

ROBOT READING GUIDE



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READING
COMPANION

THE COMPLETE
ROBOT (1982)

FOLLOW-
ALONG NOTES

by @luxuryloons

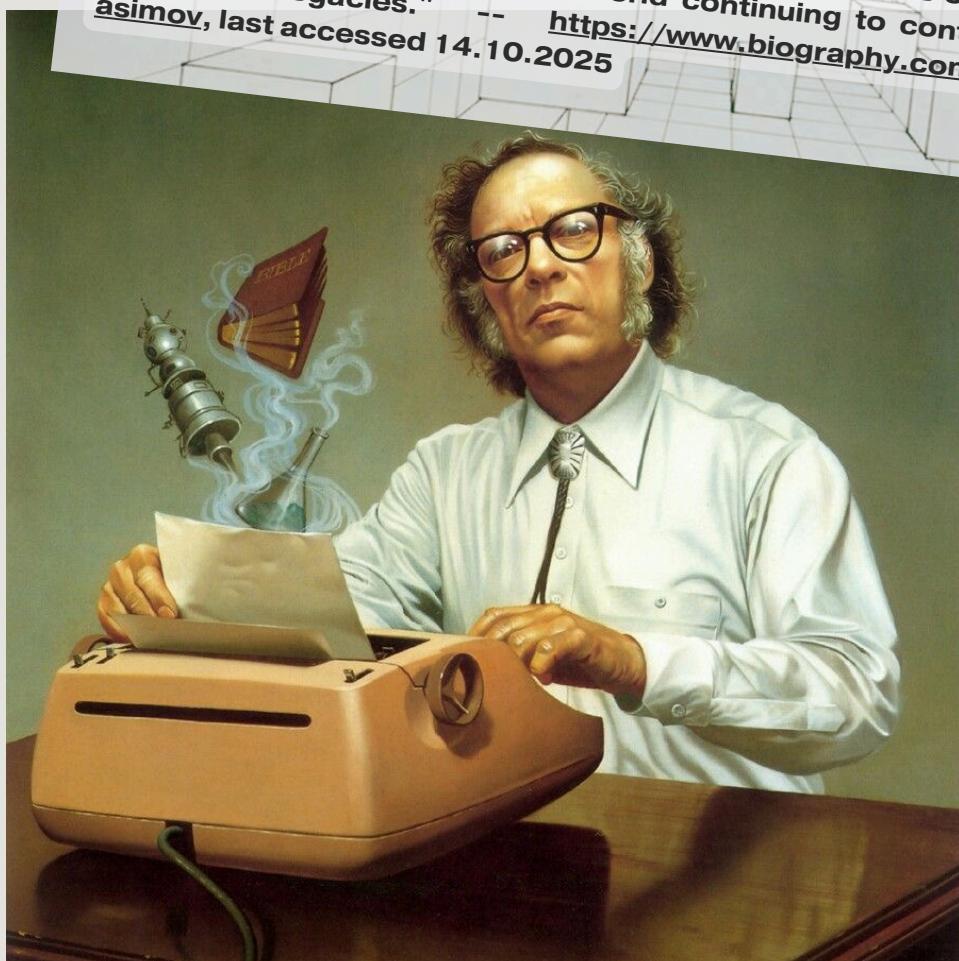
P E R S O N A L R U T H P H



Amidst a burn-out from a job that doesn't rely align with myself or my values, I had a lost a sense of myself. So I wanted to reconnect to one of the pillars of what constructed me as a teenager/young adult - SCIENCE FICTION. Although in those early years of my love for science fiction I had been more an adept of Philip K. Dick's otherwordly world of otherness that resonated with my typical teenaged outcastness, Asimov's Foundation series started me on the best journey of my life, a decade-long discovery of the beauty of mathematics, culminating in a PhD in applied mathematics that had far too little mathematics for my taste. With the rising ubiquity of AI in both my work and everyday life, it feels almost violating the way that these neural networks have become inescapable. For the past 5 years, I have been battling with how to deal with this new tech and research trend - oscillating between the annoyance of having to tell every new Microsoft or Google feature to fuck off and the ease with which I can now tackle new tasks, in new ways. Even though my AI dilemma is a story for another time, the philosophical musings or maybe the desire for a bigger picture of how to deal with these new tools on a grander scale than just my grievances with Microsoft, motivates this exploration into Asimov's world of robots (or maybe I should say deeper exploration, hello Prelude to Foundation). So, welcome to my notes on this Robots deep-dive. Disclaimer: If the writing here is janky, I apologise as it will most likely get jankier as these notes go on. The target audience here is no one, which is reflected in the initial writing, as well as the editing phase (if there is one). My background is more technical than literary, I'm really not much of a linguist.

A SHORT BIO

"Isaac Asimov immigrated with his family from Russia to the United States and became a biochemistry professor while pursuing writing. He published his first novel, *Pebble in the Sky*, in 1950. An immensely prolific author who penned nearly 500 books, he published influential sci-fi works like *I, Robot* and the *Foundation* trilogy, as well as books in a variety of other genres. [...] An influential vision came with another 1950 release, the story collection *I, Robot*, which looked at human/construct relationships and featured the Three Laws of Robotics. [...] 1951 saw the release of another seminal work, *Foundation*, a novel that looked at the end of the Galactic Empire and a statistical method of predicting outcomes known as "psychohistory." The story was followed by two more installations, *Foundation and Empire* (1952) and *Second Foundation* (1953), with the series continuing into the 1980s. [...] Asimov died in New York City on April 6, 1992, at the age of 72. [...] Over the course of his career, Asimov won several Hugo and Nebula Awards, as well as received accolades from science institutions. He stated during a televised interview that he hoped his ideas would live on past his death; his wish has come to fruition, with the world continuing to contemplate his literary and scientific legacies." -- <https://www.biography.com/authors-writers/isaac-asimov>, last accessed 14.10.2025



GENERAL NOTES

We're aiming for an in-universe chronological order here.

The basis we're using is going to be *The Complete Robot* (1982) collection which contains both *I, Robot* (1950) and *The Rest of the Robots* (1964) collections, plus some additional scattered robot tales.

Potential further reading that could be cool:

- *The Caves of Steel* (1954) - first full-length novel in the Robot Detective Series, a classic human/robot buddy-detective story and exploration of Earth's fear of robots.
- *Robots and Empire* (1985) - which bridges the Robot and Foundation universes (this can be followed up with "Mother Earth", a pre-Empire story with no robots). I would recommend maybe reading the main Foundation trilogy before going into this middle ground.

The Complete Robot arranges its short stories into thematic sections, not strictly chronological ones so I'm going to try out the following ordering and report on the progress to see how it shapes up and what needs to be amended.

I'm also going to skip Asimov's introductory/bridging sections between the stories as they'll lack relevance with the new reading order. However, I might read them at the end for further context/insight.

ASIMOV'S THREE LAWS OF ROBOTICS

1. A ROBOT MAY NOT INJURE A HUMAN BEING OR, THROUGH INACTION, ALLOW A HUMAN BEING TO COME TO HARM.
2. A ROBOT MUST OBEY ORDERS GIVEN TO IT BY HUMAN BEINGS, EXCEPT WHERE SUCH ORDERS WOULD CONFLICT WITH THE FIRST LAW.
3. A ROBOT MUST PROTECT ITS OWN EXISTENCE AS LONG AS SUCH PROTECTION DOES NOT CONFLICT WITH THE FIRST OR SECOND LAW...

READING

THE COMPLETE ROBOT CHRONOLOGICAL READING PLAN



Phase	Stories	Approx. Reading Time
Dawn of Robotics	1. Robbie 2. Robot AL-76 Goes Astray 3. First Law 4. A Boy's Best Friend 5. Satisfaction Guaranteed 6. Lenny	~2–3 hrs
Early Expansion	7. Runaround 8. Reason 9. Catch That Rabbit 10. Victory Unintentional	~2 hrs
The Engineers' Frontier	11. Risk 12. Light Verse 13. Stranger in Paradise	~1.5 hrs
The Psychologist's Era I	14. Liar! 15. Little Lost Robot 16. Escape	~2 hrs
The Psychologist's Era II	17. Galley Slave 18. Evidence 19. The Evitable Conflict	~2 hrs
Moral Maturity	20. Segregationist 21. Feminine Intuition	~1.5 hrs
Decline on Earth	22. Sally	~45 min
Transition to AI	23. Let's Get Together 24. Someday 25. Point of View	~1.5 hrs
The Age of Thinking Machines	26. Think! 27. True Love	~1 hr
Toward the Human Ideal	28. The Tercentenary Incident 29. Mirror Image 30. ...That Thou Art Mindful of Him 31. The Bicentennial Man	~3 hrs

Total: ~20–22 hours of reading (assuming ~40–50 pages per week in a 10-week plan)

PLAN



Time Theme / Era

Domestic & experimental robots; the Three Laws emerge.

Powell & Donovan adventures; industrial and space robots.

Advanced engineering; robots as tools and artists.

Susan Calvin takes centre stage; moral and logical dilemmas.

Robots enter law, politics, and world management.

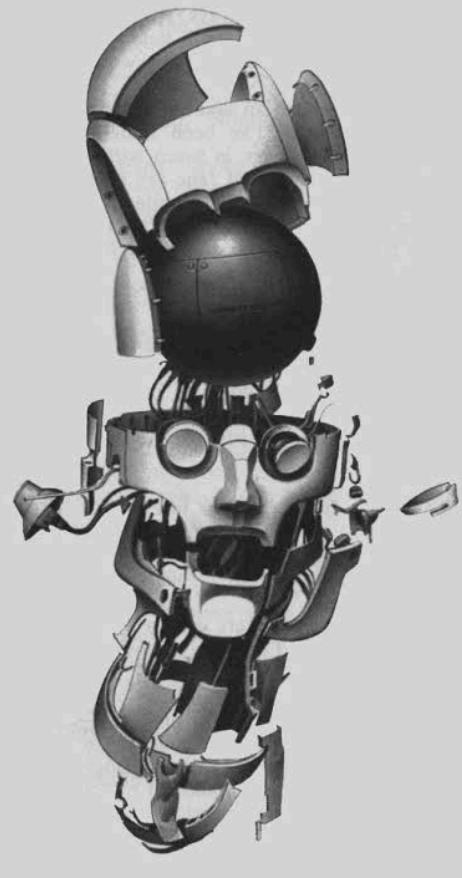
Prejudice, intuition, and humanity's limits explored.

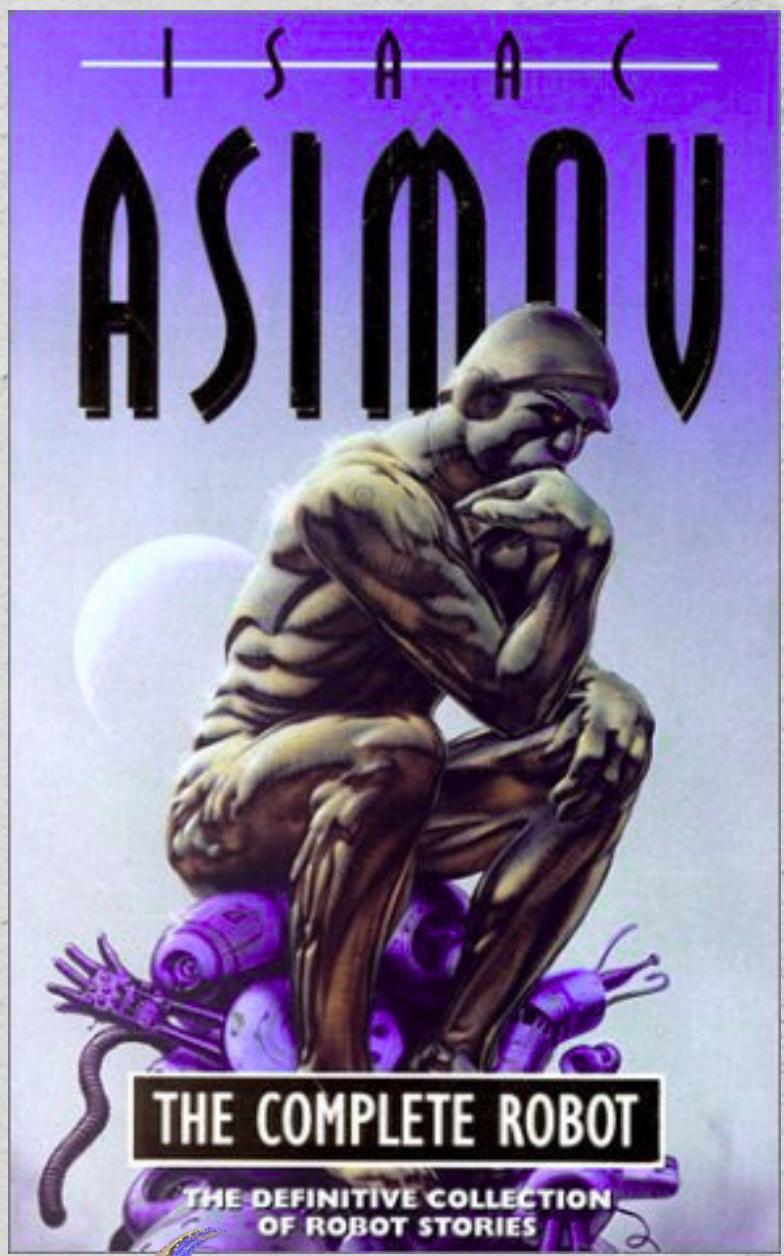
Robots largely retired; autonomous cars linger.

From Cold-War robotics to storytelling computers.

Self-programming computers — robotics giving way to pure AI.

Robots merge with society, then transcend it — direct bridge to The Caves of Steel and Robots and Empire.





OVERALL NOTES

Enjoy the continuity — but don't stress about it. Asimov didn't originally plan all of this as one continuous universe. He retroactively connected it in the 1980s (*Robots and Empire*, etc.). So, you might spot contradictions — don't let that bother you. It's part of watching a universe coalesce over 40 years of writing.

Keep an eye on **Earth's social evolution**.

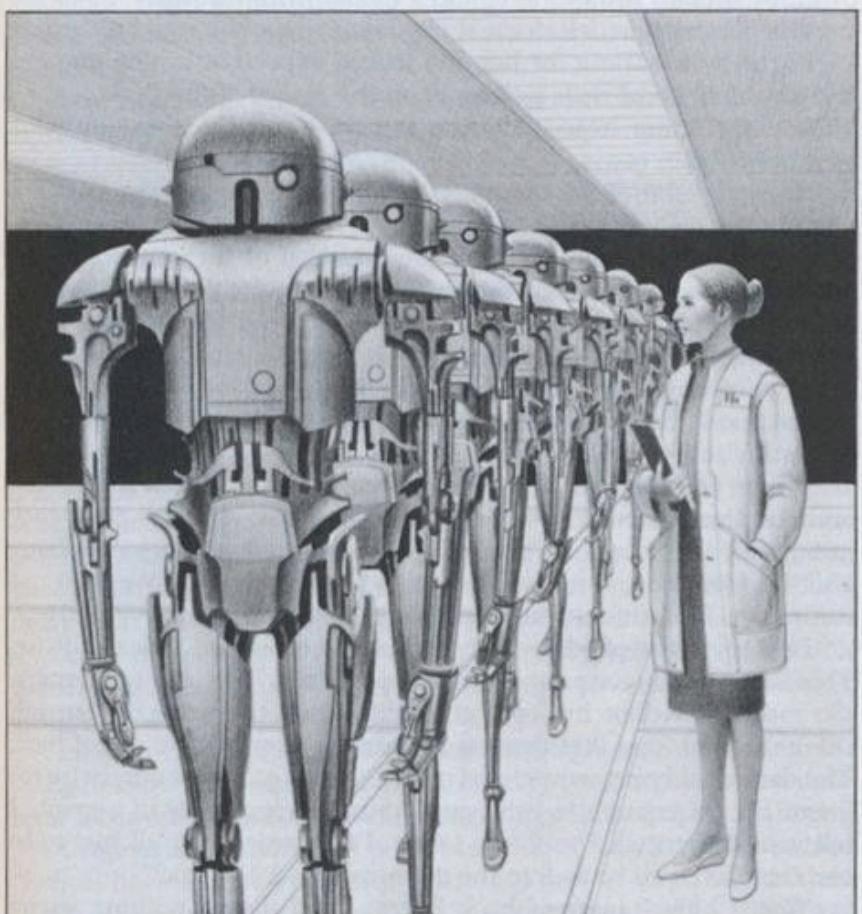
When you finish each story, ask: "What human behaviour did this story really critique?"

Note **Asimov's changing tone and style**. Let the tonal shift happen — it mirrors how Asimov's own view of humanity matured across decades.

Follow **Susan Calvin's arc**. Read her as **Asimov's scientific conscience** — she represents rationality, responsibility, and restraint in a world racing ahead technologically.

Watch the evolution of the three laws. Try noting how each story introduces a "new wrinkle" in the Three Laws — Asimov was essentially stress-testing his own ethical system over 40 years.

SENTRY JOURNAL



Reading Guidelines

Birth of Robotics – Curiosity and Control

Stories: Robbie, Robot AL-76 Goes Astray, First Law, A Boy's Best Friend, Satisfaction Guaranteed, Lenny

Think: How does fear vs. affection for robots mirror how we treat new technologies today?

Expansion & Exploration – The Engineer's Age

Stories: Runaround, Reason, Catch That Rabbit, Victory Unintentional, Risk, Light Verse, Stranger in Paradise

Think: What happens when machines 'follow the rules' better than their creators do?

The Psychologist's Era – Susan Calvin

Stories: Liar!, Little Lost Robot, Escape!, Galley Slave, Evidence, The Evitable Conflict, Segregationist, Feminine Intuition

Think: Who's more humane - Calvin or her robots?

Decline & Transition on Earth

Stories: Sally, Let's Get Together, Someday, Point of View

Think: Why does society reject its own creations once they outgrow us?

The Age of AI – Thought Without Form

Stories: Think!, True Love

Think: When does a program become a person?

Toward Humanity – The Philosophical Robots

Stories: The Tercentenary Incident, Mirror Image, ...That Thou Art Mindful of Him, The Bicentennial Man

Think: what truly defines a human.

Note: Connections to the Foundation universe should start to arise here.

When you finish *The Bicentennial Man*, reread the first page of *Robbie*. Note your thoughts on this.

TEMPLATES



The rest of this booklet contains templates for note-taking during the reading process, including a template for notes on individual stories and templates for the questions / reflections listed in the *Reading Guidelines* (p. 9).

All templates are available online – scan for access:



STORY NOTES

STORY DESCRIPTION

TITLE:

GENERAL IMPRESSION

LONGER NOTES

ERA QUESTIONS

ERA 1

BIRTH OF ROBOTICS — CURIOSITY AND CONTROL

ERA 2

EXPANSION & EXPLORATION — THE ENGINEER'S AGE

ERA QUESTIONS

ERA 3

THE PSYCHOLOGIST'S ERA — SUSAN CALVIN

ERA 4

DECLINE & TRANSITION ON EARTH

ERA QUESTIONS

ERA 5

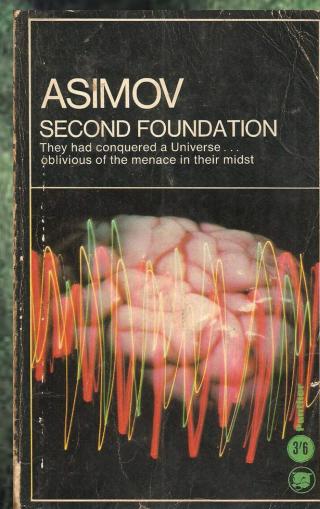
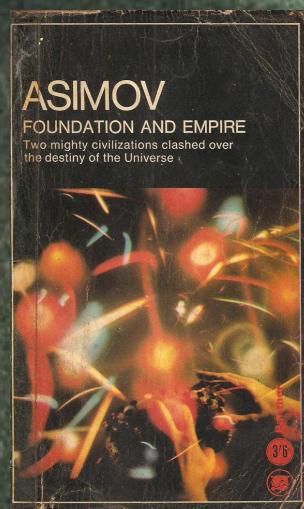
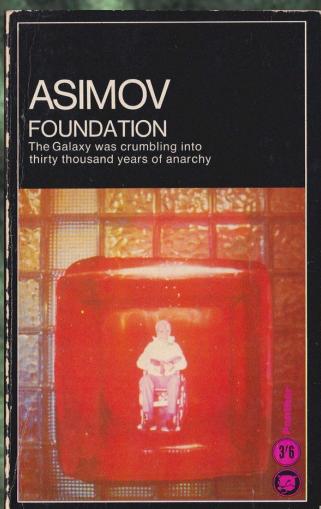
THE AGE OF AI — THOUGHT WITHOUT FORM

ERA 6

TOWARD HUMANITY — THE PHILOSOPHICAL ROBOTS

THANK YOU FOR READING

Next Steps – Foundation:



Next Steps – Robots:

