street in the middle of winter.

The Great Soviet Encyclopedia contains a separate entry on Asimov which is mostly accurate, but mistakenly states that I, Robot is Asimov's "first novel." This slip may reflect the fact that I, Robot is a popular book in the U.S.S.R. One survey of 600 Soviet SF readers showed that 436 had read it.(1) A Soviet SF short story, "A Person Is...(An Essential Addition to Asimov's Three Laws)" by Boris Stern, depends on the reader's knowledge of Asimov's Three Laws of Robotics to make its point. Stern doesn't explain who Asimov is and spells out only one law; knowledge of Asimov and his Laws are taken for granted.

On at least one occasion, a passage in Asimov's work was changed during translation into Russian. The End of Eternity contains the sentence, "Any system like Eternity, which allows men to choose their own future, will end by choosing safety and mediocrity." (2) The passage was changed in the Soviet translation to: "Any system like Eternity, which allows a small group of men to make decisions for all of humanity, inevitably leads to a state of affairs where safety and mediocrity are the highest goods."

Patrick L. McGuire, an American expect on Soviet SF, commented, "Evidently, Asimov's lack of faith in the power of human reason was considered the greatest problem, even though its 'correction' heightened the anti-oligarchical side of the book." (3) McGuire adds in a footnote, "Alternatively, it is possible that somewhere in the process of editing and translation, someone consciously altered the original so as to make it more applicable to the Soviet Union."

Asimov commented, "I don't terribly mind minor changes, under the circumstances. I would rather they read me, slightly bowdlerized, than not read me at all. And maybe, in time, the bowdlerization will cease." (4)

Asimov's introduction to a translation of Soviet SF stories lead to a brush with Soviet critics. In More Soviet Science Fiction (New York: Collier, 1962), Asimov discussed various approaches to SF and speculated on how Soviet SF writers might deal with political restrictions. Asimov

said that Soviet writers take as a basic premise that in the future under communism, "man's goodness and nobility will be free to develop and people will live under the reign of love." Asimov added:

> I suppose if one were sufficiently skeptical, one might suppose these stories were written strictly for American consumption and are published only in order to confuse us and weaken our will; that the Soviet people is not allowed to see them, but is fed on pure hate.

E. Bradis and V. Dmitrevskiy, in their article "The Future: Its Promoters and False Prophets," seized on this and wrote

> It is true that after this monstrous assertion, Asimov says, "I do not believe this, however. A more reasonable supposition is that the stories are indeed among those written for Soviet consumption but are carefully selected and are, therefore, not representative. To check on that, one would have to obtain Soviet science fiction magazines or the equivalent and see what the general run on unselected material is like."

The two Soviet authors wrote:

> We can assure Mr. Asimov that the humanismhe has found in the several stories "very carefully selected" is inherent in and typical of Soviet science fiction and Soviet literature as a whole. Asimov's ideas show that even the honest American intellectuals are so blinded by the unofficial propoganda that they often cannot tell black from white.

The Soviet article was translated and published in the October, 1965, issue of The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction. F&SF printed a reply by Asimov, whose temperate remarks seem more in keeping with the modern age of glasnost than the old Cold War days. Asimov wrote:

> I think Messrs. Brandis and Dmitrevskiy are being a little harsh with me. They themselves, in referring to American science fiction stories published in the Soviet Union say: "Judging solely from these translations, one might get the erroneous impression that bourgeois science fiction is now for the most part nonpolitical and quite harmless..."
>
> In other words, they say that what the Soviets see of American science fiction is not representative of the whole and is deliberately selected to be "nonpolitical and quite harmless." They ought, then, to hold me fairly blameless if the same thought had occurred to me about Soviet science fiction published in the United States.
>
> Brandis and Dmitrevskiy had the opportunity, apparently, to read other American science fiction and satisfy themselves that the translated material was really unrepresentative.
>
> When I wrote my prefaces to Soviet Science Fiction and More Soviet Science Fiction, I was less fortunate for I had no access to Soviet science fiction generally. But I took that into account and carefully mentioned this lack of representivity only as a "supposition."
>
> I wish they had continued to quote the final lines on my introduction; lines that followed immediately after the passage they did quote. Those last lines read:
>
> "On the whole, though, what I would like to believe is that the Soviet citizen would really like to see the coming of a reign of love when 'nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.'
>
> "Why, after all, should he not?
>
> "If only we could believe it is what they really want, and if only they could believe it is what we really want, then perhaps things would yet end well."

--Tom Jackson
August, 1989 [*]

(1) Red Stars: Political Aspects of Soviet Science Fiction. Patrick McGuire, Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1985; p. 86

(2) The End of Eternity. Isaac Asimov, Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett, 1955; p. 188

(3) Red Stars, p. 77

(4) Postcard dated July 21, 1989.

# Robot AL76 Goes Berserk

"Can you honestly say you appeciate Mr. Asimov? He's put you in some strange situations."

The robot moved its head slightly from side to side, reverted to normal. They had him at a convention. He was being tested not only on the Laws of Robotics, but on whether he could duplicate human sentiment with his mechanical parts. His answers were being recorded as independent observation of the master. They were about to indicate a "No Response" when a single light glowed and the answer came.

"Mr. Asimov is not that much a series writer. There was only one situation and that story was unique."

"Alfred Bester might disagree with that. Or how would you like to be put in a room with Gort?"

That would be rather agreeable." But they weren't sure he'd understood the question. There was a humming silence. Then they asked him, "How does Mr. Asimov think 'em up?"

"Marijuana plus tequila." There was glee in his voice.

"Thinks he's on a quiz show!" someone commented.

"AL, that is what he doesn't use. 'He just does it,' you should answer."

The robot was silent. It wasn't going anywhere. Outside, the place was utterly silent, except one could hear the many mosquitoes from the nearby swamp looking around the hotel's exterior. But then came the bell-ringer.

"Do you love Dr. A? Would you do services for him?"

"Insufficient---interference or confusion of question. The bell-ringer has come in, yes."

They looked around. They hadn't been aware that the hotel had a bellhop, but there he was; he punched the button on the clerk's bell lightly, hopped once, spun and departed.

"Repeat question. Do you love Dr. Asimov?"

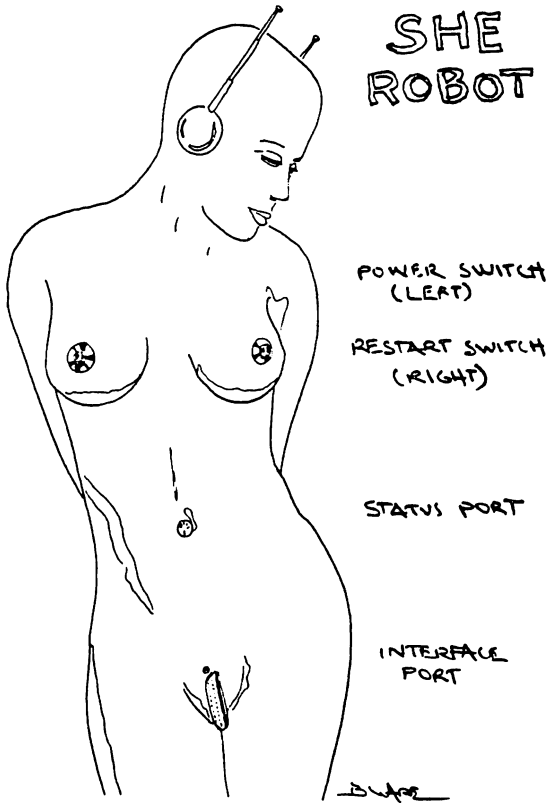
The robot looked stalled. Then it recited an Asimov bibliography, perfectly and completely. It paused to let it be perceived that a point was implied, then said, "He should work more, but relax too. Does one deny a maker his due? Asimov has no similitudes."

But it was unable to say the word "Love."

Suddenly, there was a loud crack from across the lobby. A tennis ball flew at the robot. It lifted a mechanical arm and returned the serve. Then it said:

"LOVE! And the name of the game is Asimov!"

--John Thiel
1988 |*|




by John Thiel

# Asimov, Foundation and Me

I can't remember which was the first Asimov novel I ever actually read, or even when I read it. I do know that back in elementary school I pestered the local library for all the Lucky Starr books. It was only years later that I discovered to my delight that Paul French, the author, was a pseudonym for Isaac Asimov.

Since then, I have read Fantastic Voyage (I & II), most of Asimov's collections and anthologies, and I even own one of his non-fiction science books.

But what I really want to talk about in his Foundation Series. I first read the Trilogy years ago, and re-read it, and re-re-read it. Then, lo and behold, Asimov wrote a fourth book. Of course, I raced right out and bought it, oddly enough on the day that New York City had its annual autumn Book Fair. There was Isaac, holding sway in the Doubleday Booth, signing copies. So now I own a signed hardcover of Foundation's Edge (numbered as well by the author: #14). I ran home and read the novel completely by the end of the day. As I closed the book, I said, "Gosh, now I have to wait for book Five."

So I did. And when Foundation and Earth was released, I bought that as well. By now, however, I was starting to "see" something that I wasn't sure I liked. Robots were becoming the "guardians/protectors" of humanity. And if there is one plot I personally don't care for, it's the one where humanity can't evolve properly on its own, but, rather, needs some outside force to help it along. And when that force isn't even a living force, but a MAN-made one meant to be subservient, well....

But this was Asimov, so I held out hope. Then, here came Prelude to Foundation. Of course I bought it, and read it in one or two days. Now I was certain that the robots the Good Doctor so loves were going to be the heroes once again. Even good old Seldon was helped out by...yep, you guessed it, robots.

Well, I put my disappointment aside for a long while, and went on to other things. Just recently, however, I gave myself a project: to read the entire Robots and Foundation Series as quickly as humanly possible. So, starting with The Caves of Steel and ending with Foundation and Earth, I read them all in two days (perhaps three). It was time well-spent. I did a complete 180 degree turn in my perception.

Humanity, represented initially by one Elijah Baley, was the instrument of its own evolution. If it hadn't been for the robots being exposed to Baley's own inner desire to see Earth finally reach the stars; if the Robot Giskard hadn't been tampered with by his human designer, thus gifting him with "telepathy"; if Seldon hadn't started the basic work on psychohistory; if there hadn't been various human beings who were determined to see a stronger galaxy rise up after the Empire fell; well, robots were a catalyst, but even they could not work in a vacuum. It was always the Humans who somehow made the next step in growth possible, whether they were conscious of it or not.

And now Dr. Asimov's vision is going further. Foundation and Earth ended on a new puzzle: what happens when humanity as we know it meets humanity evolved to a different power?

Never having had the opportunity to actually talk with or even hear Dr. Asimov, I am not certain what his true hopes and expectations for humankind are. But I know now I perceive his dream: humanity will always find within itself, either as a collective body or through various individual representatives, the power to go further and farther than it ever did before, if it dares to seek for that adventure. Whether that voyage will be in our present forms, or in some new form we can't yet anticipate, only time will tell. I can't say if my perception is accurate in Asimov's eyes, but for his allowing me the opportunity to grasp it, I am eternally grateful.

Dr. Asimov, keep 'em coming!

--Marie Parsons
July, 1989 |*|

Marie Parsons

# My Encounter with Isaac Asimov

by Alexander Slate

I have had the pleasure of meeting Isaac Asimov once. It is an encounter that I will never forget. I was in high school at the time, in Upper Dublin township, Pennsylvania, a suburb of Philadelphia. I read a lot of science fiction, but I had not yet discovered fandom, and my favorite SF writer was Isaac Asimov. Somewhere I saw a notice of an upcoming lecture by Dr. A at the Montgomery County Community College in Blue Bell, PA. Of course, I had to go. So I contacted the people at the college about tickets. They asked me if I would like to do a little PR work for them, putting up posters in my area. In return, I would be invited to the reception afterward. I jumped at the chance.

The lecture was quite entertaining, and we had pretty good seats, the auditorium being fairly small. The reception afterward was held in the library, and there were complimentary drinks and nibbles. Dr. Asimov was very approachable, and there were extra copies of the posters available

# Isaac Asimov: A Memoir

by Alexis Gilliland

I was chairman of the 1981 DISCLAVE, and sometime in 1980 I asked Isaac if he would be our Guest of Honor. He gave me a firm "maybe" and time went by. So I wrote him, politely, and received a polite and inconclusive response. And time went by. The people in the club were beginning to get a little edgy that we hadn't nailed down a GoH for the convention. Particularly since Isaac hadn't been going to conventions for a few years, and I did think this was a good idea, etc.

Polite perseverance pays off, sometimes. After I told Isaac that we needed to mail out the flyer advertising DISCLAVE in the very near future, on which it would be necessary to disclose our GoH, he agreed to come so that we could use his name.

I had a lot of preliminary aggravation from that convention, but the only bad moment Isaac gave me came when I went over to pick him up at the train station at the appointed time. After taking an earlier train, he and his wife had taken a cab over to the hotel. Once it turned out that

for him to autograph. I had already talked to him a little bit, telling him how much I enjoyed his works and basically who I was. I also got his autograph on a couple of posters and a few books. At one point, someone was taking Doctor Asimov to task for his attitude toward religion.

"Dr. Asimov, how can you, an intelligent man, not believe in God, given that you could end up in Hell?"

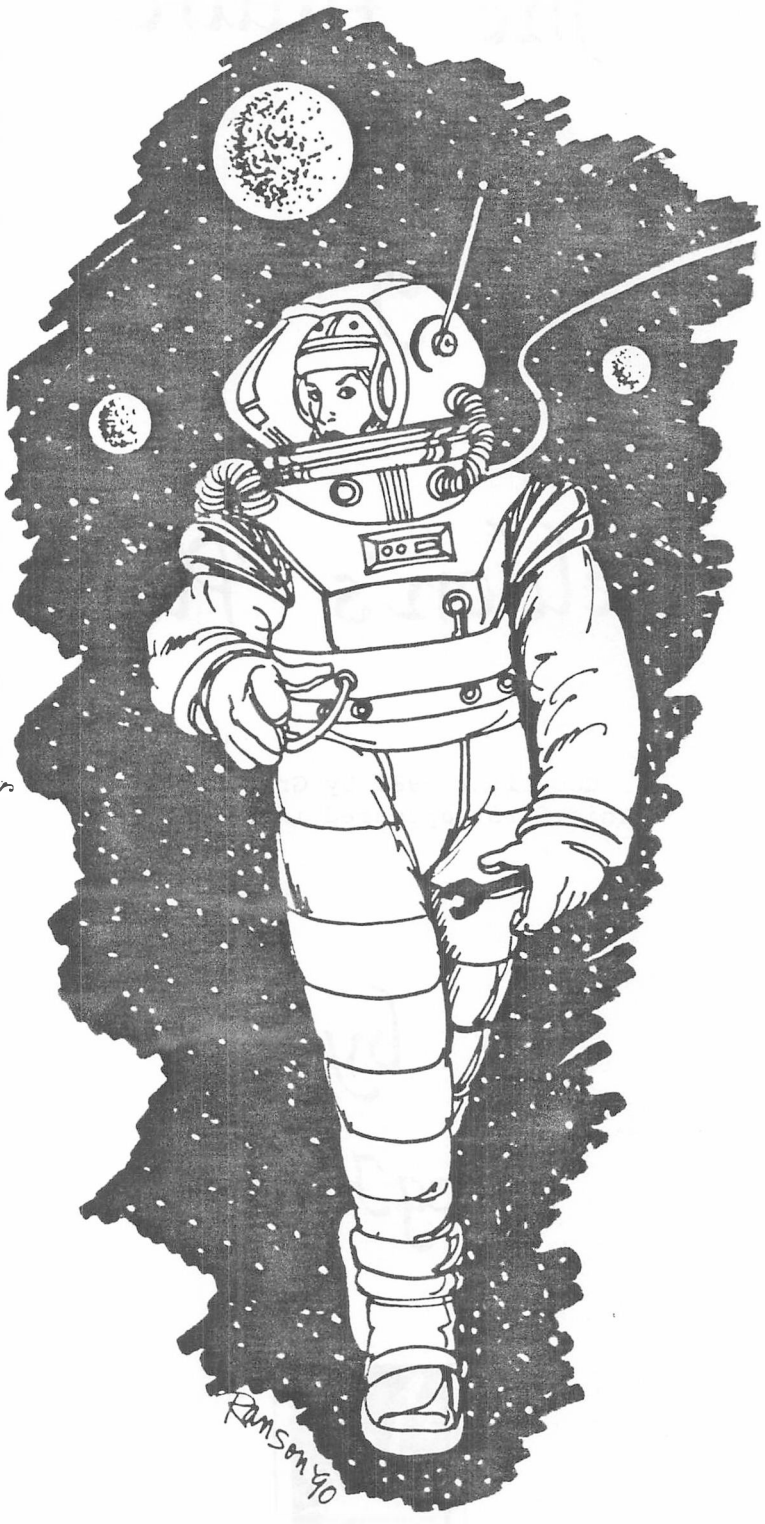
At this point I jumped in with a comment, even then I was not known for being able to keep my mouth shut.

"Well, if the Calvinists are right, and our destinies are predetermined anyway, then it doesn't matter whether he believes of not."

Dr. Asimov turned slightly, since I was right next to him at the time, out his arm around my shoulders and asked, "Are you sure you're not forty years old?"

I will never forget that!

--Alexander R. Slate
May, 1989 |*|




he was there, the convention went swimmingly. I made time to have supper with the Asimovs, memorable in that the waitress at the hotel restaurant asked for his autograph. During the event he did an excellent job for us, delivering an emotionally charged denunciation (I should check my notes, but I can't find them) of "Creation Science" to a packed ballroom. And after breathing fire for fifty minutes, he meekly let himself be led to a table for an impromptu autograph session.

I found out about those impromptu autograph sessions at another convention. Shortly after I had published my fourth novel, I had the third seat at a table with Ben Bova and Janet Jeppson, Isaac's wife. Bova had a long line, Jeppson had a short one, and I was getting the occasional passerby when Isaac walked up and decided to join Janet. Immediately a long, winding line snaked its way around the huckster room. For Isaac who had, of course, earned it.

--Alexis A. Gilliland
1987 |*|

# The Future of Seldon's Plan


This first appeared in Secant Two

by

Greg Hills

To readers like myself, whose taste in SF was influenced early on by writers such as Asimov, Heinlein, and Clarke, the extension of some favourite body of their work by one of these authors is an experience fraught with exultation and fear. Will the new material add to the existing structure or detract from it? How will the more mature section fit against the work of the younger writer?

I have been a reader of SF since the age of nine--1967, roughly. Among my earliest remembered reading is Asimov's The End of Eternity. The first book that I bought with a view to a collection was a paperback edition of The Martian Way in 1971. And in the early-to-mid 1970s a friend of my older brother introduced me to the Foundation Series. In no time at all, despite schoolboy poverty, I had acquired the three volumes if the paperback edition: Foundation, Foundation and Empire, and Second Foundation.

The concepts and breadth of the series held me entranced. The canvas was as broad as the Galaxy, and hundreds of years thick. There was the ancient, inexorably toppling Galactic Empire; the tiny, energetic Foundation; the wise and foolish leaders of men; and behind it all the hidden hand of Hari Seldon, first and last master of the science of psychohistory. I could not see the crudeness in the writing, the hammed characterisation, the occasional awkwardness in the plotting to make everything work out. And later, when I could take critical hold and tear it apart, I still respected it as one of the most brilliantly realised conceptions in SF. And I wished Asimov had followed through and finished off the whole thousand years of the Seldon Plan.

In 1982, he started to do just that, with the publication of Foundation's Edge; and in 1986 he took another step, with Foundation and Earth. From the ending of that volume it is plain that he has left himself plenty of room in which to write further volumes; but as of this article the series stands at five volumes: the three collections and two recent novels. I leave out of this calculation material such as Robots and Empire and The Stars, Like Dust, which does not fit within the period covered by the Seldon Plan even though Asimov is plainly attempting to write it into the subtext of the series.

How, then, does the new fit with the old, and how has the conception of youth been overtaken by that of the old man? This is the limit of discussion of this present article. Consideration of the wider body of work is the subject of a separate, later essay. Here I am solely concerned with those volumes which are unarguably the core of the Foundation Series.

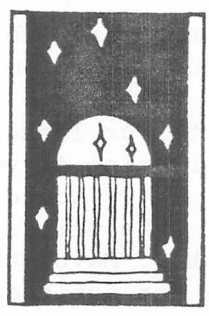
> ... The glass cubicle was no longer empty. A figure occupied it--a figure in a wheel-chair!
>
> It said nothing for a few moments, but it closed the book upon its lap and fingered it idly. And then it smiled, and the face seemed all alive.
>
> It said, "I am Hari Seldon." The voice was old and soft.
>
> "...From now on, and into the centuries, the path you must take is inevitable. You will be faced with a series of crises, as you are now faced with the first, and in each case your freedom of action will become ... circumscribed so that you will be forced along one, and only one, path...."
>
> --Foundation

The Foundation Series had its origins in the pages of the SF magazine Astounding in the 1940s. It appeared as a series of short stories. When the series was adapted for book publication, the stories became sections in the books and Asimov wrote an introductory section, "The Psychohistorians," to ease the reading public into the action.

The episodic nature of the earlier parts of the series could have been a major weakness, lending indiscipline and disunity. Instead Asimov turned it to good effect, using the stories to leapfrog from Seldon Crisis to Seldon Crisis and so covering a period of almost four centuries in a mere 220,000-odd words. He did this with such skill that the readers could feel for themselves the ever-growing length of the history of the Foundation, with Seldon retreating from front-stage to become a semi-mythical figure in the backdrops, and even the early builders and shakers of the Foundation itself gained in stature and rumour. As for the Empire, the readers could see its developing fall for themselves, even though the climax--the sack of the world Trantor--was never brought on stage (rather a weak aspect of this part of the Series). In short, Asimov succeeded in the difficult task of creating historical parallax, by which the Series profited markedly.

A recapitulation of the Series here would be a waste of time and paper. I shall assume that you have all read at least the first three volumes. If you have not read the latest pair, I shall try to avoid spoiling them for you. Nevertheless, I must deal briefly with some aspects of the Series.

The first and most obvious difference between the old and new is that the new is in the form of novels--two of them--where the old is patched together from short stories. The second obvious difference is that whereas each volume of the old spans at least decades, the whole of the action in both volumes of the new takes place within a single year, even though time has been gained by setting them two centuries further into the Seldon Plan. Both novels use the same characters, whereas all the characters change in the course of each of the earlier volumes (though some characters may carry on from one story to the next, as in "The Encyclopedists"/"The Mayors" in Foundation and "The Mule"/"Search by the Mule" in Foundation and Empire/Second Foundation). The third obvious difference is that in the old, Seldon's Plan is of prime importance; by the end of the first of the two novels, it is almost irrelevant to the story. Indeed, whereas the Foundation itself is always close to center-stage in the old, in the new it is quickly shunted into the background--and left there, since the chief characters do not return to Terminus nor, indeed, to any other Foundation world.



> On 1 August, 1941, when I was a lad of twenty-one, I was a graduate student in chemistry at the Columbia University and had been writing science fiction professionally for three years. I was hastening to see John Campbell, editor of Astounding, to whom I had sold five stories by then. I was anxious to tell him a new idea I had for a science fiction story.
>
> It was to write a historical novel of the future; to tell the story of the fall of the Galactic Empire. My enthusiasm must have been catching, for Campbell grew as excited as I was. He didn't want me to write a single story. He wanted me to write a series of stories, in which the full history of the thousand years of turmoil between the fall of the First Galactic Empire and the rise of the Second Galactic Empire was to be outlined. It would all be illuminated by the science of "psychohistory" which Campbell and I thrashed out between us.
>
> The first story appeared in the May 1942 Astounding and the second story appeared in the June 1942 issue. They were at once popular and Campbell saw to it that I wrote six more stories before the end of the decade. The stories grew longer, too. The first one was only twelve thousand words long. Two of the last three stories were fifty thousand words apiece.
>
> By the time the decade was over, I had grown tired of the series, dropped it, and went on to other things.
>
> --Isaac Asimov
> in Foundation and Earth

There are other differences, great and small. Some will be considered in this article, when they become relevant to my argument.

People change in the course of their lifetimes. Asimov was about 21 when he wrote the first Foundation story; he was about 65 when he wrote Foundation and Earth. To greater or lesser degree he has spent the intervening 44 years in writing science fiction. I would expect, then, that his skills as a writer would have developed noticeably. Maybe they have developed--but it is not noticeable.

> Gladia waited, with an almost painful anticipation, for the conclusion of the final Jump. They would then be close enough to Solaria to make out its sun as a disk.
>
> ... Nevertheless, when Gladia found herself staring at a circle of light that was absolutely nothing more than a circle of light to her, she found her eyes welling with tears.
>
> "I wanted to discuss Solaria with you. If we succeed with a micro-adjustment, we'll land tomorrow...."
>
> --Robots and Empire

Short stories and novels are two quite distinct forms of literature, requiring different approaches. The earlier Foundation stories are of the shorter type, and are accordingly forced to be succinct. In the new novels, however, Asimov has more room in which to expand on his worlds and his characters, and to develop his plots as a leisurely pace. Nevertheless, a novel has its own natural flow and rhythm. Any forcing or (as the case may be) lack of forcing of the novel's development will show up as a compaction or distension of the story.

In the early material the writing is crisp and to-the-point. Everything furthers the story; there are no wasted words. This constraint suited Asimov in the past. He realised that he was no "stylist" (though he does in fact have a very distinct style) and was content to write clear English, with no attempt to create Great Prose. And this suited the Foundation stories admirably.

When he started writing novels, he at first retained this spare form of style. Even as recently as 1972, in The Gods Themselves, writing is clear and direct.

Both Foundation's Edge and Foundation and Earth ramble. There are long passages which advance neither the story nor the characterisation; nor do they enrich the story. Perhaps the worst examples are the endlessly redundant passages describing approaches to, or departures from, various worlds, usually including in them a repetition of gasps of awe over the technological advancement of the ship or descriptions of hyperspacial travel that duplicate--or worse, contradict--each other and similar passages in the earlier stories.

I wish I could treat this example in the shallowness it requires. But after producing two closely-typed pages of quotes without exhausting the potential, I concluded that it was too much for me. Nevertheless, it does illustrate aspects of what I have been saying, and also illustrates development of Asimov's conceptions. It also shows something else--but read carefully and see if it is as obvious to you as it seems to me.

> The first sight if Trantor's sun was that of a hard, white speck all but lost in a myriad such, and recognisable as such only because it was pointed out by the ship's guide. The stars were thick here at the Galactic centre. But with each jump it shone more brightly...
>
> An officer came through and said, "View room will be closed for the remainder of the trip. Prepare for landing...We'll be landing in Trantor by morning... We're spinning down, sunside."
>
> --Foundation

> "...The ships of the fleet left Anacreon fifty minutes ago, at eleven, and the first shot will be fired as soon as they sight Terminus, which should be at noon tomorrow."
>
> --Foundation

> "We're in space now, about to make the first hop."
>
> Pritcher...sprang to the visiplate. Coldspace met his eyes when he adjusted it.
>
> "By my order, general...while I was engaging you here. You probably felt no acceleration, because it came at the moment I was expanding the field of the lens and you undoubtedly imagined it to be an illusion of the apparent star motion."
>
> --Foundation and Empire

These quotations are from the earlier stories. It is quite clear from them that Asimov conceives hyperspacial travel to be quick and to involve hours rather than days in approaching or leaving a planet. Look the quotes up for yourselves--you'll find I've abridged to save space and concentrate meaning, but that I've not distorted their message. Indeed, the most damning quote of all follows, but I had to gather it together from several pages of the story. I doubt if I have unreasonably distorted its meaning.

> "Leopold is coming of age, next week ..."
>
> Sermak said, in a hushed voice, "Great Space, [Hardin is] going to Anacreon! ...I'm going to ask the Council tomorrow that Hardin be impeached..."
>
> [On the way to the spaceport with Hardin.] [Yohan Lee said], "Sermak raised hell yesterday in the City Council and called for an impeachment ..."
>
> Salvor Hardin did not travel to the planet Anacreon--from which planet the kingdom derived its name--immediately. It was only on the day before coronation that he arrived, after having made flying visits to eight of the larger stellar systems of the kingdom, stopping only long enough to confer with local representatives of the Foundation.
>
> --Foundation

From context it is plain that Salvor Hardin has hyperspaced at least nine times in a period that cannot possibly span more than twelve days, and the wording strongly implies that he landed or closely approached at least nine worlds (as well as leaving Terminus) in that time. Check me.

Now let's move on to the novels, set up to five hundred years later than the above quotes. Asimov's characters are blathering about the technological superiority of their supership. Two days out from Terminus:

> "When would you make the Jump if you had no concerns...?
>
> "At our present speed and trajectory, I should say on our fourth day out."
>
> --Foundation's Edge

> "Do you realise what this means, Janov? ...Every ship I've ever been in--or heard of--would have made those Jumps with at least a day in between for painstaking calculation and re-checking, even with a computer."
>
> --Foundation's Edge

"Instead of having to move away from a star for a couple if weeks just to reach a safe and comfortable distance for a Jump, the **Far Star** need travel for only two or three days."

--Foundation and Earth

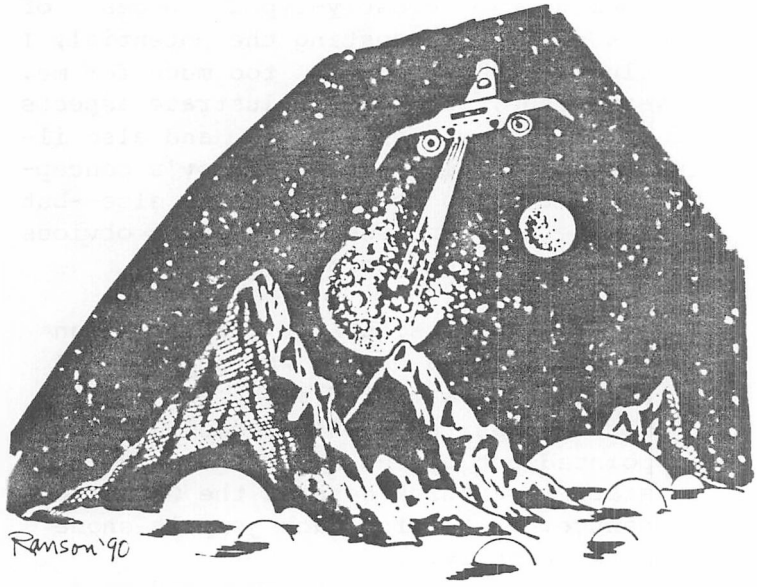
"... It would be perfectly possible to clean out your brain, Daneel, and then, under supervision, refill it with its important memory content only; say, ten percent of the whole...."

--Robots and Empire

"Even my positronic brain has been replaced on five different occasions. Each time the contents of my earlier brain were etched into the newer one to the last positron. Each time, the new brain had a greater capacity and complexity than the old, so that there was room for more memories, and for faster decision and action. But--"

"But?"

--Foundation and Earth




Of course, even so, he acknowledges that it is possible to make Jumps close to planets or stars, provided you don't care where you emerge. In Foundation and Empire Nathan Devers, a Foundation Trader, Jumps from two thousand kilometers above Trantor; and in Foundation's Edge Trevize states it can be done from just two hundred kilmeters above a planet. But Devers suffered blinding pain in doing his stunt, and it is unlikely that Hardin, even pressed for time, would put himself through that--especially since he would then lose days recalculating his position!

Asimov wastes pages and pages of the novels contradicting the earlier material and revising reality in this way. That he advances the story not at all does not seem to concern him.

Now, the "something else" that I mentioned earlier. Hyperspace travel illustrates it here; other examples are chemical versus atomic power, large versus miniaturization, calculators (at best) versus the Lens versus direct computercalculation of ship's location, and the hyperwave relay.

Whenever Asimov wants to show up a technological edge throughout the series, he also shows up a tendency to play down earlier examples of that technology. In the case of hyperspacial travel, he chooses to play on the reduction of time taken to land/leave a planet, contradicting almost every word written in previous stories, in order to emphasize the degree of advancement.

As for the hyperwave relay, it is a device that comes and goes, becomes known or unknown, according to the needs of the moment.

I consider this to be foul play. There was certainly no need for it--minor things such as the smoothness of **Far Star**'s Jumps and its ability to direct-land a planet; major things such as its gravitic drive and sophisticated control system; these underline the advancement of Foundation over Empire and later Foundation over earlier Foundation quite well and do not require pages and pages of explanation in order to drive the message home to the poor wee reader.

The loss of conciseness is one way in which Asimov's writing has failed to grow (unless it be towards obesity). In The Early Asimov, indeed, Asimov remarks on his adoption of a technique he saw demonstrated by Clifford Simak--that of dropping "bread & butter" connecting sequences between essential passages. He uses this technique extensively and effectively in the earlier Foundation material. He uses it infrequently in the two novels.

... It is almost incredible to me that [the Foundation] books are taken ...as serious statements about the nature of historical evolution. This dispite the fact that the galaxy is saved by a precocious fourteen-year-old girl called Arkady. Yep, there's a real sophisticated historical thesis in there.

--Peter Nicholls
Science Fiction at Large

Yep, some people will do anything to get in a cheap shot. For one, the girl is named Arcadia (she changes to Arkady only at the end). For the other, the Galaxy is saved by the machinations of Preem Palver, who uses Arcadia, her father, and some of his own colleagues as his tools to mislead the First Foundation into believing it has destroyed the Second, so that the secrecy vital to Sledon's Plan can be restored. People wishing to shoot Asimov down should first be able to demonstrate that they know what they are firing into, lest they merely show their own ignorance and malice.

--Greg Hills

Another example of the failure to grow is illustrated in the sidebar on page -- above. That dangling "But?"--a mild example of a device used merely to split up a monologue. In other cases the characters tell each other things they all already know, for no discernible reason except that the reader mayn't.

Pelorat said, "Why does it take so long to arrange a Jump? You're just taking little ones."

"Listen to the man. Little Jumps are harder to control than big ones. Is it easier to pick up a rock or a fine grain of sand?"

--Foundation's Edge

"What a pity we're seeing it so nearly head-on."

"We don't have to. The computer can show it in any configuration..."

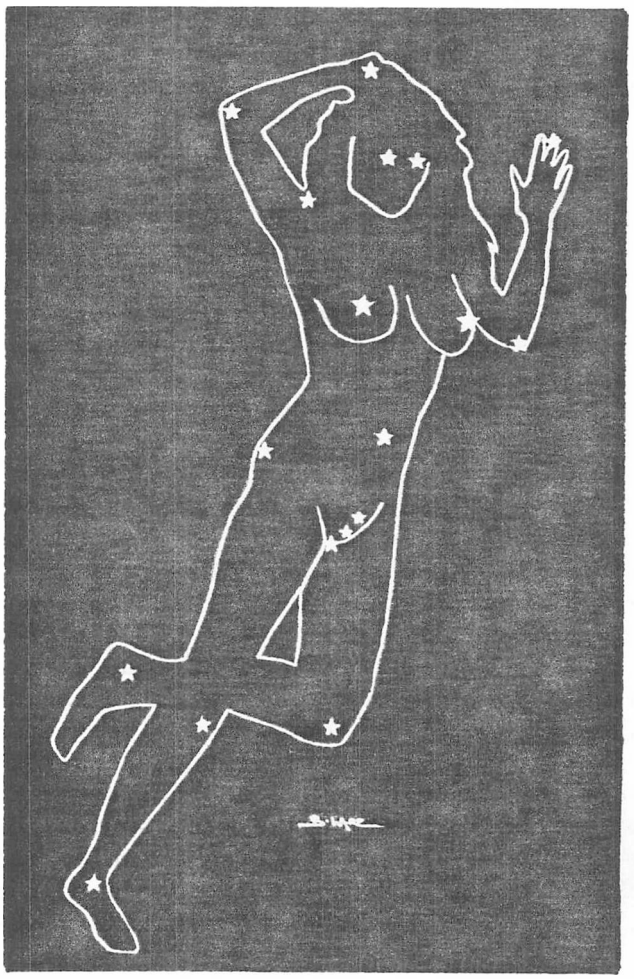
Pelorat asked, "How can the computer see it from a position in space that must be more than fifty thousand parsecs from this place? ... Please forgive me that I ask. I know nothing about all this."

--Foundation's Edge

This from the representative of an advanced computer-using society--and from an intellectual member of that society; one who must use computers in the everyday performance of his duties! Poor Pelorat--his main function in life, if it isn't supplying bits of information or insights that would look suspicious coming from Trevize, is to ask naive questions and act as a blackboard upon which Asimov writes his background material.

This is a flaw noticeable in the earlier material as well--but which I would have expected Asimov to have outgrown by now.

The two novels have sex in them. Yessirree, they do. Most particularly Foundation and Earth, in which Trevize is seduced by a politician on Comporellon and by a young girl on Alpha. Oh, and a page or so is spent deciding the sleep arrangements on the **Far Star**, too (as Pelorat is being accompanied by his Gaian lover)--all in the tones of bickering adolescents.



The earlier books, of course, did not contain any sex. apart from the occasional implied relationship--as with Gallia, mistress of the Warlord of Kalgan in Second Foundation.

The sex in the novels is not gratuitous. Asimov does use it to advance the plot, in ways that sex might actually work. But it is not very important, and is told with such stoical lack of emotion that one can see Asimov writhing in his seat, torn by internal doubts but feeling impelled to include the scenes in order to display his ability to handle such material and to cater to today's more "sophisticated" taste.

> "We investigated our own future, our upwhen. We learned the destiny of Man in the Reality that actually existed in order that we might compare it eventually with BasicState. Somewhere past the 125,000, mankind solved the secret of the interstellar drive. They learned how to manage the Jump through hyperspace. Finally, Mankind could reach the stars.
>
> "And once they could reach the stars they did so and left the Earth.
>
> "Man tried to leave Earth. Unfortunately, however, we are not alone... there are ... other intelligences. None, in this Galaxy at least, are as ancient as mankind, but in the 125,000 centuries Man remained on Earth, younger minds... colonized the Galaxy.
>
> "When we moved out into space, the signs were up. Occupied! No Trespassing! Clear Out! Mankind drew back its exploratory feelers, remained at home ... died out."
>
> --The End of Eternity

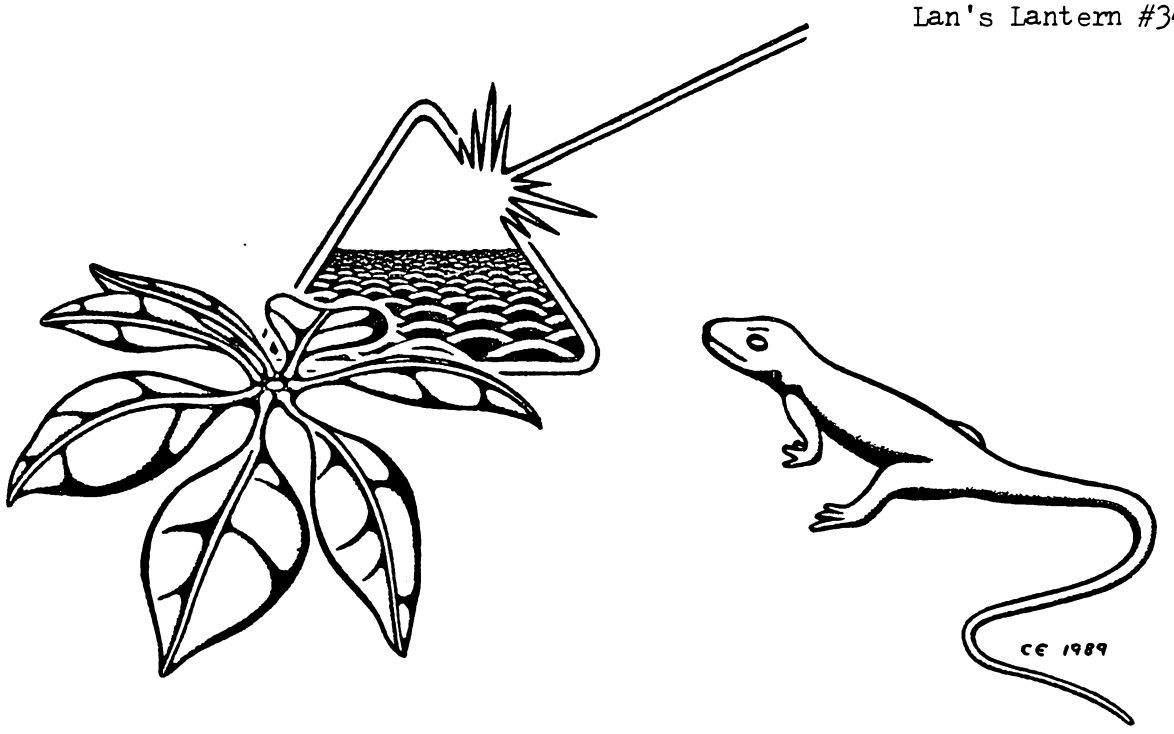
I have already commented on the removal of Seldon's Plan from the core of the development of the series. This relates, in part at least, to Asimov's changing ideas. Nevertheless I think that it is a great pity that he has chosen to introduce forces of the magnitude of Gaia and the ancient robots. Lying outside the parameters of Seldon's psychohistory, they render the Plan false and so abort the thrust of the earlier work. At a stroke, the series loses its soul. From a universe in which fallible men are using fallible means in an attempt to improve their lot, we arrive--thump--in a Van Vogtian situation dominated by groups of supermen and super-things.

It could be argued that the Second Foundation and the Mule already violated this, but in fact the Second Foundationeers are shown to be all too human, and the Mule is alone, a freak, eventually outmaneuvered by the fallible men. And the Second Foundation's nature is at the very heart of Seldon's conception. The new creations are outside the scope of the series-as-it-was.

> "A Tyrannian ship ... once the controls are properly set, will make any number of Jumps quite automatically... I watched it make the Jumps without a hand on the controls."
>
> The Stars, Like Dust
>
> "It ... charted a course in twenty-nine steps, which is arrogance of the worst sort. ... The error in the first Jump makes the second Jump that much less certain, and the added error makes the third Jump pretty wobbly and untrustworthy."
>
> --Foundation's Edge
>
> By context, another case involving reinvention of the wheel.

The nature of the next part of the series is, of course, up to Asimov. It is futile to make firm predictions about his future development of his ideas. That it will involve Fallom--probably carrying Daneel's knowledge, powers, and, possibly, mind--and the Solarians is a good bet. I hope that it does not use Trevize and his chums again--I am getting rather tired of them after wading through them for over a third of a million words.

Let me see...move the action another century or so into the future, when the Foundation is moving inexorably toward Empire, guided by the Second Foundation; guided in turn toward Galaxia by Gaia; and watched by "Daneel" or his surrogate. Maybe "the period of coalescence, when the Second Empire that is to be is in the grip of rival personalities who will threaten to pull it apart if the fight is too even, or clamp it into rigidity, if the fight is too uneven..." mentioned in Second Foundation by Preem Palver. I'd like to see that.




I think, in fact, I would welcome almost anything that shifted the series away from the "quest" theme that has dominated it since the Mule. Searching for the Second Foundation is a seam mined out, while the rediscovery of Earth has given Asimov the links to earlier times that he was after.

To close this article I would like to mention quotations, in the earlier books, from the 1020 F.E. edition of the Encyclopedia Galactica, published on Terminus at a time after the putative establishment of Seldon's Second Empire. Since a living planet such as Gaia will need no publishers, it may be concluded that the establishment of Galaxia will require more than 500 years left as at the time of Foundation and Earth. We can further conclude that the robots and Gaia will continue quietly to aid the Second Foundation with the Plan in the interim, since the Plan represents the best known way to avoid hindrance from interstellar anarchy during the growth of the Galaxia concept.

* * * * *

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"--And Now You Don't" ("Search by the Foundation") 50,000 words; November 1949-January 1950

Foundation's Edge: 140,000 words, 1982

Foundation and Earth: approximately 200,000 words, 1986

Other reading:

| | |
|---|---|
| The Stars, Like Dust | I, Robot |
| The Currents of Space | Rest of the Robots |
| Pebble in the Sky | The Caves of Steel |
| The End of Eternity | The Robots of Dawn |
| The Early Asimov | Robots and Empire |

"Blind Alley", 8,500 words; March, 1945
"Mother Earth", 15,000 words; May, 1949

The shorts cited (from The Early Asimov) make particularly interesting reading.

--Greg Hills
August, 1989 *

## Recipe for a Humans-Only Universe

"Why was it only Earth that bore a complex ecology? What distinguished it from other worlds? Why did millions upon millions of other worlds in the Galaxy--worlds that were capable of bearing life--develop only an undistinguished vegetation, together with small and unintelligent animal lifeforms?"

--Foundation's Edge

Asimov postulates an answer to this question which clashes with The End of Eternity. There is an alternative which does not. It involves the use of three Realities:

Reality1: Evolution of a human species on Earth in a Galaxy which may or may not possess multiple alien forms of intelligence. Discovery of time travel and creation of "Eternity", perhaps by robots, or perhaps taken over by robots. These look for a Reality safest for human beings. Maybe they find one or maybe they make one, Eternal-style--say by sending a seeding crew back to Earth's past to give the planet a head-start in development. In the former case the robots then deactivate; in the latter, their Etrnity ceases to exist.

Reality2: The End of Eternity universe eventually aborted by Andrew Harlan to create

Reality3: In which Eternity is not developed and Man colonizes the Galaxy instead, eventually creating the Galactic Empire.

The robots in Reality1 might have foreseen all of this. And maybe they left a time-cyst (as per Mallinsohn's diary) explaining what had happened. Reality2 might have found it and Noys may have known of it, hence the "fable" in Foundation's Edge.

--Greg Hills

# My 15 Year Love Affair with Isaac Asimov

Isaac Asimov introduced me to science fiction.

Oh, I had read some SF and fantasy before--kids' books like Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH and A Wrinkle in Time-- but never anything that I had identified as belonging to a specific genre. I had read none of the usual Norton or Heinlein juveniles that every other fan seems to have started with.

At about age ten came my introduction to Star Trek. Yes, painful as it is to admit, I was a Trekkie for a few years. Eventually, like many Trekkies, I decided to take a look at the shelves in the library labeled "Science Fiction." None of the names was familiar--wait! There was a book by someone named Isaac Asimov, and I had read that he had given a talk at a Star Trek convention. So I decided to try it.

The book was I, Robot. I took it home and read it cover to cover. It was love at first sight.

* * * * *

After that, I began to rampage through the SF shelves, prompting my mother to worry at one point that my reading was becoming too restricted. I started with the Foundation books, and was so impressed that I took down some of the Star Trek quotes that decorated my walls and replaced them with quotes from the books. I read anthologies Asimov had edited and so discovered new authors, and my reading spread in ever-widening circles.

Janice M. Eisen

In my first year of junior high school, my health teacher decided I should go to the library to do independent study projects instead of sitting in class. What this actually resulted in was my spending class periods reading in the library, and pulling something together for a presentation a couple of days defore it was due. I discovered that at the back of the library, where my lack of legitimate activity would be less noticeable, were the A's and what should be there but an Asimov book I hadn't seen: The Naked Sun. I must have read that novel four times that year. (I searched vainly for The Caves of Steel, unable to find it at libraries or bookstores; I didn't get to read it until I went to college.) Almost made school seem worthwhile.

At some point our local planetarium announced a special show, a dramatization of "The Last Question," the first piece of fiction they'd ever done. Of course, I dragged my family to see it. What I remember most was my surprise upon hearing a recorded introduction from the Good Doctor himself--the man spoke like my relatives! That New York Jewish accent put an end to any ideas I might have had that SF writers were some kind of exotic, large-than-life species. (I hope this doesn't sound too much like Harlan Ellison's first meeting with Asimov.)

Around that time I also wrote my first fan letter, after reading in Reader's Digest that Asimov answered all his own mail. I don't have a copy of that letter, and, from what I can remember of it, I'm glad to assume that he doesn't either. I cringe just thinking about it. But I did get a postcard with a polite personal response, which delighted me no end.

By ninth grade I had read widely enough in SF that I could discuss pretentiously with friends issues such as Lazarus Long's mother-fixation. When my English teacher assigned a term paper, I seized the chance to use Isaac Asimov as my topic, mostly because it gave me an excuse to reread some of my favorite books and call it homework. The paper examined attitudes toward science in Asimov's short stories, with footnotes and everything. The teacher wouldn't give me an A+, though she didn't find anything wrong with the paper; I presume she just couldn't accept such an "unworthy" topic.

Once I had finished off all the Asimov fiction I could find (including his non-SF mysteries), I moved on to his science books, the essays collected from F&SF. I read them with fascination and delight. I can't say whether they were a formative influence on me, since I was already interested in science, but they certainly expanded the number of things I knew something about. Made me even more insufferable about that, too, I'll bet.

* * * * *

Well, we all grow out of our teen infatuations. While I continued to admire Asimov, my reading interests had moved on to other authors, other styles. Now I can look at his writing with a bit more distance.

When Foundation's Edge came out, I reread the original "trilogy" in preparation, for the first time in years, and was amazed. Yes, the books are talky. Yes, everything happens off-stage. Yes, there are any number of flaws which I could point out even as I was reading. But the damnedest thing was, none of them mattered. I was enjoying the books so much that weaknesses which might have had me throwing another writer's books across the room seemed inconsequential.

However, that's not the highest praise I can give to Asimov. There are plenty of gray eminences in the field these days, many of whom are simply regurgitating their old work, and far too many of whom have reached the point where, from lack of editing, their books become less and less readable. Isaac Asimov stands out, though, because his writing continues to improve. He has not let his skills slide; on the contrary, he keeps getting better.

* * * * *

I'll close by mentioning my first encounter with the man, at NOREASCON II, my first con. After meeting him at an autograph session (where he favored me with a limerick), I passed him in the hall and shyly said, "Hi, Dr. Asimov." He called me over, saying something like, "What's this Dr. Asimov, stuff? Call me Isaac."

So, for introducing me to science fiction, for expanding my knowledge of science, and above all for continuing to produce interesting and exciting work: Thank you, Isaac.

--Janice M. Eisen
June, 1989 |*|

# Foreward to



# The Edge of Tomorrow

## by Ben Bova

When you first meet Isaac Asimov, you get the impression that all the man is interested in is himself. After all, his favorite topics of conversation are (in order of frequency) the number of books he has written, the fact that he is a genius, the fact that he is sweetly dangerous among the women, and the fact that he enjoys immensely all of the above.

It isn't a lie, exactly. Isaac is proud of his accomplishments and has every right to be. And he certainly is heterosexual. But the brash, bragging public image he presents, the kid from the Brooklyn candy store who will compose a lecherous limerick at the drop of a hint--that's a persona, a disguise that Isaac wears, like the stingy millionaire that Jack Benny portrayed for so many decades, or the clumsy, pratfalling oaf played by Chevy Chase.

It's all a put-on. Beneath the cloak Isaac shows to the public is a thoughtful, kind and loving man; not only a friend, but a friend in need, a man who has been rather like a big brother to me for nearly thrity years. There is a great heart in Isaac, a heart as great as his mind.*

Let me tell you just one story to illustrate that point.

Shortly after I first met Isaac, when we both lived in the Boston area, he phoned me to tell me that I would soon be receiving a call from the editor of Amazing Science Fiction magazine, asking me to write a series of nonfiction articles about the possibilities of life on other worlds.

"She asked me to do the series," Isaac said, "but I told her I couldn't because I was too busy and that you were a better choice anyway, since you knew more about the subject than I did."

I damned near fainted. Here's the foremost writer in the field, a PhD biochemist and polymath, telling me--a writer with almost no credits and only a smattering of the basics of astronomy--that I knew more about extraterrestrial life than he did.

Sensing my constrenation, Isaac explained, "Look, I'll tell you everything I know about the subject. And you must know some things I don't. So that way you'll know more than I do!"

He was as good as his word. I did the series, and it established me as a writer within the science-fiction community.

So much for Isaac's public persona.

Then you begin to read Asimov's writings. Fact or fiction, the first impression you get is, "This is easy! Why, I could write something like this."

Try doing it. I have, and it's far from easy. For that simple, straightforward Asimovian style hides depths of understanding and talent far deeper than almost anyone suspects.

Isaac loves numbers, as you will see in many of the essays in this book. And when he talks about his writing, he stresses the number of books he's written: more than three hundred as of this moment. Other writers will talk about the pain of creation, the turmoil of their art, the struggle of overcoming writer's block. Isaac sits down and writes. He enjoys doing it; he's probably the only person I know who actually enjoys the physical task of writing.

---

*Although Isaac's heart is truly great, its coronary arteries needed the help of triple bypass surgery in 1983. He is fully recovered now.

Look beyond the numbers. Look at the breadth of subject matter he has written about: everything from the Bible to biochemistry, from poetry to paleontology, from history to science fiction.

He does make it look easy. His special genius is to take a cubject, any subject, and present it so clearly and so well that the reader can understand it with hardly any effort at all.

Isaac writes in a way that has often been described as an effortless style. (I once teased him that it was really a "styleless effort." It took him all of ten seconds to realize that I was kidding.) Because his style is so smooth, so clear, so logical and rational, there is some tendency among the more self-conscious literati to dismiss Isaac's nonfiction writings as "mere popularizations" and his science fiction as "old-fashioned pulp writing."

To paraphrase Shakespeare: They jest at scars, who never felt a wound. I have spent a fair part of my life as an editor, and let me tell you that finding essays about science (or any subject) that are as clear and cleanly written as Asimov's is rare to the vanishing point. And finding fiction as thought-provoking and haunting as "The Ugly Little Boy" or "Nightfall" is equally uncommon. If these be popularizations and old-fashioned, then let's have more of them! I dare the literati to produce them.

As you will see in the pages that follow, Isaac has chosen to write about scientists--real ones out of history and imaginary ones from the realm of science fiction.

You will find some marvelously curious things in these essays and stories. You will meet some fascinating people. Some of them you may already know; others will be new to you. There are many surprises in store, such as:

§ Isaac Newton, revered as the greatest figure in science by our Isaac, was a moral coward.

§ Two famous writers--Goethe and Omar Khayyam--were involved in the advancement of mathematics.

§ The weight of the Earth is zero.

§ Ben Franklin's lightning rod did more to shake the grip of religion on the mind

of Western man than Darwin's theory of evolution.

§ There was no Nobel Prize for physics given in 1916, and Isaac wants to mount a campaign to correct that injustice.

§ Queen Victoria (of all people) struck one of the earliest and strongest blows for Woman's Liberation.

All that is in the nonfiction essays of this book: the Scienctists Past. In the fiction, the Scientists Future, you will meet:

§ A goose that literally lays golden eggs, with an accurate scientific description of how it's done.

§ A scientist who realizes that the human race is nothing more than an experiment created by a superior intelligence.

§ A man who can walk on air.

§ A homicide committed with a billiard ball.

§ A man in the far future who can do arithmetic in his head...and pays the price for that talent.

§ A Neanderthal baby snatched out of his own time and brought into ours.

§ A world that periodically goes insane.

§ And, in a sotry that Isaac has often claimed to be his personal favorite, a computer that puzzles for eons over "The Last Question."

A strange thing about these works of fiction. In each of these stories, Isaac Asimov--the eternal optimist, the rational enthusiast of science--shows what can only be described as the dark side of scientific research. These stories show scientists as the public never sees them, as the history books never portray them: scientists who doubt themselves, who worry about the moral implications of their work, who scheme against one another, and even commit murder.

Which proves the point I started with, Beneath Isaac's public persona is a very perceptive, extremely intelligent and sensitive human being. He knows, better than most of those who rail against scientific research and mushrooming technology, that science is a human activity, that research is conducted by fallible, emotional, imperfect men and women.

Yet, despite the dark side, despite the schemings and shortcomings of the people in these stories, the work of science proceeds. These flawed and faulty human beings build marvelous creations for us: generators that deliver energy endlessly, machines that allow us to travel through time, computers and robots that free humankind from drudgery.

Perhaps that is the essence of true optimism, the belief that imperfect human beings can build toward perfection. That is certainly the message you will find among the scientists, past and future, in this book. That is the foundation of faith that has made Isaac Asimov who and what he is.

--Ben Bova
1985 |*|

# Short Comments on Isaac Asimov

After having corresponded with the Good Doctor for a few years, I met him for the first time at a convention in Toronto (TORCON I). After I introduced myself, he replied, "That's funny; you don't write with an accent!" I do speak with a vaguely British accent of obscure origins.

The same, of course, might be said of Dr. Asimov, who has a charming Brooklyn accent. And it is, I suppose, one of his more unusual accomplishments that even the generally unpleasant accent of Brooklyn, is charming as rendered by him.

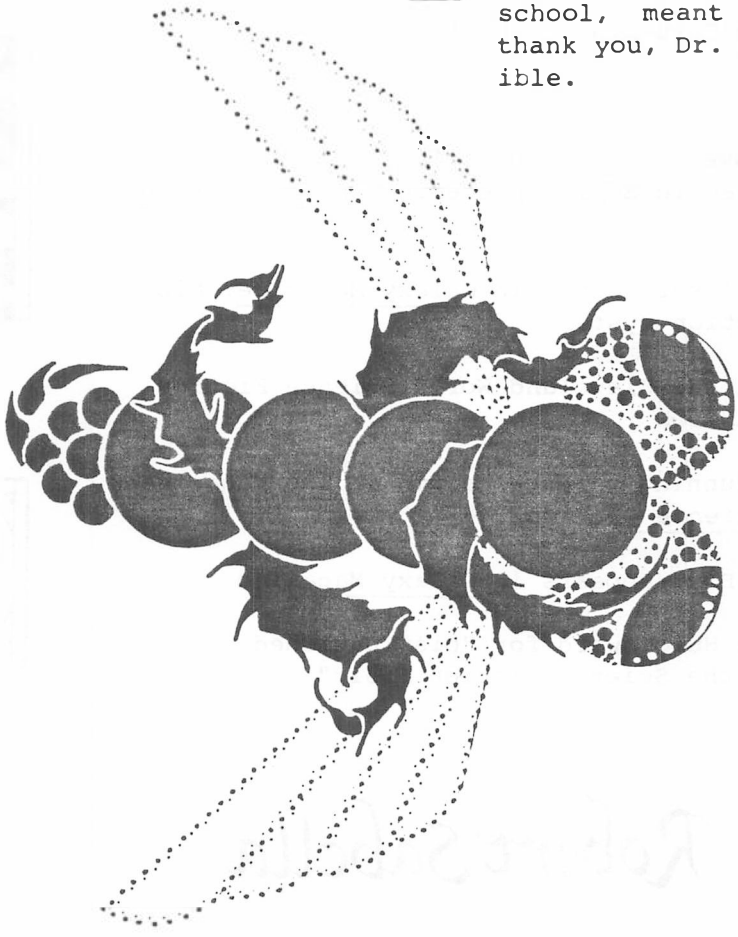
--David Palter
March, 1986 |*|

In my bad, early days of fandom, I attended a couple of Star Trek conventions, where I had a good time and met Isaac Asimov (these cons were in New York City, of course). Later on, at the Baltimore Worldcon, I met him again and mentioned that I had met him before at Trekcons. He expressed his happiness that I had raised my consciousness, and that I was fully healthy again.

--Lloyd Penney
1986|*|

"Here, read this," the senior told me back in high school. I had in my hand a science fiction book (which one, I don't remember), and the one he handed me was titled, I, Robot. That was enough. I read everything the school library had by Dr. Asimov, and asked the senior for more from his collection, and recommendations for other authors and books. George (also known as Lan) was generous with his books and time for discussion. And that meant as much to me, a freshman, as did the wonderful worlds that Asimov opened up to me. Thanks to both.

Larry Nowinski
March, 1989|*|



About a week into my freshman year at De La Salle Collegiate, one of the seniors walked up and asked if I had enjoyed the book he loaned me. I realized that this was the guy who had given my twin brother I, Robot to read. I could have given him the run-around and said that I didn't get a book from him, but that would have invited, I thought, serious retaliation on the part of this senior, who wasn't very tall, but had shoulders a yard wide; he was co-captain of the swim team. (I found out later that I really needn't have worried; Lan was quite open and understanding, but I was a freshman...) I explained carefully about my twin brother Larry, and we got into a good conversation about books and brother relationships. His brother was too young to read, but he was looking forward to the time when he could introduce him to SF.

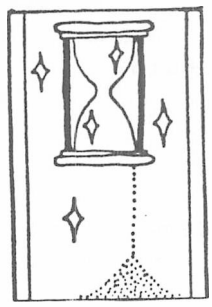
Since I too was interested in SF as my brother was, I should read I, Robot. and was not in a hurry to get it back. In addition, he loaned me the book he had just finished reading: The Caves of Steel.

So it was over Asimov that I made a good friend, with whom I have kept in touch over all these years. And his willingness to be friendly, particularly a senior to a freshman in an all-boys high school, meant a lot. Thanks, Lan, and thank you, Dr. Asimov, for making it possible.

Timothy Nowinski
July, 1989|*|

# Isaac Asimov: A Chronology

1920 Born in Petrovichi, USSR



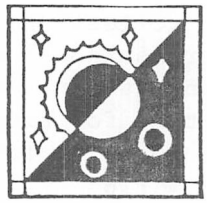
1923 Emigrated to the United States

1938 Charter member of The Futurians along with Frederik Pohl, Donald Wollheim, Cyril Kornbluth and Robert A.W. Lowndes

1939 His first story, "Marroned Off Vesta," appears in the March Amazing Stories

"Ad Astra," his first appearance in the July Astounding Stories, under the title "Trends"

1940 His first robot story, "Robbie," appears in the September Super-Science as "Strange Play-Fellow"

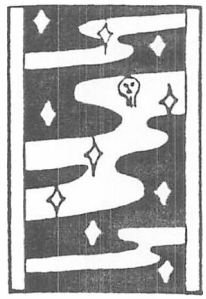


1941 "Reason" appears in the April Atounding Stories, and introduces the Three Laws of Robotics

"Nightfall" appears in the September Astounding Stories

1942 "Foundation" appears in the May Astounding, first story in the Foundation Series

1949 Receives PhD from Columbia University



1950 I, Robot published

Asimov's first novel, Pebble in the Sky, published; it is set in the Galactic Empire preceding the Foundation Series

1953 The Caves of Steel serialized in Galaxy Magazine, his first science fiction mystery

1955 Guest of Honor at the Cleveland World Science Fiction Convention, CLEVENTION

1958 begins the long-running science column in The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction

"The Ugly Little Boy" appears in Galaxy Magazine

1963 Awarded a special Hugo Award for "Distinguished Contributions to the Science Fiction Field"

Robert Sabella

1966 The Foundation Trilogy wins the Hugo Award as Best All-Time Series

1970 The Science Fiction Writers of America select "Nightfall" as the best science fiction short story ever

1973 The Gods Themselves wins both the Nebula and Hugo Awards as Best Novel

1977 "The Bicentennial Man," published in Stellar 2, wins both the Nebula and Hugo Awards as Best Novelette

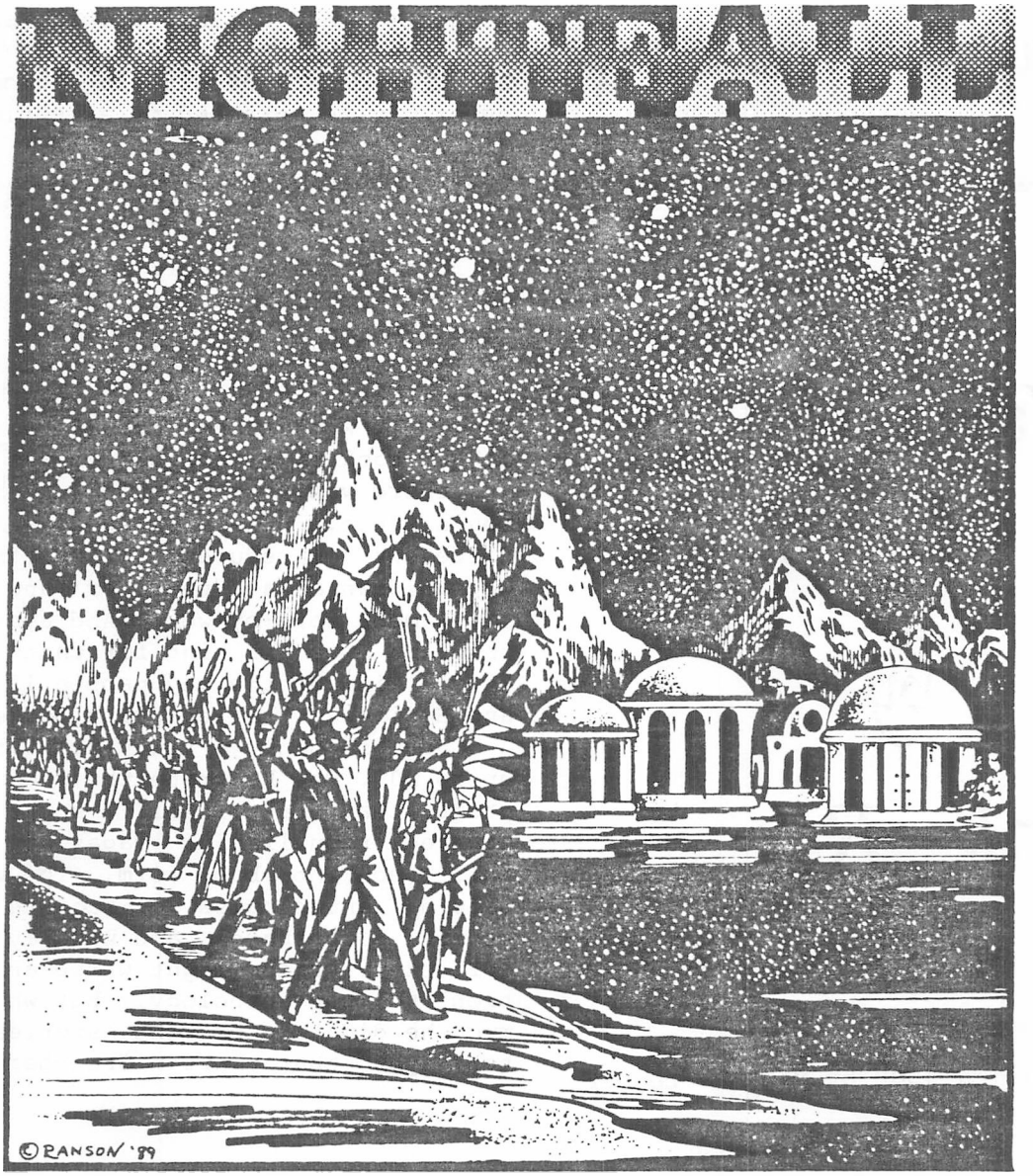
Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine debuts

1983 Foundation's Edge makes The New York Times bestseller list and wins Asimov a second Hugo Award for Best Novel

Has triple by-pass heart surgery and survives admirably

1987 Receives SFWA Nebula Grandmaster Award

1989 Has 500th book published



# The Most Influential Man in My Life

by

Harry Andruschak

Back in the Good Old Days there were a lot of science fiction magazines. And every one of those magazines carried a science column. Every month I would stack up the magazines and read the science columns one after another. Only after that orgy would I bother to read the fiction. And of course, the #1 magazine I always reached for first was Galaxy and the column by Willey Ley. No, not Asimov, he came second.

It was Ley who wrote about rockets! And astronomy and space travel. But it was his writings on rockets that inflamed me and made me want to be a rocketeer when I grew up. Well, I spent 13 years at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, working on the NASA Planetary Exploration Program. That was as close as I came.

After Galaxy I would pick up The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction and read Isaac Asimov's monthly column. Isaac was wonderful, wrote on a side range of subjects, had a fluid writing style, and was always enjoyable to read. I learned about science and technology from him. He never quite grabbed my attention the way

# The Asimov Writing Machine

by

Mark R Leeper



It's out of control. I am not sure anyone can stop it now, not even Asimov. Not that I think he would even if he could.

I remember--it wasn't that long ago--when Isaac Asimov published his 100th book. It was, I believe, Opus 100 or another book that came out at the same time and there was some question which was Asimov's 100th. But in those days Asimov had different procedures for writing a book. He sat down at a typewriter and he wrote it. I mean word-by-word. And every word he knew he was writing for that book. You know, kind of the way people like Dickens and Hemingway used to write books.

Then suddenly a few years later he was up to 200. Did he write the second hundred books that fast? Well, not really. He started republishing magazine articles collected into book form. The we started getting anthologies of stories edited by Asimov, Greenberg, and usually one other collector. Asimov might write an introduction to the anthology, but who knew how much he did to pick the stories? I can tell you that Martin Greenberg seems to

Willey Ley did. But his impact was more lasting.

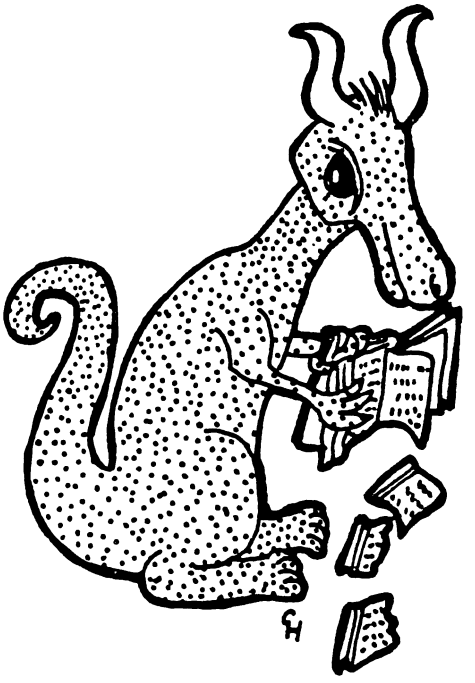
Asimov was, and is, an atheist. He wrote about this now and then in his column, but never in an angry or hateful tone. Asimov was and is the best example I know of the cheerful skeptic.

I did not quite realize what I had learned from Asimov until I was in my early teens. My family made me go to the local Lutheran Church. I was introduced to all the doctrines. The day came when I was introduced to infant damnation and the whole idea of hell. I balked. In fact, I had a crisis of faith. Could I reconcile the nonsense I was getting from the church with what I knew of science and the scientific method?

In the end, I decided that Isaac Asimov was right about science, atheism, and the rational outlook on life. That has been true all my life, and is still true today at age 44. And I still read his monthly column in F&SF magazine. I still enjoy his cheerful skeptical outlook on life. I share his joy at the wonders of science and technology.

How influential is Isaac Asimov in my life today? A few months ago I received a piece of junk mail, a request to join the American Humanists Association sponsored by Isaac Asimov. I do not usually join this sort of organization, but this time around I did. Yes.

--Harry Andruschak
August, 1989 |*|



need little help in putting together anthologies. The Groff Conklin of the 1980s seems to edit about two-thirds of all science fiction anthologies published these days. And that isn't counting all the mystery anthologies he publishes and who knows what other kind of anthology he publishes. The man must do nothing in life but read short stories and talk to lawyers and agents.

In any case, even Asimov is starting to lose track, but it seems there is a new Asimov book out every 2.3 days. Old Isaac just sits back and relaxes as the number of his books--now over 400--just keeps growing. Asimov is not insisting that whenever a new Asimov book comes out he be informed in writing by the publishers. Every four or five Asimov books that come out, the publisher must send him copies so he can keep track. I asked Isaac if he counts in his book count the issues of his science fiction magazine and he referred me to his book accountant. He was not sure since he had forgotten that there even was an Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine.

In any case, one publisher I talked to informs me that Asimov will eventually have at least 1000 books to his name. That will be at the turn of the century and that is a worst-case figure, assuming Asimov dies tomorrow.

Mark R. Leeper
May, 1988 |*|

# Isaac Asimov by Gerri Balter

The only Asimov books in the Minneapolis Public Library that I remember seeing when I was a child and teenager were the Lucky Starr series. Since he wrote them under the pseudonym Paul French, I had no idea he wrote science fiction books until I was much older.

I had quit reading science fiction in my twenties because I read series books I disliked. When I started reading SF books again, I was told to read Isaac Asimov's Foundation series.

I bought the trilogy and started to read it while waiting for some friends who were going to spend the weekend with me. These were good friends, people I was looking forward to seeing--at least until I read Foundation.

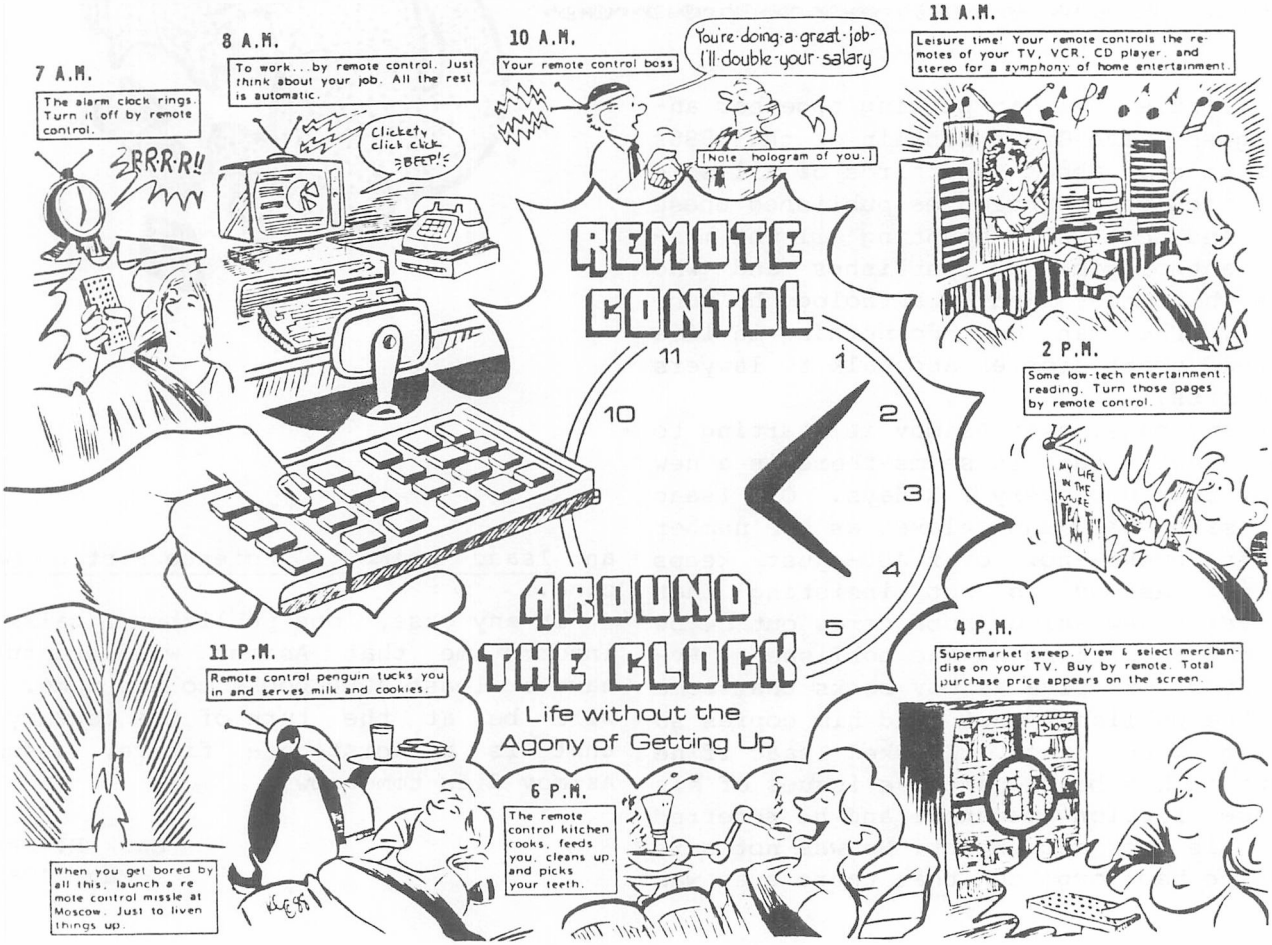
Next to science fiction, my favorite fiction genre is mystery. Foundation is a combination of both. I was so enthralled in the story that I had to find out what happened; I had to solve the mystery!

When my friends came, I ignored them. I ignored food, sleep, everything, until I finished the trilogy. Lucky for me, my friends were understanding and patiently waited until I finished reading the trilogy. Not being science fiction readers, I am sure they were bored by my constantly talking about what I had read.

I enjoyed the trilogy so much I began to read every work of fiction by Asimov. The more I read, the more I wanted to read. His plots fascinated me. I enjoyed trying to see if I could figure out what was going to happen before I read it. I was the happiest when he fooled me, which was most of the time.

Like so many of his fans, I wanted to meet him, but I thought that was next to impossible. The autograph lines at any convention had to be enormous which would leave little chance for more than a quick hello and goodbye.

Finally, I heard that he was going to



appear at a small Star Trek convention in New York. A friend, who was also a fan of his, and I went. Imagine our surprise when he not only signed copies of our books, posed for pictures, but actually had time to talk with us for a few minutes. My friend, who had never met a writer, could do nothing but giggle. I, on the other hand, who had met several, was able to nod and shake my head. He was very nice to two obviously overawed fans.

I am in my forties now. In spite of the fact my taste has changed with time, I still read most of his fiction. His taste in humor differs enough from mine so that I only skim his humorous stories. Otherwise, I enjoy reading his fiction as much now as I did in the past. I thought that as I learned more, I would more easily be able to figure out his plots. The problem is that he has learned more too. He continues to fool me. Since he continues to grow younger while I grow older, I fear I will never be able to consistently outsmart him. But I will keep on trying.

--Gerri Balter
August, 1989 |*|

# Points of Intersection

## *Lan*

My first encounters with the Good Doctor began in grade school when I discovered his work in the library. I read and collected most everything of Asimov's I could find then, and enjoyed every word. One particular incident that stands out was reading "The Last Question" on New Years Eve, and being bowled over by the ending as the New Year rang in.

About a decade later, I managed to meet the man. I was in my second year of graduate school at Ohio State University in the Classics Department, and I saw an advertisement in the school paper about Isaac Asimov coming to speak on campus. I immediately got tickets so my friend Terry Tressler and I could go see and hear him. Then I came across a notice that Asimov would be having an informal discussion of anything and everything in the library the afternoon before his lecture. So I went to that and managed to ask a couple of intelligent questions, among the crowd of a couple hundred people crowded into one of the lounges.

Soon after, an article appeared in the school paper, which I clipped and sent to Dr. A. He sent a short letter in reply, thanking me for it, and I was thrilled by this first contact with a man whose work I had admired for so many years.

All this was before I encountered fandom. I wish I had known about it then, since Columbus, Ohio, where I was going to school, was a center of fan activity, and they had been having MARCONs there for years.

My encounters with Isaac after that were mostly by mail. He gave me permission to use a science fact article he had written about logarithms (and had published in F&SF) in my algebra classes. Dr. Asimov also gave me permission to excerpt sections of his autobiography to use in some of the other special issues on Golden Anniversary Authors that I have done, most notably on Clifford Simak.

Then came NOREASCON II, the Boston Worldcon in 1980. Maia and I were asked to help with the Hugo Ceremonies, taking the awards to the presenters, who would give the rocket to the winners. We then would escort the winner off stage to be photographed. We readily agreed.

That same year, there was a cover on the October issue of F&SF (arriving a couple of days before we left for Boston), which featured a man with a beard wearing a coonskin cap and holding a Hugo Award. The story was "The World Science Fiction Convention of 2080" by Ian Watson, and the cover was done by Barclay Shaw. Since one of my totems is the coonskin cap, I was rather taken with the cover. I also saw the original painting by Barclay Shaw on sale in the art show, well out of my price range. But the picture and circumstances planted the idea. (I think you know where this is headed, but bear with me.)

Come the night of the Hugos, Maia and

I, Chris and Pat Beck, and Valarie Sussman were on stage to help with the ceremonies. When Asimov came up to present one of the awards, he did his usual kissing of the female ushers at the bottom of the stage stairs, gave toastmaster Robert Silverberg a kiss, and headed for Valarie to collect a kiss from her. Although she knew Isaac, she decided to play coy, backed into the upright holding the curtain hiding the rest of us, and knocked it over. Isaac collected his kiss, while the rest of us struggle with the backdrop.

Asimov was not up for a Hugo that year, but accepted the Hugo award for Arthur C. Clarke, who won in the novel category that year for Fountains of Paradise. After the ceremonies were over, Isaac was standing and talking to Fred Pohl. Mark Evans, one of the convention photographers, asked, "You want the picture?" I had talked with him earlier about the F&SF cover.

"Sure," I said, and in one of the boldest moves I had made since becoming a fan, I put on my coonskin cap, walked over to Isaac Asimov, introduced myself, and asked to borrow the Hugo. He smiled at the quick explanation, and relinquished his hold on it, but kept an eye on me while the pictures were taken. I quickly returned it, thanking him profusely.

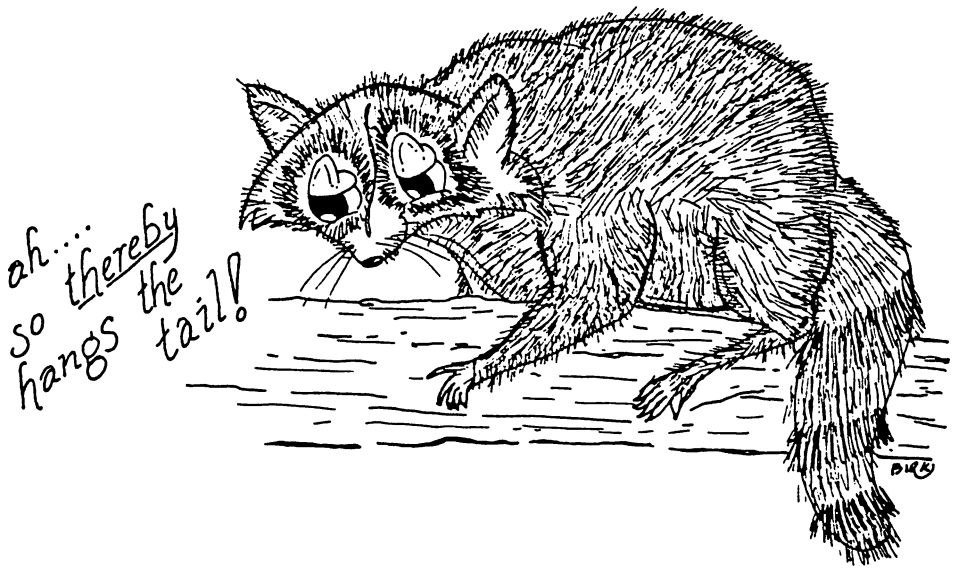
And that was it.

I never thought that I would eventually have my own Hugo Award, and that I could get my picture taken with it any time I wanted. The strange thing about the incident is that I never did see a print of that picture.

After that, our paths crossed infrequently, mostly at Worldcons. I continue to send Lan's Lantern to Isaac and Janet, and occasionally I get a postcard. That's enough; he is a busy man.

The stories that Asimov has written, along with those of several other authors, are what have made me a science fiction fan today. I am very happy to thank him by publishing this issue of LL, honoring his 50th anniversay as a writer of Science Fiction.

George "Lan" Laskowski
May, 1990 |*|



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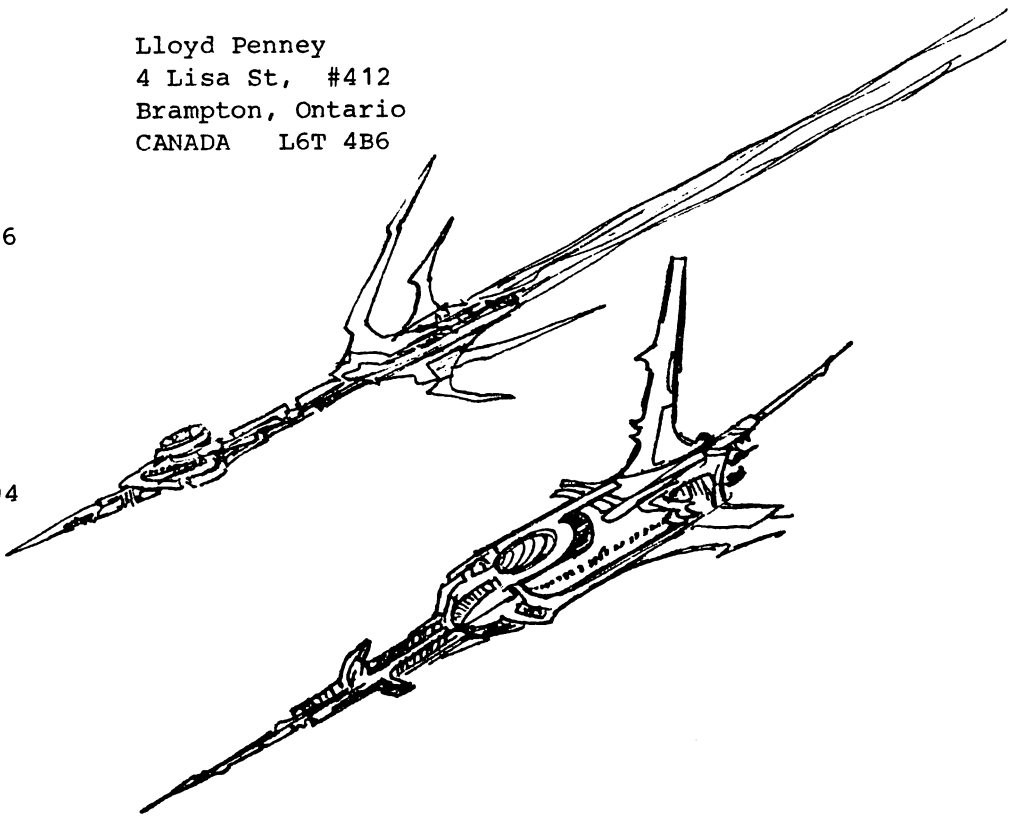


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