



Asimov on Science Fiction

Isaac Asimov

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ASIMOV:

Grand Master of SF

No one knows science fiction as well as Isaac Asimov, the bestselling author of the FOUNDATION saga and many other classic works. He has taken part in all the significant developments and knows most of the important writers personally. His familiarity with the history of sf is unsurpassed, including UTOPIA, FRANKENSTEIN, the stories of Jules Verne and the concerns of today's writers.

ASIMOV ON SCIENCE FICTION is just that: the Grand Master's views on his subject. There is no other book like it.

Asimov on Science Fiction Details

Date : Published March 1981 by Doubleday Books

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Author : Isaac Asimov

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Charles says

This is pretty dated now but it was worth a read. I was never a huge fan of Asimov's fiction itself, although I enjoyed the Foundation series and the Robot stories. For one, I think Asimov often wrote too fast. But this is an interesting view on the field of SF.

Alyssa Watson says

This book is great fun for any Asimov or scifi fan. It's great to see how Asimov jokes around with his friends Arthur C Clarke, and Campbell, and his flabbergasted reactions to Ray Bradbury, Heinlein, and Star Wars. This also gave me profound insight into Asimov's fiction- esp based on what he has to say about death, human fear of closed endings, the morality of robots replacing humanity, and his theories on the origin of religion.

Fredrick Danysh says

Asimov covers several areas in his discourse on the art of writing science fiction using some of his work and that of others as examples. This a very informative book from a master story teller who also wrote excellent non-fiction.

Alejandro De Luca says

The book is Ok, but is a bit repetitive. Some of the articles are about the same thing, specially those about old school sci-fi and John Campbell.
Worth reading anyway.

Octavia Cade says

A collection of short writings, originally appearing in a number of magazines, on science fiction. I found the early sections most interesting but it all went on for quite a while, and, unsurprisingly given the format, could be a little repetitive.

And this is picky on my part, but the scientific nit-picking on Orwell's *1984* seems to me a perfect example of not seeing the forest for the trees. Yes, the trees are not very accurate, but the forest is *fascinating* and it's hard for me not to side-eye Asimov for missing that.

AndrewP says

Essays and articles on Science Fiction.

Toni Cifuentes says

He tardado en leerme este libro lleno de reflexiones, ensayos recopilados por el propio Asimov sobre la ciencia ficción. Un interesante acercamiento, y a veces incluso profundización, en los orígenes, en los autores y en los libros que han consolidado el género. Se divide en una serie de capítulos que tratan sobre la ciencia ficción en general, cómo se escribe buena ciencia ficción o sobre las revistas de género. La parte donde Asimov critica otras obras o incluso películas de género es, para mí, la peor y más aburrida. Pero el libro es consistente y entretenido, a pesar de que la traducción en la edición de 1986 de Edhasa (incontrastable hoy día) es un poco regulara.

Shane Moore says

As much as I enjoy the books of Isaac Asimov, this collection of essays (mostly editorials he wrote for his magazine) wasn't exactly to my tastes.

There are quite a few topics that are covered repeatedly (What is Science Fiction? What were the early days of Science Fiction magazines like? How has the genre changed over time?) and they don't really benefit from the repeated attention.

The most interesting anecdote I gleaned from the book was that in spite of being one of the most prolific and influential authors in the genre, Isaac Asimov spent the first 15 years of his career after being published working full-time as a teacher. And even after he began working full-time as an author, he was not making very good money.

Brian says

A good collection of essays.

Andrew says

Out of the pile of vintage (ok they are to me at least since they were some of the first books to enter my collection) pile of Asimov this is one of the few he wrote (I seemed to have found a lot of his anthologies of other peoples works).

Anyway this was the first time around a real eye opener - now however its caught my attention for other reasons.

The first time around I read this book it was before the days of the internet and certainly before computerised

catalogues - so much of my early exploration of science fiction was through books I found or stumbled across - as unless there was a decent bibliography there was nothing to go on.

Thankfully this book is great for referencing and yes it did launch my exploration of other authors and titles - however as you can imagine on such a huge subject it was somewhat limited. These days a single word it seems can send me off on amazing tangents however back then it was a little more limited.

So what about today - well now with a little more experience and breadth of reading I can look at this book again with a different view point. Now I see the author behind the words - having now read several leading authors views and definitions of science fiction (as it seems all of these books have to define and by rights set out the rules of science fiction) I now get to see how those authors approach and think of the subject.

For me I have always loved the easy going and "friendly" manner Asimov wrote in and this book is no different so for me I think I would choose to accept many of the opinions Asimov raised in this book but I know now this was HIS view and I should not be afraid to disagree and make my own up - something I think only time has given me the perspective and the courage to do. However for nostalgia and a whole load of fun this book still has a special place on my book case.

Max Lybbert says

I wasn't sure what to expect from this book. Then again, I wasn't sure what to expect from Asimov's Guide to the Bible: The Old and New Testaments and I was pleasantly surprised.

At the very least, I expected some storytelling tips. I was wrong. There is very little of that. Instead, the book contains a lot of commentary on science fiction books/magazines and science fiction in just about any other media, and that commentary generally praises science fiction books and magazines, and laments that "science fiction" for any other media usually just means "with lots of special effects, and very likely lots of loud noises." There is an essay discussing the meaning and origin of words such as robot, android, and anthropoid. As always, Asimov's writing is clear and enjoyable, and his opinions are valuable.

I will note that after reading this book, I realized that George Lucas spent decades talking about the legends and storytelling devices he put in the *Star Wars*, *Empire Strikes Back*, and *Return of the Jedi* scripts. But, when he offered his expertise to the entertainment industry, he didn't focus on writing. Skywalker Ranch and Industrial Light and Magic are focused on special effects. And I remember at least one interview with Lucas where he said that he believed *Phantom Menace*, *Attack of the Clones*, and *Revenge of the Sith* would have been more popular had they relied on models, forced perspective, and real explosions instead of computer-generated special effects. Perhaps books don't fall into the trap only because books don't have special effects. In any case, I'm glad science fiction books aren't focused on explosions and big budgets.

Arun Divakar says

In younger days, I was never much a taker for sci-fi. Movies like *Star Wars* had me yawning away to glory and I have watched none of the greats in the powerful lineup of movies in this genre. The first brush of something different was Ridley Scott's cult classic *Blade Runner* but even then I never became an avid fan. In the matter of books it was even more worse for I have read hardly anything by the old or new masters in the field. I am a person who would rather prefer walking through a castle talking to the king or watching a knight fend off a dragon. I would also prefer having my pants scared off by any of the horror maestros but

space travel, extraterrestrial life forms and such terminology hadn't affected me a lot till a short while ago. Dan Simmons's Ilium cycle was the series that changed the tide for me but my interest in sci fi was truly and totally heightened by Asimov's Positronic Robot series. I truly loved it and when I came across a book that offered his views on the field of sci fi, I never had second thoughts.

It is a collection of essays, editorials and articles penned by Asimov in span of many a decade. Asimov is no master wordsmith for he does not mesmerize with intricately woven wordplay. His voice is the common man's voice which makes the reader comprehend every single word that he is using. His ideas never felt to me to be enshrouded in the mist of pretension which needed to be hacked off to understand the principles beneath. It is as simple as pushing a button and getting coffee in your paper cup. You don't have to make the coffee yourself !

Asimov, Heinlein & Clarke pioneered the movement that led to the world wide acceptance of sci fi as a genre which means that the author has this ethereal, booming voice that can lecture us mere mortals on the development of this fascinating genre. Asimov would have been a swell teacher for the way he writes made me imagine him sitting poised on the edge of a table and talking to a jam packed hall full of sci fi fanatics in the backdrop of absolute silence. An area where he spends considerable time on is the developmental phases of this genre. Here came my only grudge with the content for it repeats many a time. The points on John Campbell, Hugo Gernsback were so often repeated that I lost count of them. Just a minor thing but still a deterrent.

There are a few articles on writing and his views on how best to do it. Asimov stresses on the need for consistent and unrelenting focus on writing as the secret to be a successful writer. I relapsed to thinking of personal favorite Stephen King's *On Writing* here for the principle essentially was the same there too. I would pick the review of 1984 by Asimov as the best in this collection. The author does a brilliant dissection of the Orwellian masterpiece and showed quite a few angles which I had not earlier looked at it in much detail. Other well written pieces were the one co-authored with Ben Bova on the development and usage of the brain in literature, the machine and its future in human society and on prolific writing.

As an aside, I think Asimov would have been an exceptionally self-centered person to which his words stand testimony !

Jen says

As a genre, science fiction encompasses quite a lot of ground in both content and its history, which one of the genre's fans and prolific writers provides insight to within Asimov on Science Fiction by Isaac Asimov.

To read this, and other book reviews, visit my website: <http://makinggoodstories.wordpress.com/>.

Throughout this compilation of Asimov's essays, which primarily have their origin from his editorials from his science fiction magazine, on the subject of science fiction, he covers the context in which the genre initially arose and grew, his experiences with writing and the other authors within the field, how aspiring authors ought to go about joining the ranks, and the complications science fiction encountered alongside the rise visual media's offering of science fiction stories for the masses.

Asimov's tone and voice within these essays is generally rather witty and humorous, which is entertaining as he reminisces quite fondly about the past and the old school writers who helped to shape the field as it emerged, as well as his own writing. While points that are raised within each of the essays of this collection are incredibly informative and well-presented, there is an abundance of repeated sentiments, frequently with

the same exact phrasing, that makes reading them feel a bit redundant. Through no fault of his own as this book is older, many examples provided are rather outdated and colored with nostalgia so strong that it could make more contemporary readers warier of his authority on the subject.

Anthony Faber says

A collection of introductions and essays about science fiction. I enjoyed it, but don't necessarily agree with some of his opinions. A lot of golden age name dropping, too, so if you're not up on the old stuff, you might feel a bit lost at times.

Iain Turnbull says

This is a collection of editorials and essays written by Asimov, mostly during the 70s. As usual, it is written in an endearing and witty fashion which is very easy to read. However, there is a lot of repetition which does start to get tiresome after a while, and his dislike of Hollywood sci-fi seems quite dated and disproportionate (although he does make some good points on how it could be improved).
