



Harvest the Fire

Poul Anderson

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Poul Anderson, a legend of SF, is the writer whom the mantle of Robert A. Heinlein descended upon. Anderson devoted his career to the visionary enterprise of creating science fiction set in a carefully extrapolated human society of the future in the spirit of Heinlein.

Nowhere does he succeed more powerfully than in the works set in the future history that began in *Harvest of Stars*, continued in *The Stars Are Also Fire*, and now leaps into the distant future in *Harvest the Fire*. This is no less than the tale of the expansion of humanity to the limits of the solar system and beyond. It also chronicles the evolution of machine intelligence, until humans and machines come into conflict in an age when the outward urge and the urge to change are the chief barriers to utopia for many humans--and for their machines.

Harvest the Fire is the story of politics and poetry: of a poet, Jesse Nicol, who aspires to great work in an era when human literary greatness is apparently all in the past, who travels to the Moon and falls in love with a beautiful revolutionary, Falaire--a woman determined to escape from the care of machines. For the machines are now the masters of humanity, and the great work of Falaire is freedom, which must be stolen from the machines.

With the precision and clear focus of a master, Poul Anderson tells a sharp and poignant tale against an epic interplanetary background. *Harvest the Fire* is hard SF raised to the intensity of poetry.

Harvest the Fire Details

Date : Published November 15th 1997 by Tor Science Fiction (first published 1995)

ISBN : 9780812553758

Author : Poul Anderson

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From Reader Review Harvest the Fire for online ebook

Elar says

Third book in the series was quite simple and linear, but little bit to bitter for my taste. Nothing special unfortunately.

Christopher says

In 1993, science-fiction author Poul Anderson published *Harvest of Stars*, the first in a four-volume future history that depicted the human race grappling with machine intelligences. That first volume was mainly a libertarian fantasy about independent spacers evading a tyrannical world government, but it ended with a colony to Alpha Centauri launched just as true AI was appearing on Earth.

For Anderson, superhuman intelligences were scary because they might lead to a managed economy, the great bugbear of libertarians like himself. But also, Anderson started off writing science-fiction in the 1950s when everyone envisaged intrepid space cowboys flying their ships all over the galaxy. By his old age, it was becoming evident that automation meant humans would have little direct role in piloting craft or working any other machines. Furthermore, other forward-thinking authors like Vernor Vinge were suggesting that humanity might even choose to simply stay put and move into a virtual reality instead of expanding outward into the galaxy. This reversal of all he had held dear left Anderson appalled.

Harvest the Fire, published in 1997, is the third book in this series, its title being a portmanteau of that of the first book and the immediately preceding volume *The Stars are Also Fire*. Set in the solar system centuries after the departure of colonists to Alpha Centauri, its plot concerns earthman Jesse Nichols, a poet and dreamer by inclination, invited to join a Lunarian conspiracy to seize an antimatter shipment from Earth's dreaded machine overlords. They aim to bring it to the distant planetoid Proserpina where humans have escaped the control of the AIs. Venator, the villain of the preceding volume, appears again, this time as a downloaded personality.

This third book of the series is quite different from the others in that it is essentially a novella, readable in one sitting. When Tor published it in hardback, they tried to compensate for the meagre length by including a series of illustrations by Vincent Di Fate, who did the cover art for this series and has been an acclaimed science-fiction artist since the 1960s. Di Fate's drawings are mainly generic scenes of spacecraft, with only a handful actually reflecting the action in Anderson's book. Not only is *Harvest the Fire* just a novella, but it also doesn't affect the overall plot of this series. A reader could easily skip from books 2 to 4, and Tor seemed to think the same because this book was less promoted than the other volumes.

While I enjoyed the series as a teenager, when I was too ill-informed about the world to pick up on Anderson's political advocacy, on later re-readings I found the first two volumes in the series fatally flawed by the overt libertarian agitprop. *Harvest the Fire* is superior to the earlier volumes in that it lacks those highly unrealistic dialogues that serve more to castigate "big government" than depict realistic characters. Sure, Anderson works in a dig at income tax and the book continues the series' theme that the rise of AI might quench human ambitions, but the political concerns are no longer so heavy handed.

That said, the characters continue to be fairly one-dimensional, and the writing is so simple that I wonder if Anderson was intentionally reaching for a young adult audience. Furthermore, the plot feels repetitive in that our protagonist is again an earthman caught in a big conspiracy out of love for a mysterious, elf-like

Lunarian beauty.

Anthony Faber says

If you liked "Harvest of Stars" and/or "The Stars Are Also Fire", you'll probably like this. Standard space libertarian ubermensch novel.

Renee says

An enjoyable tale of space travel and civilizations, struggle for resources, and machine intelligence. Not a great sci fi novel, but a good read.

David says

I'd give this a grand-spanking "meh." This has the signal flaw of being the third book in a series *but not noting that fact anywhere on the cover* - I only realized this when I went to write a review. This does explain why some of the interactions between the characters have an unvoiced tension - this could perchance be the history and backstory which was built up over the past two novels... But I don't believe I'll be finding out: it isn't quite interesting enough as a story to really get me to read more, and the woodenness of the Lunarians is particularly off-putting. For a better example of how to treat a similar plot arc, take a look at Niven, Pournelle & Flynn's *Fallen Angels*.
