

Psychohistory

"Psychohistorical Crisis" by Donald Kingsbury is a wonderful take on Isaac Asimov's "Foundation" universe which is galactic in scope. For once in this famous universe, Kingsbury spins a story of and about humans, their trials and aspirations minus robot saviors.

The story occurs in the far future. By 80,374 AD, the human race has expanded to encompass 28-million star systems of our Milky Way. Trillions of folks live fruitful lives under the benevolent guidance of the pscholars of Splendid Wisdom (**Trantor**).

The pscholars are privy to the secret math of the Founder, which is able to predict socioeconomic futures by nudging nodal fulcrums in ways that lead to peace and prosperity rather than famine and war. Psychohistory works on a broad social level. It cannot influence individual prerogatives and actions. So personal freedoms exist amid the backdrop of socioeconomics throughout the galaxy. Even so, pscholars guard their secrets jealously, lest counter-predictors disrupt the benevolent plan and bring on social anarchy.

The narrative begins after Eron Osa publishes a psychohistorical treatise in the public domain. He's convicted as a traitor in the high court of **Lyceum** and has his fam removed and disintegrated.

Here I must explain the "fam" or familiar. Almost every citizen of the galaxy has a fam affixed to back of neck at age three. The fam boosts mental speed and memory capacity. It's an outgrowth of the tuned psychic probe that nearly destroyed the Founder's plan. In effect, the fam has become a personal safeguard against hostile psychic probes. Over many years of improvements, the fam is now a common accessory that enhances human mental abilities.

After a lifetime of constant use, the fam and its human host create a close-knit symbiosis. Without his fam Eron Osa becomes a mental invalid, for everyday tasks have been done with the aid of his fam. Left to his flesh & blood mind, he's a mental cripple.

The narrative shifts backward in time to Osa's teenage years. He's a

kind of child prodigy with a chip on his shoulder. He has been expelled from a number of schools. In frustration, his father hires a tutor for his son. Scogil, the mild-mannered tutor, is really an undercover agent for the Overseer, an clandestine group of dissidents who are learning psychohistory to overthrow the pscholars.

Next the plot thickens, and Kingsbury introduces several extraordinary characters. Kama is an antique dealer with airs of a **hyperlord** and a desire to bring on another age of social chaos. It's he who stumbles onto a long lost cache of Psychohistorical equations. Jama teams up with Scogil and his soon-to-be wife Nemia, who's a topnotch designer and builder of fams. Together they salvage the lost equations of the Founder.

Scogil and Nemia are assigned to a boondocks planet where the residents ride bicycles and practice astrology. Scogil has a brilliant idea to embed Psychohistorical tools inside eggs which cast birth charts for anywhere in the galaxy. Fledging astrologers progress from parlor arts until they receive eggs with similar predictive tools used by pscholars.

Meanwhile, Eron Osa attends the university on Faraway, the planet the Founder used to shorten the age of chaos and bring about a new age of peace and prosperity guided by the pscholars. Osa is attracted to physics where he learns to test theories in real-life experiments. Eventually, his brilliance is noticed by Konn, the mad admiral and 2nd-rank pscholar of the Lyceum.

Konn takes Eron under his wing and introduces ancient earth history. Eron Osa studies the patterns of history and learns to devise equations that fit the historical record. Later, he examines the concept of social stasis (what we might call a sustainable culture). He learns the galaxy is headed for another period of chaos as dissident groups are about to counter-predict the pscholars.

You must read the book to see how it all ends. Along the way, Kingsbury lends ominous insights about our near future from his perspective in the far future. He warns about human populations ballooning to unsustainable levels. It appears inevitable that humans

will exploit earth's resources until there's nothing left but barren deserts.

Kingsbury says a lot about the evils of secrecy. Today we have government secrets in the guise of national security. And we have corporate secrecy in the guise of proprietary knowledge. Both of these conspiracies rob citizens of democratic rights, since it's impossible to choose the best without full pictures of who they are and what they represent.

Secrecy robs citizens of free choices of which products are best to buy. If manufacturers withhold proprietary knowledge, they're letting buyers stumble into hidden pitfalls. Proprietary knowledge is wasteful because consumers must choose between a range of products, all of which have strong and weak points. If consumers buy an unpopular brand, they could be left owning a discontinued product without replacement parts. Even vendors lose because they must all start from scratch. This secretive system of business invites wastefulness.

Moreover, Kingsbury examines the science of prediction in ways that are more convincing than other books about psychohistory. It proves that those who fail to learn from history are doomed to make the same errors.

I recommend this book whole-heartedly for everyone, especially for those familiar with Asimov's Foundation universe.

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Trantor is the name Asimov gave to the planet near the center of the galaxy which is covered pole to pole with urban structures. [Back](#).

Lyceum is the elite academy where the smartest mathematicians in the galaxy learn the equations of predictive psychohistory. [Back](#).

hyperlords were troubleshooting bureaucrats of the prior galactic empire. [Back](#).