

The Golden Age of Science Fiction with Cora Buhlert



[Opening theme music with voiceovers.]

Cora Buhlert

"Most of the Golden Age science fiction isn't actually as expansive as Foundation is, because it mostly sticks to the Solar System. And they have a very clear idea of what the Solar System is like, which is completely wrong, we later found out. But it's always, I've called it the..."

Joel McKinnon

"Jungles of Venus..."

Cora

"Jungles of Venus, the deserts of Mars..."

[Theme music plays out.]

Joel

Welcome, friends, to another episode of Seldon Crisis. My guest today is Cora Buhlert, an indie science fiction writer from Germany and an expert on Asimov's Foundation and on the Golden Age of Science Fiction. Cora is a prolific writer, having published over a hundred works in various genres and a nominee for the prestigious Hugo Award for Best Fan Writer.

Cora

A winner, actually, by now.

Joel

A winner?

Cora

Yeah, I won last year.

Joel

Congratulations! Her passion for speculative fiction, combined with her talents as a translator and educator, has made her a prominent voice in the science fiction community with a keen interest in cultural commentary and a strong advocate for the genre. Cora's insights into Foundation and her perspective on the Golden Age will surely make for an engaging and enlightening conversation.

So welcome, Cora!

Cora

Yeah, thanks for having me back.

Joel

And you are calling from Germany, I believe, right? From Bremen?

Cora

Yes, I am. Bremen in North Germany.

Joel

In North Germany. Okay, well, great to have you on. I have talked to you before with Paul Levinson. We had that discussion after the last season of Foundation. That was a lot of fun. And I've listened to you a couple of times on the Star's End podcast where I've also guested a couple of times and always found your commentary really interesting. I also have really enjoyed reading your blog and your reviews of the Foundation TV series. I find the writing just so superb and just a delight to read. And even though sometimes I disagree with some of your takeaways and your opinions on things, I always end up feeling like, wow, this was really worth reading. And so that's the way it should be, I think.

Cora

Thanks. I'm always glad if someone is reading them because they are quite a lot of work to do. I hope the one for the last episode will go up from either probably tomorrow or late tonight, if I still get it finished in time.

Joel

Well, they're worth waiting for, even if they're a little bit behind.

Cora

The last one was delayed because the Dragon Awards got in the way and I've always been commenting on them. So, yeah, that was a whole day of blogging about something else.

Joel

Well, let's get started with a little bit more about you, if you don't mind. Is there anything you would like to talk about that you've been doing lately? You can talk about your Hugo Award or any of your other work. You have your own publishing company, Pegasus Pulp, right?

Cora

Yes, but it's been a while since I think the last thing I published was just before the holidays because I've been very busy with work and also with family stuff, sick elderly parents. And so this year so the writing fell a bit by the wayside. But I've just had two things come out. I have a story called Rest My Weary Bones in the current issue of Swords and Sorcery magazine, which is an online scene. And I also have another story out called A Cry on the Battlefield in the anthology, the Little Cozy Book, published by Windgraph magazine of cozy Fantasy.

So those are the most recent things I have out. Those are not my own publications, of course. None of this is really it does delve into, let's say, fiction, which coexisted with the original Foundation stories. But it's not really about Foundation. So if you want something that's about Foundation, I have an essay in Asimov's Foundation and Philosophy: Psychohistory and Its Discontents, edited by Joshua Heter and Josef Thomas Simpson.

Joel

I was going to bring that up.

Cora

Because I imagined you would. I also won a Hugo award. Yeah, Asimov won his first, I think in 1965 or 66. He's a few years ahead of me. But yeah, Asimov's problem is, of course, that a lot of his best work was done before there were Hugo Awards. Entire original Foundation stories were already published before the Hugo Awards started. Lots of the robot stories. He did get a few highly deserved retro Hugos later on.

Joel

And he got the voted the best science fiction trilogy, wasn't it?

Cora

Yes.

Joel

The original Foundation.

Cora

It was a one-off vote in, I think, 1966. I'd have to look it up for the best ever science fiction series. And the finalists were Lord of the Rings, which was the one they really wanted to award because it had just come out in paperback in the US. And it was a huge success. But it was not eligible because the book had come out in 1955, so it didn't work. And then the other finalists were, well, the original foundation trilogy because there was nothing else at the time. And the Barsoom Stories by Edgar Rice Burrows and Lensman by Skylark, one of the E Smith ones and Future History by Robert A. Heinlein. And everybody assumed that Lord of the Rings would win and Foundation won. That was Asimov's first Hugo. And he did win another for Foundation's Edge in the early 80s, which I think was also a kind of lifetime achievement award because it was like, it's Foundation. We love it.

Joel

Yeah. And it's still one of my favorites in the whole series. Foundation's Edge. So great.

Cora

Yeah. It is pretty good. I'm not a fan of Foundation and Earth. Edge is a really good one. Earth is a down note to end the series on, I think.

Joel

I think it had a lot of really good points, too, but it did have a lot of downside. There were parts that were hard to drag through. And there were things that were kind of cringey like Golan Trevize's sex scenes yes.

Cora

That was like, okay, no, I don't need to read.

Joel

Yeah, yeah, exactly. So back to your essay in Asimov's Foundation and Philosophy. I really love that. First, I want to talk about that book just a little bit because I think everybody who's into Foundation, and really the themes in it, the philosophical themes, the history, the societal impact and all that, should really read that book. It's got a whole set of wonderful essays on a bunch of different topics like Foundation and Philosophy, Foundation and History, Foundation and Faith, Foundation and Science, Foundation and what was the last one? I think the mind or something. Foundation and Consciousness probably.

Cora

And some of them we have Foundation and Morality and Foundation and Being.

Joel

Foundation and Being, that's the one. And I just finished I think the last one was on determinism and free will, which is a major theme in Foundation and really beautifully explored. A lot of really great stuff. There was one on Foundation and extended mind that I really liked. But your essay was great and it was on faith as represented in the TV show compared with how it is in the books, which is quite different.

Cora

It's very different because, basically, in the books, religion is a scam and it's literally the opiate for the masses. It's what keeps the Four Kingdoms at bay. And Askone, or however it's pronounced, we don't have Asimov here to ask him. And it's also used as a weapon by the Foundation to expand the influence and keep other populations at bay and under control. When I read those books, I first read those stories, I was like 16 or 17. I had become disillusioned with Protestantism, having been raised in the Lutheran Protestant church because in North Germany, everybody in my reading is Lutheran Protestant unless they have immigrated from another part of Germany or are immigrants from Turkey.

And so, I was a bit disappointed, not so much with the church itself, but with some very hypocritical and very religious people. So this whole, "oh, it's all a scam and it's science dressed up as miracles" idea. Of course, Lutherans don't do miracles, but the Catholics do. And Lutherans don't like Catholics at all and were like, "oh, that's silly, they believe in miracles and so on." So, yeah, this is just something I latched onto as a teenager and thought, "wow, that's so cool." And by comparison, the TV show has a different approach because it takes the religions seriously.

Both Luminism in the first season, which is not at all in the book, but gets a whole lot of time in the series, this whole Luminism arc. And of course, in season two we do see this Church of the Galactic Spirit and I love the guy who plays Poly Verisof and also Brother Constance. They're fun, they're great actors. But it's interesting that they both sort of, well, let's say they use their own opiates because they actually do believe in their own religion, which the higher priest, like Poly Verisof, doesn't believe in the books, doesn't believe in his own religion. He knows it's a scam.

Joel

I get the impression that maybe Poly Varisof in the show isn't a true believer. It's hard to tell. And it's really interesting with his, he's obviously very smart.

Cora

I mean, Hari Seldon, who's not a true believer and thinks it all, knows it's all. So.

Joel

That interaction in the Vault was very interesting, where he asked him about why he killed the Warden. And there's been different interpretations of his look back at Hari as he was leaving, to me, it looked like a shaken faith kind of look back at him. Do I really want to commit my whole life to this guy? Was that an acceptable answer? Others think that he's just enthralled to have met his hero.

Cora

I think it might be a case of never meet your heroes.

Joel

Yeah, that's exactly what I felt. Right.

Cora

Actually, I never got to meet Isaac Asimov, even though I think I would have been 19 or so when he died. So in theory, it would have been possible. But in practice, I was simply too far away from the science fiction community, which was very US-centered at the time, and for a long time regretted that I never got to meet him and tell him how much I loved his stories, how much they meant to me. But, I mean, we know that he was also a serial harasser of women.

I was 19. I was quite cute at the time.

Joel

Yeah.

Cora

Nowadays, I think maybe it's better I.

Joel

Nowadays, I think maybe it's better I never got to meet him. I was thinking of getting to that topic at some point, Asimov and women, but let's hold off on that for just a second. Yes, I have the same feeling that I wish I met him, or at least that I had attended one of his lectures, because I wasn't that far away. He was in New York his whole life, and I grew up in Pennsylvania, in western Pennsylvania, around Pittsburgh. You know, he was giving lectures occasionally, and I could have attended one, and I was a huge fan. But it just never occurred to me, you know, people die and you don't have a chance to see them again.

Cora

He also died too early because none of us, it's not actually unexpected nowadays, if you know what happened. But at the time, no one knew. And I remember being really, he was so famous that his death was reported on the radio or TV news, and I was literally shattered. I think I haven't been shattered for a long time. I think the next one which shattered me so badly was the dual death of Carrie Fisher and George Michael, which was in 2016. This was 1992. So yes.

Joel

Yeah. I think the closest comparable for me was John Lennon.

Cora

I remember John Lennon's death, but I was seven at the time, and it was like, okay, everybody's very sad that a singer died and he was shot. That's very sad. But I didn't really connect him to the music because I was seven and hadn't really been. I'd heard the music on the radio, of course, but I didn't really connect. Okay, this person is so very important.

Joel

Yeah, I was in my late teens.

Cora

Those were the people who were shattered. The older siblings of friends and so on. One older sibling of a friend kept his Beatles record running on a constant loop to mourn John Lennon.

Joel

And to hear about it from Howard Cosell on Monday Night Football, it just seemed wrong.

Cora

John Lennon really was way too young. He was only 40.

Joel

Yeah. So, Cora, can you tell me a little bit about how you first became acquainted with the writings of Asimov?

Cora

Okay. And I had heard of Isaac Asimov because he was very famous at the time. It would have been the late eighties. And his name was actually occasionally in a crossword. It was occasionally a question in a crossword puzzle. My mother liked crossword puzzles, but I'd never read anything by him. I probably had seen *Fantastic Voyage* by that time. But okay, he doesn't really need to see that one at any rate. And I looked at this book, I knew that the author was famous. It was a science fiction book. I looked on the back and it said something about a mathematician who knows, who realizes that the galactic empire will fall and that bad times are coming and that he wants to figure out how to predict the future, and thought, wow, this sounds cool.

So I bought the book and started reading, and I was actually grumpy by the time I had to get on my flight back to Germany. I kept reading through the flight, which was a very unpleasant flight because I was seated. I had an aisle seat and directly behind the first class, which was curtained off, and the flight attendant always swept that curtain into my face. And there was also a woman in the window seat who was drinking all the time because she was nervous. I think we probably had another stopover because I don't think we had a direct flight from Athens.

But at any rate, I read the book. I was totally engrossed, forgot the flight and everything else. And then when I came to the end sometime when I was home, because *Prelude* is quite thick by *Foundation* standards, I realized, wow, there are more books like this. This is a series. And I said, okay, I have to read all of them. All of them. So the next time I was in the city center, we had one bookstore which had imported paperbacks from the US. Or rather, they had these imported mass market paperbacks and they had a very good selection.

I think someone there was actually a science fiction reader because they had a very good science fiction selection. I found a couple of the Foundation. I think I found the first original trilogy there and don't know if I found Foundation, Earth or Edge there. At any rate, I found all the Foundation books and read through all of them all the way to Earth.

Joel

I have a question though, did you read Forward the Foundation before you started into Foundation or did you no, I.

I have a question though, did you read Forward the Foundation before you started into Foundation or did you...?

Cora

No, I didn't because it wasn't out yet. Okay, it came out I think it was the last I think was posthumously published so it would have come out in the early nineties. I read Forward is the only one I didn't read in sequence. I read from Prelude all the way to Foundation and Earth, didn't like Foundation and Earth very much and then I went back and started with The End of Eternity, which was at the time I figured out there was a recommended it was probably one of the books, a recommended reading order. So I started with The End of Eternity, and then I went through the robot stories, novels, through the Galactic Empire novels.

So I cycled once around until I would have gotten to the point where Prelude would have started. And then when it came out, I read Forward because that was the only one I read out of sequence. I was absolutely fascinated, of course, by these books and by the scope and the ideas. I'd read other science fiction novels before, but also things like Star Wars... And I did read some Anne McCaffrey before I found Asimov and like to arrive, but they didn't have this amazing scope of thousands of centuries. And century spanning plan and trying to stop the Dark Ages, which was

very I remember in Prelude there's a scene where I think it's Demerzel Tells or whatever, yes. I forgot. What? Chester Hummin or whatever forget the name, Demerzel uses when he's talking to Hari. But he's talking to Hari...

Joel

Oh, Chetter Hummin.

Cora

Chetter Hummin exactly. Yeah, Chetter Hummin. He's a journalist. I mean, he's a chatterer, it makes sense.

Joel

A chatty human.

Cora

Yeah, a chatty human who's not a human at all. But there's one point where he's talking to Hari and they say like, look, there's a kind of a sign on the shop and the lights are just broken, no one is repairing them. That's a sign of decline. Okay? So I went looking for so every broken neon light or something in the shop really bothered me and I told her. Why aren't you replacing that? Yeah, because it's difficult to climb up there and I think the real shocker was when there was a 1 hour photoshop at the Central Station and one day I came in I don't know even know what sort of photos it was, I wanted my photos done and said, okay, I'm coming.

I left them there and I come back and they said, you have to come back the next day. And they said, Why? You're a 1 hour photoshop. Oh, no, we're not doing it anymore. Okay. So I was totally convinced the decline was real, and because I became an evangelist for Asimov, I told every person I met, you have to read this book. This is the best book ever. You have to read these books. Most of them were not exactly happy to read them. So

yeah, at any rate, I discovered Asimov at exactly the right age. I think when you're in your teens this is one of those books that can be life changing when we're at the right age and when you're a bit older, it probably no longer has the same impact.

Joel

Yeah, that's absolutely true. I want to segue into where Asimov fits into the golden age of Sci-Fi because I know you know so much about that era and I'd love to get your thoughts a little bit on some of the best writers of that era that are similar in some ways to Asimov and how they're different. But also if you can point out some of the female authors that maybe don't have as much prominence that you are aware of, I would love to get your take on that.

Cora

Yes, well, originally when I started reading science, I tried whatever sounded interesting. A lot of them were really things from the Golden Age, from the 40s and 50s, tried reading a few New Wave things, but they didn't work for me. Largely because it was not the right books. I was trying and also modern. science fiction, but where I realized that, Asimov really you may be aware, that there used to be something called the retro Hugos, which were awarded either 50 or 75 years after a year where there had been no Hugo awards but a World Con. So we basically had a bunch of - so basically all of the - everything from 1939 to 1952 was fair game.

And one year after, I think one or two years afterwards were there were no Hugos because they weren't fully established yet. And these retro Hugos and I started voting in the regular Hugos in 2014 when they had retro Hugos for it was 1939 and they had retro Hugos. They always found the retro Hugos really exciting because, wow, so many books I read or knew or laughed and laughed and I was always a bit frustrated by the results because it was always that people were obviously voting for the famous

name, for the big name authors, but for often very weak early stories. I mean, the first Asimov story, Marooned off Vesta really isn't worthy.

It's not very good. Sorry, Asimov. And there was, I think, a really early, very early Arthur C. Clark story, which was pretty terrible and so on, and I was always obviously voting for the big names. So I thought, okay, let's just start reviewing for any kind of stories from those years we can find so people can make a more informed decision. Which sort of well, didn't quite work out. The retro after I wanted to do the project for the 1944 retro Hugos for stories from 1943, but I got sick in the nomination period, caught the flu, so I didn't really get to do it as much as I wanted to.

So I did it the next year. And yeah, afterwards there were never any races for that's how even though I made some dent, I noticed that very obscure stories I'd recommend. But one thing is if you read a lot of there were three Asimov stories, of course, which were the Big and the Little or the Merchant Princess. So the Hober Mallow stories, the Traders or all the ones, Askone stories, The Wedge is the other name, and one of the Powell Donovan stories who were eligible that year. And one thing is, if you read those stories in the context of other stories from the era, you notice that a lot of similar ideas, themes, tropes, pop up.

You have robots, of course, and how to make the robots work. You have early space. Most of the Golden Age science fiction isn't actually as expansive as Foundation is because it mostly sticks to the solar system. And they have a very clear idea of what the solar system is like, which is completely wrong, we later found out. But it's always I've called it the...

Joel

Jungles of Venus.

Cora

Jungles of Venus. The Deserts of Mars. And Pluto is not only still a planet, it's sort of habitable. The tidally locked - this is one I love - the tidally locked Mercury.

We had a tidally locked Mercury. There is a tidally locked planet mentioned in the Mule.

Joel

I'm actually old enough to remember when that was the accepted knowledge was that Mercury was tidally locked when I first learned the Solar System. And I thought that was so cool. And then later, what, it's not?

Cora

Yeah, I think there still are tidally locked planets in pop culture or in science fiction, even today, simply because the idea is so cool that people were just, okay, I'm not giving up on that. Just as we still have the deserts of I mean, Dune is practically an updated take on the deserts of Mars. We knew there were no deserts on Mars, at least not the way we hoped they would be.

Joel

Right. No canals.

Cora

Yes and no canals. If you like the pulp era, if you like the old Mars and old Venus, then Leigh Brackett is probably she's one of the best, not just one of the best women authors, but one of the best authors of the Golden Age. She's been a little forgotten.

Joel

Was she the one they called the Queen of the Space Operas?

Cora

Yeah, she was called the Queen of the Space Opera. And she wrote a lot of stories in the... she started I think, she debuted around the same time as Asimov. So she was a bit older than he was, but he was very, very young, of course. And hers were more a lot more adventure oriented because we know that Foundation is quite very philosophical, but it's quite talky, especially the very early stories. And she's more adventure oriented. Also. She has a quite strongly political - especially the early stories because her heroes are the space outlaws, a space rogue, which is of course, he did not develop that archetype.

That was CL Moore who came up with the first space rogue, a guy called Northwest Smith whose adventures appeared in Weird Tales starting in 1934. The TV series is trying to turn Hober Mallow into this kind of space outlaw, space rogue character which he really isn't in the books.

Joel

Right.

Cora

Hober Mallow is a space capitalist. He's not really a space.

Joel

Yes, exactly. But I saw them as munging together, Hober Mallow and Limmar Ponyetz. And Ponyetz is definitely more of a space rogue.

Cora

I mean, Asimov tried to write this type of character several times. Limmar Ponyetz and Hober Mallow are very similar characters. Hober Mallow is the guy who actually becomes rich and fairly wealthy. Ponyetz never does. But they're both outsiders who work for the Foundation but are not fully accepted. And this is interestingly because I'm starting to think that maybe Asimov, who of course read all the other stories he read those magazines. He knew those stories, even if he Asimov published mostly in Astounding which was considered a serious science fiction magazine, which had serious covers with very phallic rockets and so on, whereas the other ones had scantily clad women being groped by bug eyed monsters.

Usually whatever was on the covers never happened in the book, but who cares? And some of the other magazines are actually quite good. Particularly Planet Stories has a lot of good stories, actually, not just Leigh Brackett, they have early stories by Ray Bradbury and so on. So they're pretty good.

Joel

I have a favor to ask you for myself and for my listeners. If you could just give me, like, offline after this a list of your favorite top ten from the Golden Age. Yeah, I would love to do that. And I would love to take that as just a project to go back and read some of those stories. Because, truthfully, I've read my Asimov, Clarke and Heinlein a few other authors, but I have not really delved deeply into that era and would love to.

Cora

Most people have read Clarke, Asimov, Heinlein are the three big three that everybody has read. And actually Clarke actually only starts getting really good. Well, he starts off, but he's a bit later then he did write during the so called Golden Age and also in the 40s, but he was also a bit younger than the others. But he only starts getting really good later. For the 1940s, you have people like Clifford Simak, Fritz Leiber, Henry Kuttner, CL Moore, Leigh Brackett, Margaret St. Clair, another woman who's really - a woman writer who's really very underrated and actually continued living and writing well until even to the 1980s.

So she lived a long time. I mean, there's a lot of good stories to discover. And also you realize that things that showed up in Asimov stories, like, for example, these space traders who are outsiders operating on the edge of legality, they show up in other stories. Or the Powell and Donovan stories. Mike Donovan the Irish stereotype. There are Irish stereotypes in other stories. And took me a while after the third. I was like, okay, why am I getting three kind of offensive Irish stereotypes in fairly short succession? Yes, because the Irish were still discriminated against at the time, and this was their way of showing diversity.

They were talking about diversity like we were today, but back at the time, it was, okay, but the Irish people can go into space, too, and they can build robots, too, right?

Joel

I don't know if you listened to a couple episodes back on Seldon Crisis, I read Reason, the Powell and Donovan story, and it was really interesting seeing how much stereotype there was of Irish stereotype in Donovan. And I almost didn't publish that episode because I did such a bad version of an Irish accent. I just didn't want to put in the work necessary to do a proper Irish accent. But one thing that I found fascinating in that story was it was written in, I believe, 1942.

Cora

Yes, it was. One of the earlier Powell stories are fairly early. I think there'll be the last one.

Joel

There's a really interesting bit right at the end where, after everything is resolved, after everything's kind of - the epilogue, the new tech comes to the station, and he's a German, he's of German descent. He's like Mueller something. Mueller and obviously, I guess it's Powell who hates him instantly and tries to make his life miserable. I just thought, they're really being nasty to this German guy. Then I thought about it afterwards, and I thought, oh, it's '42. Of course, that was the trope. That was the mindset of everyone.

Cora

He was working at the Navy yard at the time because he was terribly terrified of being drafted because he figured that if he ever became a prisoner of war, they wouldn't bother locking him up anyway. They would just kill him, which sadly, is probably what would have happened. I mean, no, they didn't just kill them but I don't think a huge prisoner of war would have felt very... I mean, diversity is something we talk about a lot these days, but there were obviously attempts at diversity in those early stories. Even going further back, I think the Lensman stories, there's a German, the first one, Galactic Patrol, there's a German general or something who feels very much like a World War I stereotype.

So going back, even further. Those are from the late thirties.

Joel

And as we get later into science fiction, there's a lot of Russian presence in space.

Cora

Yes, of course. I think we don't get so many Russian or Russian characters in these early times simply because no one was expecting that the Soviet Union would get into space before the US.

Joel

Did, right?

Cora

Especially not by in the 1940s. Germans did look... I mean, okay, the Germans were a pretty good bet only that Hitler was more interested in shooting rockets at London than into space. But the Soviet Union did not look like a good bet at the time. So I guess that's why you don't see... but you do see some... another thing is you actually see people of color quite in the golden age. For example, Hober Mallow is one of the very few characters who gets a bit of an Asimov, doesn't do physical descriptions.

Joel

Right.

Cora

Mike Donovan is... I always assumed Gregory Powell was black, but he actually isn't. His skin color is never mentioned in the stories. I had somehow just assumed he was black because I associated the name Gregory with black people at the time based on a single couple of actors or something. So I just thought that I just assumed someone named Gregory would be black. But he's not. He's not black, actually, so he's just black in my mind. But Mike Donovan is actually white. And Hober Mallow gets a bit of description that he has brown skin, which, of course, can mean anything from a strong tan to actually a person of color.

And of course, he's an 'other,' he's from Smyron. No, he's from the Four Kingdoms. He's not a real Foundationer, which everybody tells him all through the stories. He's always like, you're not even really one of us. He dresses differently. And especially a lot of these outlaw space outlaw characters, what they made him in the TV series, so he's not really that in the books. A lot of these space outlaw characters are well, they're all outsiders, and a lot of them are not white. One of the most famous ones is Eric Von Stark, who was a character Leigh Brackett created, who's a kind of Tarzan character who grows up in the twilight belt of Mercury.

He's an abandoned child. Well, not an abandoned child. His parents are miners, and they die. And some natives from Mercury take him in. Take him in and raise him, and then he's discovered and then some other evil space capitalists come in and kill all the natives and keep him as a kind of circus attraction. And then he's rescued by a kindly space police officer and goes on to have adventures as an adult. And he is black. He's described as a black man. Okay. They come like, oh, but he's black because of the solar rays from Mercury.

Yeah. Okay. He's black because of the solar rays. No, he's just a black man. That was a way of sneaking in characters of color when this was not always that easy.

Joel

Fascinating.

Cora

Northwest Smith is also described as a brown-skinned man. So he's also at any rate, of course, we have illustrations, but the illustrators usually don't care what the characters look like in the stories.

Joel

Right. And there's so much latitude, especially with Asimov characters since there's so little description they can look. I wanted to get back to the Space Rogue for a minute and first I wanted to inform my listeners that you write incredibly excellent reviews for these episodes of the Foundation TV show. I've been reading everyone...

Cora

And one coming tonight, hopefully.

Joel

Oh, great. The one that I'm thinking about is the one where they introduced Hober Mallow in the show and you talked about the Space Rogue and its history in the Golden Age. And I urge any listener to read those reviews because there's so many gems like that where you really get into the depth of things. That's one of the best things about reading your reviews.

Cora

Well, the Space Rogue is really most characters in the Golden Age, they were fairly straight-laced, heroic characters. So they were more like, well, Captain Future, if you've ever read the stories about the enemy, he's a very typical Golden Age character, Edmund Hamilton's character who's another really good writer of the - he actually started before the Golden Age and wrote well into the 1960s and I think even early 70s.

Joel

Well, I was thinking about how the Space Rogue is really an extension of the historical rogue kind of figure that goes back the heroic rogue that goes back much farther into Robin Hood. And even in myth, the trickster kind of character...

Cora

A lot of these characters are not so much in Astounding and in stories by people like Asimov. Like I said, Hober Mallow is obviously discriminated against, but he's a space capitalist. He's a guy who he's the underdog, the immigrant who doesn't belong and make good. Okay. It's not really surprising that Asimov, who was a Russian Jewish immigrant in New York City, would create such a character just as Salvor Hardin. Salvor Hardin is the first generation to grow up in a new place and deal with conflict, with values of the first generation immigrant who want to stick to their culture or whatever brought them there.

In this case, it's Encyclopedists, whereas Salvor Hardin is just, okay, I want to live here, live here. I want my homeland to be safe, safe. I want the people to just live here, make money and so mean. Those stories are clearly linked to the immigrant experience to Asimov's experience of Asimov. Yes, it's no wonder. But a lot of the other space rogues, the ones particularly by Leigh Brackett and a lot of the other stories written in places that appeared in places like Planet, stories by authors like Frederick Pohl or even Manley Wade Wellman, who's more known as a horror author these days.

But he did write a bit of science fiction. Those characters are often from the margins of society, but there's often a kind of social, let's just say, social justice warrior idea. So there's an oppressive system they're fighting against. However, Mallow isn't really fighting against an oppressive system. He just basically takes it over. He takes over the Foundation and turns it into something even more different than what it originally was.

Joel

I always find there's a commonality in Asimov's protagonists in that they were always like the smartest guy in the room and very much like Asimov himself in a lot of ways that are just a little bit flavored in different ways, but it's always essentially Asimov speaking.

Cora

He wrote what we would call Mary Sues today, only he was a man. And it makes sense. Asimov was a very intelligent person, probably usually more intelligent than the people around him. He'd never really fit in because of being second generation, but he actually still was born; he was born in what is today Russia in the Soviet Union. So he was an immigrant trying to form marginalized groups because Jewish immigrants were probably more discriminated against than the Irish and even discriminated against the Irish. He had a lot of issues to overcome. He was very smart. And that's exactly what his protagonists are, too.

Joel

We almost lost him as an infant because there was a plague in his village that wiped out, I think, like half of the children his age.

Cora

Yeah, it was 1920 or Winter 1919. 1919 might still have been the Spanish Flu, actually.

Joel

And I think that's why he didn't know when his actual birthday is. And it was set as January 1.

Cora

Of course, the former Russian Empire only changed to the Gregorian calendar after the October Revolution, which is why they celebrated the October Revolution anniversary in November because they lost all through the imperial days. They still had the older calendar. So there was a calendar switch around the time. So of course, it kind of makes sense that he wouldn't know when he was born or no one would know quite for sure.

Joel

Well, my Russian-born wife and I, and we have a circle of Russian friends and Russian and Ukrainian friends where we live, and we celebrate the old New Year's Eve every year. There's a big party.

Isn't it January 13th?

Cora

Yes.

Joel

January 6 is Christmas.

Cora

My neighbors have switched to January 6.

Joel

Yeah, there's a long period of partying. We think we party for a long time here from Thanksgiving to New Year's, but they go another two weeks.

Cora

Yes, but you can really see his life. I think most authors have their life somewhat reflected in the story, but with Asimov, I think if you think about it, it's really quite; it's very, very intelligent characters who are somewhat outsiders and have to work against a system which doesn't want to listen to them, doesn't believe in them. They all triumph at the end.

Joel

Yeah. I want to turn things to one of my pet projects, one of my pet things that I'm really interested in. This gets back into deep into Foundation in writing this book, which I'm not even sure Asimov realized how much of it he was going to write when he started, he only wrote a short story. There's another anecdote on your blog that I found fascinating was that he wrote the first story was not the Psychohistorians, it was called Foundation and nowadays and he wrote the cliffhanger at the end specifically to get John Campbell to accept a sequel to it.

Cora

Yeah, he wanted to sell a second.

Joel

Yeah, he wanted to sell a second story, which strikes me it's amazing that he didn't even realize he was going to be able to get two stories out, two short stories out. And it became this massive thousand-year project.

Cora

If you read to the end of the Encyclopedists or just Foundation, as it was called, then it literally ends with, oh, I know what the solution is. And then it just ends. And of course, you need a second story. What is the solution? I want to know.

Joel

Yeah, that took some chutzpah, really, to know. I'm not even going to tell you how this ends, John. You give me another story and you will find out how it ends.

Cora

Very smart. Also, we should know *Astounding Stories*, which is where the Foundation stories, all of the original ones, appeared nowadays still around it's. Now, *Analog* was the highest paying science fiction magazine at the time. So I think he paid two cents a word, the others paid one cent a word or less.

Joel

Did not lack in confidence.

Cora

Yeah. Also, you have to remember how very young he was when he wrote those stories. He was not much older than I was when I first read.

Joel

Yeah. And a lot of people read them just a few years younger than when he read them. So what I wanted to talk about a little bit is when you write a story that covers 1000 years and covers the whole stretch of the galaxy, like *Foundation*, you obviously have to pick and choose which parts you're going to write about, what stories you're going to write. And he has the end of the first 30 years in the first story, the end of another 60 years or so in the second, and then various jumps of a few decades.

And then later we get like a jump of more like 100 years or longer. But what really strikes me, especially when I reread it for the podcast, was these little cryptic references to side stories that were never when in the *Merchant Princes*, there's a couple in the *Merchant Princes*. There's Licia

of Korell, the Comdora, who we kind of sadly did not get to see in the series. We got the Comdor and he was great. But I would have loved to see Licia.

Cora

To see in the series. We got the comDora and he was great. But I would have loved to see.

Joel

I know I would love to see Licia, too. But what really was fascinating to me about Licia was her backstory and why she was so hateful of her husband all the time. And constantly arguing was that she considered herself a descendant of wealth and power. She was someone from the Empire. It was never specified who, but her father was some very high-ranking official in the Imperial Court. And I always like that makes me wonder, who was it? Who was her father? And could her father have been this Viceroy on Siwenna or somebody like that?

Cora

[?] was the Viceroy of Siwenna, but it's never really spelled out that she was basically married, often a political marriage to a guy she hated by an influential Imperial.

Joel

Yeah.

Cora

Which was way below her standards.

Joel

I want to know more about what created that marriage and what was the background of that marriage and what that resolved and all that stuff. But then another one in there is that fascinating story by Onum Barr where he talks about the Revolt of Siwenna and having six sons and a daughter and only one of the sons survived. He's not sure about the daughter and you never hear another word about the daughter.

Cora

And of course, the TV series managed to kill the surviving son off in a single episode.

Joel

Yes. That bothered me.

Cora

I wanted, because it was like, hey, we still need him.

Joel

Yeah.

Cora

Made him Onum Barr, who could have died at that point and kept Ducem around.

Joel

Yeah, exactly. Exactly.

Cora

The Revolt of Siwenna is something I really wanted to see and which would have been a great thing to show in the TV series because it would have been very cinematic. There's a great revolt and basically the rebellious Viceroy tries to become Emperor. His own people overthrow him and then get nuked by the Empire for that trouble.

Joel

That's amazing to me, The Revolt of Siwenna is a whole missing novel. There's so much there, and I love that the daughter disappears and you don't know anything about her. But then later we get in the general, we get Ducem Barr's story where he strongly implies that he killed the Viceroy. But I kind of know in my mind, I want the daughter to have killed the Viceroy and Ducem Barr to have protected her honor and claimed to have done it himself or something like that. And just that seems like such a great side story. That would be a great part of it.

And I wish I could write well enough to write that story.

Cora

And of course, you could always post it on fan fiction or something. Otherwise, you would have to persuade Robyn Asimov to give you the licence.

Joel

I know.

Cora

Miss Asimov, if you're listening, I would be very happy to write some missing Foundation stories for you. Love your father's books!

Joel

Yeah, we've got to get Robyn Asimov to listen. Another one is another cryptic comment is in *The Mule*. There's a couple of really interesting cryptic comments. But first, Bayta's descent is traced to Hober Mallow. That's fascinating. I want to know how that happened.

Cora

There is also a Hober Mallow descendant earlier in *The Dead Hand*, there as boss of the Senate.

Joel

I went back and looked him up. Sennett Forrell, he claims to be a son of the son of Hober Mallow, but it's rumored that it's an illegitimate son.

Cora

Of course Hober Mallow. The interesting thing about Hober Mallow is that he mentions a mistress or something like okay, this is no more your he tells this Foundation what's his name? No. Jorain Sutt. Joraine Sutt, who's actually in the TV series he tells Jorain Sutt, well, that's no more business than the name of my current mistress. So it's implied Hober Mallow has a lot of, as the TV show puts it, bedmates. What's the most intimate scene? And this totally went over my head when I first read those stories. I realized that when I reread, I was like, oh my God, how did he get away with that?

Joel

The nude sunbathing scene?

Cora

He's with a male friend and he's sunbathing and nude in some kind of glass insularium and they are smoking cigars while sunbathing and talking about Seldon Crises like you do, I mean, it's a sex position. And this is one scene I really want to see in the TV show. They are not afraid of showing sex scenes. So give us... And in the TV show they used the gender neutral term - they said, okay, Hober Mallow sleeps around a lot. They used the gender neutral term bedmates, which could be both men and women. So he probably was bisexual.

And of course it's also possible that lots of people just claim to be descended from Hober Mallow because he's one of the great heroes of the foundation and Salvor Hardin probably wasn't such a good... and he was known to have slept around a lot. So who knows if they, there was no, they had no way of really proving paternity in the 1940s beyond some fairly basic blood tests. So it's quite possible that with Sennett Forrell they actually assume he's lying and Bayta might just probably repeating some kind of family legend as if we are descended from yeah.

And Bayta Darell would of course then be descended from Hober Mallow too.

Joel

My favorite cryptic comment is very similar comes soon after that. And it's by Randu, Toran's uncle and he's he mentions Lathan Deaver's death in the slave mines with Toran's great grandfather. So I'm envisioning this completely untold story about Lathan Devers and Torrell's great grandfather, this buddy story where they decide they've had it with the oppression and mistreatment by the rising Indbur clan and they're going to revolt and do their thing and they get busted and they get sent to the slave mine, of course, but we never hear anything more about it.

Cora

Yeah, it's such a blink and you miss it moment that... Lathan Devers is on the Foundation side, he's one of the main protagonists of the previous story. He and Ducem Barr and Lathan Devers basically help to take down the Empire and they take down Bel Riose who really doesn't really deserve anything of what he gets. He's just a guy doing his job, but he's a little too good at it. But they're the people who save the Foundation and take down Bel Riose.

Joel

And yes, that's the that's one of my favorite stories in Foundation is that dialogue between Ducem Barr I call him Ducem, you call him [Dukem]. Who knows?

Cora

I learned Latin and Latin. It would be [Dukem].

Joel

Okay. He's [Dukem] from now on. Anyway. Ducem Barr and Bel Riose talking together about that sorry, talking about what's going to happen. And Ducem Barr is convinced that there is nothing that Bel Riose can do to affect the future that it is predestined to be the foundation will prevail. And Bel Riose is just shocked at this and repelled at this idea because he sees himself as an influencer of the future and that the future is not predetermined. And it's wonderful way of playing out.

Cora

Great men of history.

Joel

Yeah, it's such a great way of playing out the....

Cora

He's a great man, who fails.

Joel

That is. I really hope that they find some way of getting that it can't be Ducem Barr, obviously, but maybe that conversation will come up at some point in some way.

Cora

I was really disappointed that they killed off Ducem Barr so very quickly and barely gave him he just gave his brief presentation and then like oops, we have a lynch mob at the door. I will kill myself now. Which was really disappointing because they are both removing a good character and who's still needed and also removing some really great because most of the really good parts of Foundation are actually dialogue. They're people talking because most of the action takes off stage including some really fascinating things such as the revolt on Siwenna, whatever happened to Lathan Devers and in the slave mines, the entire fall of the Empire, the vanishing ships in the merchant princes and so on.

All the interesting stuff happens, all the action stuff happens off stage. So you have plenty of cinematic action you could introduce in the TV series only, let's say, do something completely different.

Joel

Right. And I wanted to talk about the TV series a little bit, not to get too deep into it, but I have a theory from listening to Goyer a lot on his podcasts and reading his AMAs and things. And my theory is that from what Goyer said is that when he pitched this to Apple, they rejected the idea of doing an anthology, basically said we can't do a story in which there are no characters that continue from season to season. And Goyer basically says there was not an option to do it the way it's done by Asimov.

The only way that they would pick it up and give him the money to do this story is to find a way to make characters continue. Now, one of the most ingenious ways to do that and I think is totally a great idea is to take an untold story, which is the story of the Imperial Court of Cleon and branch it off into these clones, which allows those three actors to continue.

Cora

I love the Cleons. They're great.

Joel

Yeah, right.

Cora

A lot of fun to watch.

Joel

That's an obvious one. And maybe you might say he should have pitched it as that is the recurring part and the rest of the characters are anthologized. They live normal lifetimes. But he decided to go further and have Hari Seldon be an active character throughout the story rather than just a recorded character. And now we see that Hari has multiple versions and we don't know why. One's in a human body and there's all this stuff. And then we have Gaal Dornick, who originally was pretty much a non-character. She was just the narration of *The Psychohistorians* and they've decided to explore her backstory, which I think is fine.

And I think you can almost justify the idea of having her continue through the story because she's also referenced as Hari Seldon's biographer. So if you're going to have Hari Seldon continue through the story, you almost need his biographer to continue through the story. So that kind of justifies Gaal to some degree as one of these recurring characters. And then you have Salvor Hardin, which I have a really hard time with.

Salvor is great, I like the actress. She does a good job. But I wish Salvor in the TV series was more like Salvor in the books because Salvor in the TV series is basically the action hero. Well, oh, I grab a rifle and patrol the perimeter. Again. That's not who Salvor Hardin is. Salvor Hardin is basically a guy who doesn't like violence, avoids violence and wins because he's the smartest guy in the room, which is...

Let's put Salvor Hardin to the side for the moment and just say, okay, he made this pitch to Apple that I'm going to have these recurring characters. Do you like it now? And they said, yeah, we're going to give you a ton of money for this. I think at that point when that was the pitch and those characters were established as recurring characters, the rest of it is inevitable that you're going to have lots of radical changes that you can't expect the story to stick to Asimov's *Foundation* very closely at all. Because

there's so many things that are different and as a result, he's paying lip service and bringing in quotes and putting them in the mouths of the wrong people and things like that to make it kind of fit together.

But he's telling a new story that's completely different and I kind of feel like this is why I raised this point before this season started with you and our friend Paul Levinson, that you kind of have to just see it as a new story. And if you do see it as a new story, it's interesting and it's got a lot of different things that are cool about it, and it has resonance with some of Foundation's principles, but it's obviously off the rails, and I see it as off the rails in an entertaining way, and it doesn't bother me anymore. And I found the first season hard to watch because I couldn't let go of the books, and I was really feeling this tension between the books and what they were doing...

Cora

And season one was even more off the rails because except for there's a conflict with the aggressive neighbors. And they didn't even spend all that much time on the conflict with the aggressive neighbors. There was pretty much nothing okay, there's a big battleship, but there was pretty much nothing of the first two stories and a few characters like Louis Pirenne and Lord Dorwin and so on. But there was almost nothing of the first two stories, even though okay, the first one is really a little slow and a little dull, but the second one actually has plenty of action and so on.

It would have worked.

Joel

This season. I don't know if it's just a better season or it's also my different attitude in watching it and just letting go of the books, but I'm enjoying it so much more, and I feel much more in the story and accepting it. I'm not fighting back.

Cora

A friend of mine, Juan San Miguel, says that maybe it's because Jane Espenson, who's of course a veteran TV writer and also a science fiction writer, she used a pen name to write science fiction. She's a veteran TV writer and a very good one, and she wrote a lot of the episodes. Because the thing is, of course, there are a lot of David Goyer, Josh Friedman, Jane Espenson, Eric Carrasco. Those people can write. They're good writers. They can write. I've seen a lot of them are veteran TV writers. They've written some very good stuff, so they can write.

And I'm pretty sure they have read Foundation. So it makes sense that it's producers, that it's a higher up at Apple who said, like, oh, no, we can't do this. The audience won't accept it, even though the audience accepts anthologies.

Joel

Here's my hope. My great hope is I want the series to succeed because I want it to become like a franchise that is successful and becomes kind of a thing people....

Cora

I want to see the Mule for real, right? I also want to see the Second Foundation for real. I want to see Bayta Darell. I want to see Arkady Darell.

Joel

So much great stuff to come. But my point is, if it succeeds and becomes viral, like big and accepted as a valuable franchise, right, then you're going to get reboots and spin-offs and all those kind of things. And perhaps one of the reboots could be the original Foundation. Somebody could decide, okay, I'm going to tell this story the way Asimov told it and we're going to go back to the true story of Foundation and we're going to really stage it well as like a theater piece because that's so much of it is like people talking.

Cora

You could easily adapt, especially the very early stories, into the very first one. The Encyclopedists is basically people talking in conference rooms, most of it. The second one has a bit more action. The wedge is also almost a chamber play. It's a very limited location. And at least half of The Merchant Princess is a courtroom drama which we may still get to see, of course, because they're currently messing up everything from The Wedge all the way well into the Second Foundation. So it's currently a bit of a mess because they spent too much time on the not first two stories in the first season and now they're suddenly meshing several stories together, The General and the Merchant Princes.

Joel

Have you studied Greek tragedy at all? Like some of the great Sophocles?

Cora

Yes, some of it.

Joel

I can't say I'm a great scholar of it, but I've rediscovered a lot of that stuff through a podcast called Literature and History I really love and he has several great episodes on Greek tragedy and what he makes the point that in Greek tragedy all the violence and crazy stuff, a lot of the really dramatic moments happen off stage because they couldn't put it on. And so it's structured that way to really put the drama into the so I think in that sense, Asimov's approach is kind of a throwback to that really serious, tragic kind of theater.

Cora

He may well have been familiar with the Greek tragedies.

Joel

I'm sure he was.

Cora

He very likely was. He was a very highly educated man.

He loved Shakespeare.

Much of it self-educated. And also people in the 1940s were a lot more familiar with the literature of the past, including the ancient past, than we are today. I mean, the Golden Age is Golden Age. Science fiction is full of allusions and also fantasy to writers, which are cases where I'm glad that I have the internet because I've never heard of these people in many cases. In many cases. And I consider myself fairly well read and educated, but a lot of differences. I mean, also it's kind of the famous story that Foundation was based on the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire by I forgot the name of the author now.

Joel

Gibbon.

Cora

Sorry. Yes. And this is that it was based on that and fairly loosely tracks the fall of the Roman Empire. Except that there's something I mean, nowadays we know that the whole thing about the Dark Ages wasn't like that. The Dark Ages are Victorian prejudices. There's a time between the Roman Empire and the high middle ages. Wasn't Dark Ages, but this was still the accepted belief at Asimov's time, even my time. Like I said, I learned Latin in school, and so, of course, I was familiar with the Roman Empire. And also, if you learn Latin, I was also very pro largely very pro Roman.

Roman, as in, okay, Rome was good. Rome had civilization, and then all this Christian stuff came in, and we had a throwback. So, yeah, that was also something which resonated with me at the time. I mean, I probably carried around my Foundation paperbacks in Latin class to read them during the break or something, so it was really resonated with me. We know it's not right now. It's wrong, and it doesn't fit. And of course, this is one I'm actually mentioned in the essay in Foundation and Philosophy is a very different story by L. Sprague de Camp, who nowadays is mostly known as a guy who took all the unpublished Conan stories and unfinished Conan stories and finished them and wrote some new ones and wasn't very good.

But he was a very good writer of was also a very educated guy, was a very good writer of historical fiction, science fiction and mythological fantasy and so on. And he wrote a story called Lest Darkness Fall, which was published in Unknown, which was a fantasy oriented sister magazine of Astounding Science Fiction, which sadly, did not last very long in 1939, where a guy in the modern age is sucked back in time. I think he's an archaeologist or something, visiting Pompeii. He's visiting Italy and is

sucked back in time into the late Roman Empire. And he knows that the Roman Empire is going to fall.

He knows that there will be long Dark Age, and he has all the foreknowledge I mean, this sounds really familiar, doesn't it? He has all the foreknowledge of what will happen. And he also has this knowledge of his really he also has this really advanced knowledge of technology. So he well starts so he decides, okay, I'm going to prevent the fall of the Empire, and, okay, these Christian people, we will try to keep them down. They're just hindering everything. And he sets about inventing the printing press centuries early. Yes, he builds a distillery and makes booze, and he invents a lot of economic techniques, and it's a great book.

And you really root for this guy. And actually General Belisarius, the guy who's basically the real historical model for Bel Riose, general from Byzantium, who tried to claw back the Empire and actually reconquered some things and got a bit too and was too good that he was killed for his trouble and executed by the East Roman by the Empire of Byzantium. Sorry, I'm pronouncing it the German way now. And he actually appears as a character in Lest Darkness Fall, when the protagonist basically recruits him as in okay, you're smart, we can use you forget Byzantium.

And in the end they set off for the New World. They have really built some very good ships. They set off for the New World. Because our hero wants mean it's obviously a very different take on the same story.

Joel

Yeah, I love that idea. Have you read Harry Harrison's Deathworld trilogy, by any chance?

Cora

I have, a long time ago.

Joel

The middle story in that was very similar in that he winds up on this primitive planet, but he's a modern guy with all the knowledge of the modern civilization and technology, and he works his way up through all sorts of adventures to the point where he is basically the king of the planet because he has all the knowledge, you know, to create the best weapons and all that stuff. Really interesting story. I'm a big fan of Harry Harrison.

Cora

Oh yes, he's great. He was also, I discovered him a little after Asimov.

Joel

Yeah, he's a lot of fun. Another one I really love. Is Sheckley, Robert Sheckley.

Cora

Oh yeah, Sheckley is great. We have a great Robert Sheckley story. The Price of Peril has an amazing German TV adaptation from the early seventies.

Joel

I don't think I know that one.

Cora

It used to be on YouTube. I will send you the link if it's still there. But it doesn't have subtitles. But it's basically a kind of reality show story where some guy is where a guy can win 1 million it's probably dollars in the American in the story. And it's 1 million deutsche marks in the German movie if he survives being hunted by killers for a weekend. It's a huge and they made a TV adaptation the early 70s which is structured like a fake TV show. It looks like a real 1970s lost TV show.

It's like watching TV from a parallel universe. There are these weird dance interludes with German TV shows. The guy who plays the host of the show was a real TV host at the time, Dita Tomas Hack. He was known as this motor-mouth host. He hosted game shows, but mostly he was known for hosting a music show at the time. It looks like a real TV show. It has fake commercials in the middle and it's absolutely amazing because when it first aired, people didn't know this was fictional. It's a kind of War of the Worlds situation.

They assumed it was a real TV show and they wrote letters to the TV station. A lot of people complained like, "Oh my God, how can you show such a horrible show? They're really shooting the poor guy." A lot more people applied like, "Oh, I want to be a contestant on the show. Where can I apply?" And some people said like, "Oh, can I perhaps play one of the killers? Because I think that would be really interesting." Yeah, it was a huge scandal and it was never shown again for decades afterwards. Partly because of the scandal and partly because, and this is their own fault, they forgot to pay Sheckley for the license.

They bought the license from some kind of German science fiction anthology and they bought the license from the publisher but never paid Sheckley. And Sheckley got angry, of course, and wanted to be paid, which is totally his right. And I think they resolved it sometime before his death.

Joel

Yeah. My favorite is Mindswap. I think that I read that one in my teens and I remembered it all my life.

Cora

The ones you read earlier are always the ones that stick with you.

Joel

Yeah, but I looked for it and found it in a book of a compilation of five novels of his. And they were all fairly short novels, but they were all great. Everyone was just so entertaining. And he has such a loose kind of like a wild imagination. Very funny. Yeah.

Cora

He lived fairly long. He lived into the 2000s.

Joel

He actually died not that long ago and that's when I...

Cora

He lived well into the... I remember he was still alive on the internet.

Joel

Into the teens I think, but it was his death, or reading about his death that made me go back and look for that book again and find that compilation of his novels. And I was so glad I did. I wanted to get to one more question, running on a little long here, but that's fine. I wanted to know about if you have any favorite adaptations. We've talked about Apple's adaptation of Foundation having some issues, but I'm wondering if you can think of any adaptations of golden age Sci-Fi that really work.

Cora

Yeah, that's a bit of... that's really difficult. Actually, one that does work, but it's probably hard to find is the 1979 anime adaptation of the Captain Future.... The Captain Future stories by Edmund Hamilton are not very good, let's say it. But there was an adaptation, an anime adaptation in 1979, which was one of my foundational sciences. It aired on German children's TV really cut really badly. And that's still a really good adaptation, I think.

Joel

What do you think of Dune? The various attempts to do Dune?

Cora

Yeah, Dune is of course, Dune is not golden age. It came out in 1965, so it feels a bit like it feels more golden Age than New Wave, but it's not. But the latest Dune adaptation is, I think, pretty good, at least the first half. Of course, no one has seen the second half yet, but I do like the Lynch version. But it's very compressed.

Joel

Yeah. And it has some kind of cringey parts.

Cora

But actually, for some reason, there are not a lot of and nowadays not a lot of people look towards the Golden Age of Science Fiction for stories, even though they are okay. You probably have to change from Mars to planet, whatever, but there's a lot of good stories there. But there aren't a lot of thing. Most of the better adaptations of Golden Age science fiction were TV adaptations that aired as part of Twilight Zone or The Outer Limits. And there was one, I think, out of the unknown, was a British one who actually did the two Asimov robot to Daneel Olivaw and Elijah Baley stories. They actually did an adaptation of that, but it's lost because the BBC wiped its tapes sometime in the 60s.

Joel

That's terrible.

Cora

Peter Cushing is I think he's done the....

Joel

I've seen screen grabs from those. But that's another part of my great hope with Foundation taking off is I hope that it spurs somebody to do the robot stories.

Cora

Well, those would be much because sorry, the I Robot adaptation is absolutely not...

I mean, the Robots and Empire stories.

I Robot isn't a story, it's a short story collection. But what I want to see is Baley. Is Elijah Baley and Daneel Olivaw fighting crime? There was a human and robot partner cop show a while back, but it died after a single season. Starred Karl Urban, who was who plays Scotty in the no, he's not Scotty, but he's the Bones in the JJ. Abrams Star Trek movies. Scotty is Simon Pegg. Anyway, that's probably the easiest thing to do would be the Elijah Bailey and Daneel Olivaw.

You have two novels and short story. And you can mix in some other cases of the week that would be really great to do. And the other one I would love to see is Susan Calvin, Mike Donovan and Henry Powell solving problems with malfunctioning robots.

Joel

Yeah. Yeah.

Cora

For robots, there was really... Henry Kuttner, who was another, he was a contemporary of he was a little bit older than Asimov. He died very young, which is why he's mostly forgotten these days. He died he was only 40, 42 or something. Was very, very young when he died. He also wrote some wrote stories about an inventor who is absolutely brilliant, but only when he's drunk. And when he's sober. He can't remember what his inventions do. And there's also a robot in those stories. They are hilarious. If you like the funny Asimov stories, you will like those as well.

Yeah, because Asimov could be funny, which a lot of people nowadays, he could be unintentional. And Robert ALL-75...

Joel

There are some humorous scenes in Foundation. Not very many, but I think my favorite comic scene is the one I call it Tea Time with Dagobert the 9th of you know, that scene where they're trying to pull it, get information from him about where the Second Foundation might be on Trantor. And he's now mad and thinking about all he can talk about is Gilmer trying to take over and thinking that Gilmer is still alive and that he's going to get his empire back and all that. And I had great fun on Seldon Crisis recreating that little scene.

Cora

Yeah, I mean, actually, we forget these days that Asimov could be really funny even in Foundation. And there are also funny stories. And also he gets a lot of flak for his rather plain style. But he actually wrote some pretty, some really good and funny dialogue and well-written dialogue in Foundation, but also in the robot stories. There's a lot of stuff that is actually good. And okay, what was Powell and Donovan, which I really write for the retro Hugos. It was Catch that Rabbit. One of the Powell and Donovan stories. And I was struck by how actually funny a lot of the dialogue was, including making fun of the whole "as you know, Bob" thing, because robots are controlled by one robot controlling subsidiaries via Positronic Field.

And they're like, oh, what's a positronic field. Well, actually, we don't know. And the specialists don't know either. And at one point, I think Donovan goes into, well, as you know, you know, Greg poses. I know that you don't have to explain. And then Donovan is like, well, but I need to express I need to say it now, so just shut up. It's hilarious, of course. And of course, Asimov also made a really cringeworthy world as a Seldon Crisis info dump in The Merchant Princess actually turned it into a vital clue in the mystery because The Merchant Princess, in essence, it's a mystery story.

And Asimov was, of course, also a very good mystery writer, which is, again, kind of this is actually one thing I'm sad because I bought all the Asimov books, which this import bookstore had, which is long gone by now. Well, the bookstore is still around, much diminished, and they only carry things like art books now. They no longer have the foreign language section, which was so wonderful. And they had a lot of these Black Widower mysteries and I always skipped over those like, oh, well, I don't want to read mysteries. Those are for old people. Those are for my mom.

And I now wish I would have bought all of them.

Joel

Yeah, I haven't read any of those and I want to.

Cora

The characters are apparently his writer pals, so people like Lester del Rey and so on. I think L Sprague de Camp is a character as well. So a lot of his old writer pals are characters in the story, which is, of course, and solving mysteries, which is, of course, just fun to imagine. A lot of golden agers sitting around solving murders.

Joel

Yeah, that sounds like a great premise. Well, I'm going to have to say goodbye, but before I do, I want you to let us know about anything in your world upcoming, any events or publications or anything that you want our listeners to know about.

Cora

Yeah, well, the next thing I have coming out actually is arrives on September 7 is a story in Simultaneous Times, Volume Three, which is Simultaneous Times is a fiction podcast, a science fiction podcast by Space Cowboy Books, which is a science fiction specialist bookstore in Joshua Tree in California. And they have a fiction podcast, and they put out a print annually. This is already the third volume, and I have a story in that one which does poke fun at Golden Age tropes, though it's not a robot, it's a bug-eyed monster story. And then later in the year, I have a short story in an anthology called 99 Fleeting Fantasies edited by Jennifer Brozak.

And that's coming out later in the year. I actually have to look through the proof soon and soon, so it's probably sometime in the third or fourth quarter of 2023.

Joel

Well, you do keep busy.

Cora

Yeah. Those are the next ones I actually have coming up, probably, and otherwise now, I'm not really planning on any cons this year. I may be doing some virtual programming for the 2023 Worldcon, which is in Chengdu, China, and therefore very difficult to access, but I'll very likely be at the 2024 World Con in Glasgow, Scotland, which is a bit nearer to me.

Joel

Yeah, that sounds like something worth shooting for.

Cora

Yeah, I have a membership, so yeah, let's hope it works out. You can't always know if it works out, of course, but let's hope.

Joel

Well, maybe I'll meet you there.

Cora

Yeah, if you're there, always feel free to say, but there's some US cons I really want to do, but it's a travel it's a problem with also a time issue. I have elderly parents and don't want to leave them alone for too long. So yes, we'll see.

Joel

Yeah. Okay. Well, someday. And been wonderful talking to you. We'll have to do this again sometime.

Cora

Yeah, I'm always happy to talk about Asimov, golden age science fiction and well, a lot of other things too, as long as it's fiction and fantasy related. All right, well, and actually, my next review should probably be coming out sometime later tonight. Last episode, because I didn't get it finished yesterday. It was late and was like, okay, no, I'm just shutting this.

Joel

My first thing I look for tomorrow morning or tomorrow night, maybe.

Cora

Yeah, well, it might be morning by your time because you're behind me.

Joel

Yeah. Okay. It's been great.

Cora

Yeah, it was lovely talking to you and thanks for having me and yeah. Hope to get to talk to you again sometime.

Joel

Yes. Okay. Thank you. Bye bye.

Cora

Bye. Bye.

[Closing theme music]