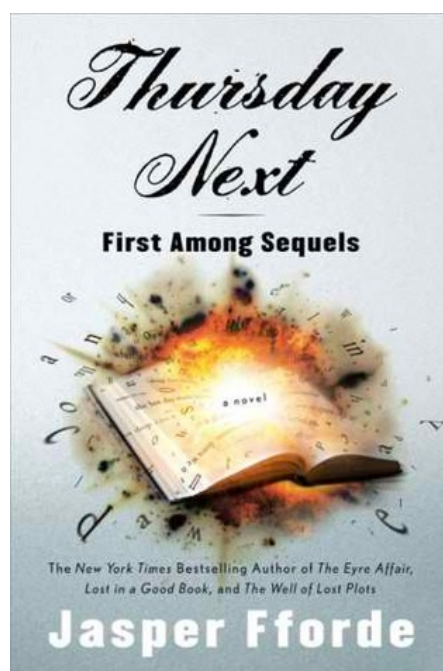




First Among Sequels

Jasper Fforde

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Jasper Fforde

First Among Sequels Jasper Fforde

Literary sleuth Thursday Next is out to save literature in the fifth installment of Jasper Fforde's wildly popular series

Beloved for his prodigious imagination, his satirical gifts, his literate humor, and sheer silliness, Jasper Fforde has delighted book lovers since Thursday Next first appeared in *The Eyre Affair*, a genre send-up hailed as an instant classic. Since the no-nonsense literary detective from Swindon made her debut, literature has never been quite the same. Neither have nursery rhymes, for that matter. With two successful books of the Nursery Crime series under his belt, Fforde takes up once again the brilliant adventures of his signature creation in the highly anticipated fifth installment of the Thursday Next series. And it's better than ever.

It's been fourteen years since Thursday pegged out at the 1988 SuperHoop, and Friday is now a difficult sixteen year old. However, Thursday's got bigger problems. Sherlock Holmes is killed at the Reichenbach Falls and his series is stopped in its tracks. And before this can be corrected, Miss Marple dies suddenly in a car accident, bringing her series to a close as well. When Thursday receives a death threat clearly intended for her written self, she realizes what's going on: there is a serial killer on the loose in the Bookworld. And that's not all--The Goliath Corporation is trying to deregulate book travel. Naturally, Thursday must travel to the outer limits of acceptable narrative possibilities to triumph against increasing odds.

Packed with word play, bizarre and entertaining subplots, and old-fashioned suspense, Thursday's return is sure to be celebrated by Jasper's fanatical fans and the critics who have loved him since the beginning.

First Among Sequels Details

Date : Published July 24th 2007 by Viking Adult

ISBN : 9780670038718

Author : Jasper Fforde

Format : Hardcover 363 pages

Genre : Fantasy, Fiction, Mystery, Humor, Science Fiction, Writing, Books About Books

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From Reader Review First Among Sequels for online ebook

Tripp says

If I have ever read a more raucous and joyful ode to reading than Jasper Fforde's Thursday Next series, then I have long forgotten it. Set in a fantastical alternate Britain, the series heroine is the titular Next who is a member of the Literary Detectives, a government organization that combats book crime, such as, say, the unlawful editing of books. How can such events occur? Well as it happens, what is written in books exists in its own dimension and if you were to enter that dimension, you could say, leech all the comedy out of the Thomas Hardy books and make them terrible tragedies, as some nasty did in these books.

Did that last bit make you chuckle or leave you confused? If it is the former, these books are for you. In addition to being entirely about books and reading, these stories are marked by an unrelenting tide of jokes. I can think of few books that I want to read that I can also call "madcap," but this is certainly one. One scene features a Beatrix Potter character conversing with a Ming the Merciless clone, over tea. It is a mark of Fforde's skill as a writer in that he can be so incredibly silly, while also sucking you into the (often nonsensical) story.

His latest book in the series, Thursday Next, First Among Sequels, may be his most enjoyable yet. Flinging from one crisis to another, Next deals with (as usual) threats to the BookWorld, the universe, declining read rates, her family and to her pet Dodo (genetically re-engineered, wouldn't you know). The pacing is among the most relentless in this volume, so that if one joke or encounter leaves you a bit dry, you will soon find another.

While I won't stoop to spoiling, I will say that this is a series that can read out of order if you so chose. Yes, certain personages' fates will be known to you, but like as not, they have changed in bizarre ways, so that you will be surprised nonetheless. The fun here is in Fforde's seemingly bottomless invention and literary referencing. If you are an inveterate reader, then you need to try these books.

Oriana says

One of the endorsements on the back of this book reads, *Brainier silliness is hard to find*, and I think that's the best encapsulation of Jasper Fforde I've yet to find. He really is the smart person's beach read, or some other such epithet.

This book made me think, though, that really really original artists can sometimes suffer for their singularity. I remember thinking this about Tom Robbins years ago, and it happens with visual artists and musicians too, I'd say. What I mean is that when someone is *totally, utterly unique*, and persists in creating work after work which are all in the same *totally, utterly unique* vein, a certain sameness begins to creep in. You know? Hearing the next Devendra Banhart album is really going to be a lot like hearing the previous one, and reading the next Thursday Next novel is honestly going to be rather similar to reading the last one. I haven't got any striking conclusion to draw about this, but my nearly worshipful love for Jasper and Thursday is beginning to... if not *wane*, exactly, then at least shift, from idolatry to merely very-impressed-ness.

But look, he really is endlessly creative, he has an immense arsenal of trickery and absurdism and silliness and twisty-turny prose. His ideas really are just amazing and crazy and lots and lots of fun. But by the fifth book, it's just not as jaw-droppingly *new* as it was when I read *The Eyre Affair*. I also think that despite his clear success (or, obvs, maybe because of it), he may be getting a smidge sloppy at times. Some of the jokes

here are really forced, some of the plot twists are visible pages and pages before they happen, and some of the stuff has crossed the line between silly-stupid and just *dumb*.

Anyway, it's still a super-great book, and of *course* I will continue reading whatever he puts out, but I guess it's become a little less phenomenal. That's all.

Louize says

I love how Jasper Fforde stitched things together without a flaw.

It's just cockily satisfying how each question was answered in the most unexpected manner and timing. And his name choices were impeccable as ever.

Julie says

Love it. Love the whole series. Love the author. It's literary sci-fi, literary mystery, just plain literary at it's best. Awesomely clever. Time travel, ghosts, the end of the world (caused by the end of Time), a demon, Danverclones (creepy Mrs. Danvers from du Maurier's Rebecca, cloned into an army of thousands), a "dirty bomb" that if unleashed in an inter-genre war between Racy Novel and Feminist Literature, could "scatter poorly described fornication all across drab theological debate or drop a wholly unwarranted scene of a sexually exploitative nature right into the middle of 'Mrs. Dalloway.'" We also get to see Aornis again, and discover just exactly how evil she is. (Very. The part about Jenny is painful.)

As a bonus, I got to read the best explanation of "Schrodinger's Cat*," re-couched into what is called "Schrodingers Saturday Night Fever Principle."

Friday explains it thusly: "It's simple. If you go to see 'Saturday Night Fever' expecting it to be good, it's a corker. However, if you go expecting it to be a crock of sh**, it's that, too. Thus 'Saturday Night Fever' can exist in two mutually opposing states at the very same time, yet only by the weight of our expectations. From this principle we can deduce that any opposing states can be governed by human expectation - even, as in the case of retro-deficit-engineering, the present use of a future technology."

L: "I think I understand that. Does it work with any John Travolta movie?"

F: "Only the artistically ambiguous ones such as 'Pulp Fiction' or 'Face/Off.' 'Battlefield Earth' doesn't work, because it's a stinker no matter how much you think you're going to like it, and 'Get Shorty' doesn't work either, because you'd be hard-pressed not to enjoy it, irrespective of any preconceived notions."

See? What kind of brain thinks of these things? I love these books.

* Schrodingers Cat, a thought experiment in quantum mechanics, about a cat being simultaneously alive and dead. Google it.

Lisa Vegan says

I was really scared to read this one because so many readers seem to dislike it, even those people who enjoyed the first four books in the series, and I didn't want to feel disappointed. I'm not sure why so many readers don't like this one. I was into it right from the start.

So what if this book isn't plot heavy (but there is a story/plot!) – I love hanging out in this alternative world with Thursday and the other characters – I especially enjoyed the parts about the kids.

Fforde is unbelievably witty, smart, imaginative, subversive, astute, perspicacious; I could go on and on and on.

Just about every page had something that tickled my funny bone.

I got a huge kick out of what he says about the roles readers play; I just loved it.

I loved all the digs about modern life and trends and pop culture. The material about reality shows & reduction in reading rates were so spot on. And, The Sound of Music movie reference I found amusing because it is my favorite movie. And, for probably the first time I was glad that I'd read Cold Comfort Farm. The Pride and Prejudice stuff was great as well.

There were a couple of ingenious twists that made me go back and reread sections which I decided to do while I was still reading the book, and I'm glad that I did.

Fforde makes great use of the previous books in the series as a part of this book.

As usual, I think it's imperative to read series books in order so I would definitely recommend reading the first four before this one. I'm really looking forward to book six.

I'm also really looking forward to his upcoming book Shades of Grey but I'm not that compelled to start the nursery crime series, but I might give those books a try too.

Jenny says

I have loved this quirky series, but in all honesty, I think this book had too many subplots and not enough plot to sustain the interest of anyone but a fan. Some great satire, though--I loved the reality TV shows made out of books.

Neil says

Whilst this book might be listed as ?5 in the Thursday Next series, it is set 14 years after the previous book, so it is almost like a brand new series. The only trouble with that is that so much time is spent filling in the intervening happenings, and scene setting that the first half of the book is quite a slog of a read. There is a fair amount of repetition too.

So things have changed in this fictitious corner of England. Much of SpecOps has been disbanded, and Thursday now finds herself working for a carpet warehouse, along with some of her former colleagues. Allowing for the time which has passed the reader now has to be reintroduced to the characters which they had come to know in the previous books.

There are plenty of ideas rattling around in this offering, but perhaps too many sub-plots as things can get a bit confusing. The same can be said for the additional characters. Some of the political satire comes over as a bit heavy handed too. I did enjoy some of the ideas behind the mindless TV reality shows. For me this book was just about OK, and certainly seemed to be missing something which the previous books had.

Kerrin says

Probably my least favorite of the Thursday Next series so far. It seemed less coherent and more bogged down with explanation than the rest. While there were a few exciting parts near the end, I did not enjoy it as much as The Eyre Affair and others in the series.

Sandi says

According to the little pop-up under each star, two stars means "it was okay". And, that's about all I can say about this 5th installment in Jasper Fforde's Thursday Next series. It was in serious trouble when 75 of the first 100 pages were spent in a pointless jaunt through Book World that seemed to be there only to provide exposition that fans of the series don't really need. Fforde throws out a lot of potential story lines and doesn't follow through with most of them. Absolutely nothing comes of the super reader phenomenon. That could have been interesting. The bad guys aren't bad enough and don't show up enough. It just wasn't a cohesive narrative. I was very disappointed.

Brownbetty says

Jasper Fforde reminds me of a Douglas Adams who came from a happier home. (I have no idea what Adams' home life was like, but for the sake of analogy, humour me.) His humour is less biting, but just as madcap, his characters are kinder, and easier to like, but the surreality is, I think, just as strong, and listen to this nice bit of language on pianos: *"Composed of 550lbs of iron, wood, strings, and felt, the 88-key instrument is capable of the most subtle of melodies, yet stored up in the tensioned strings is the destructive force of a family saloon moving at 20 miles per hour."*

If you read for plot, you're not going to like this book. In fact, if you read for narrative, you may not like it either: at one point, with the future of the time-stream in the balance, a chapter is taken off for an adventure in laying carpet. This interlude has no connection whatsoever to anything happening before or after; you either embrace this sort of thing, or go mad.

I can't remember if I've enthused about Thursday as a heroine, but really, she just keeps on getting better. She's an action heroine who doesn't carry a gun, (mostly), she's middle-aged, happily married with children, and not terribly good at communicating with her loved ones. She's female, but not highly gendered, and I think her hair colour may be mentioned once but I don't recall at the moment what it is.

This book is fairly standard for Fford, but he does two interesting things with the first-person narrator, neither of which I wish to spoil for you, so go read it yourself.

Carmen says

This book is #5 in the Thursday Next series. Read the other books first! Not a stand-alone.

Thursday Next is retired from Special Ops. Now 52, married with three children: Friday, Tuesday, and Jenny, Thursday Next is working for Acme Carpets.

Except she's really not. Unknown to her darling husband, Thursday has not really given up her dangerous job of keeping the fictional world in order. Blessed with the rare ability to travel in and out of books, Thursday and the other agents of Jurisfiction keep BookWorld running.

There's not much I can say in this review that will make sense to people who haven't read the book. I will say this: the Thursday Next series is incredibly smart and funny. But the best thing is that it's not a big joke (like *HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE*), these books actually play for high stakes and make you feel anxious about the characters and what happens to them.

Another thing I like is Fforde's portrayal of Thursday Next - one of my favorite female protagonists. Smart, witty, world-weary, practical, with normal-looks and a normal body. She loves her husband and her kids, and she is pretty kick-ass - but in a realistic way, not like...you know...Anita Blake or something.

I highly recommend this series to any book-lover.

P.S. The fact that Thursday Next starts off as a 36-year-old in the *Eyre Affair* and now, in installment 5, is 52 - really tickles me pink. So many authors of a series don't allow their heroes/heroines to age. Great job, Fforde. Keep up the good work!

Arnis says

<https://poseidons99.wordpress.com/201...>

Leigh Wisniewski says

Seriously, Jasper Fforde. This has gone far enough.

I thought *The Eyre Affair* was pretty ingenious. As the series continued, the books seemed to start to fall into a hole, but as the holder of an English B.A. and M.A., I was sticking with Fforde for his clever puns, literary allusions, Shakespeare references, and other literature-related nonsense. I was particularly fond of *The Well of Lost Plots*, not because it was terribly good, but as a writer I appreciated the fantasy of Bookworld and how stories are created (it's a big machine, people have nothing to do with it, we're "inspired" by what the machine creates, it's complicated). Books two through four were too much, but this was *really* too much.

Fforde has clearly become so entrenched and obsessed with his fantasy world, he doesn't bother trying to explain anything anymore. If you hadn't read the first four books, you'd be lost on page one. It really seems like a private little joke. All of us could write novel after novel based on our own knowledge and inside jokes. We wouldn't get published, though. Fforde has lucked out, but he isn't at all thinking about his readers anymore. This is sort of ironic, considering how important readers are in this book.

My advice? If you studied English in college or you're sort of a literophile (I made that word up, in the spirit of Fforde), read *The Eyre Affair* and stop. If you have neither of those things going for you, well, you're lucky, but you shouldn't bother with this series.

BrokenTune says

2.5*

'Incredibly enough, reality TV has just got worse.' *'Is that possible?'* I asked. *'Wasn't Celebrity Trainee Pathologist the pits?'* I thought for a moment. *'Actually, Whose Life Support Do We Switch Off ? was worse. Or maybe Sell Your Granny. Wow, the choice these days makes it all so tricky to decide.'* Bowden laughed. *'I'll agree that Granny lowered the bar for distasteful programme makers everywhere, but RTA-TV, never one to shirk from a challenge, have devised Samaritan Kidney Swap. Ten renal failure patients take it in turns to convince a tissue-typed donor – and the voting viewers – which one should have his spare kidney.'* I groaned. *Reality TV was to me the worst form of entertainment – the modern equivalent of paying sixpence to watch lunatics howling at the walls down at the local madhouse. I shook my head sadly. 'What's wrong with a good book?'* I asked.

Indeed. What is wrong with a good book? This question goes to the heart of the plot of First Among Sequels. A plot, I should add, that doesn't actually become clear until well into the second third of the book, which for an impatient and plot-loving reader like me, made for rather frustrating reading of most of the book.

Multiple storylines were hinted at throughout the book, but only a few, were actually followed through with in this installment of the Thursday Next series, and one that grabbed my interest in particular was revealed to be addressed only in the next book. That is, maybe. If the author can be bothered to remember.

It's the same situation again as with one of the main twists (the one relating to Pickwick) in Lost in a Good Book (book # 2 in the series), which is not actually addressed again until Something Rotten (book # 4). I understand that this structuring of the story is supposed to keep the series alive, but it makes for a rather unsatisfying reading experience, especially so when most of the book just feels like a filler until the next installment.

What adds to my disappointment with the book is that Fforde changed some of the characters, and it is not clear if this was by design so it fits with the amended backstory (view spoiler), or whether the continuity errors are simply because neither author nor editor could be bothered.

For example, we have Stig's attitude towards chimera's described as follows:

'Don't move,' said Stig in a low rumble, 'we don't want to hurt it.' He never did. Stig saw any renegade unextinctee as something akin to family, and always caught them alive, if possible. On the other hand, chimera's, a hotchpotch of the hobby sequencer's art, were another matter – he dispatched them without mercy, and without pain.

However, one of the most poignant scenes of the previous book, describes Stig as far more complex and contradicts the statement that Stig did not care for chimera:

The Neanderthal moved closer and held the creature's grubby hand as its life ebbed away. 'Sometimes,' said

the Neanderthal softly, 'sometimes, the innocent must suffer.'

[...]

'Every time we do this it's like killing one of our own,' said Stiggins softly.

This is only one example of the changes, but a poignant one. Others would provide spoilers for the previous books, but suffice it to say that Thursday's attitude towards Pickwick and other characters is far from what I would expect from the Thursday of books #1 through #4.

I got the impression that by one of the plot twists, Fforde tried to explain some of the break with the previous books by justifying the existence of books #1 through #4, but he does it in such a convoluted way, that it makes it difficult to follow.

"I wanted the series to be a thought-provoking romp around literature; books for people who like stories or stories for people who like books. It wasn't to be. The first four in the series had been less light-hearted chroniclings of my adventures and more 'Dirty Harry meets Fanny Hill', but with a good deal more sex and violence."

It also does not answer the more fundamental question of why he includes this plot twist in the first place. Again, the plotting of this book just really did not work for me. Nor did some of the characters, especially Thursday1-4. The break with the previous books just does not work, and there is not enough explanation of why Thursday1-4 is the way she is. The whole concept of each version of Thursday being a part of each other version just does not work if each version is not given the capability to act like another version. Fforde tried to do it, but not convincingly - a case of too little too late.

Which leaves me with the one redeeming point of the book: the writing. As much as the plot and characters irked me, it is difficult to put a Thursday book down. The story may be convoluted and the characters confused, but in the end, Fforde's imaginative plea for the celebration of literature and his expressions of love for the written and spoken word are nothing but awesome:

The book may be the delivery medium but what we're actually peddling here is story. Humans like stories. Humans need stories. Stories are good. Stories work. Story clarifies and captures the essence of the human spirit. Story, in all its forms – of life, of love, of knowledge – has marked the upward surge of mankind. And story, you mark my words, will be with the last human to draw breath, and we should be there, supporting that one last person.

Jack says

Thursday's back, in the first installment of her second four-book series; how I'd missed her.

Familiar ground is less familiar than I might have expected. It's 14 years later, SpecOps has been disbanded, and Thursday is working at a carpet company while England's love of reading (so prominent and charming in the world of the first series) has plummeted so far that bookstores no longer sell books and reality TV has resorted to titles like *Samaritan Kidney Swap*. It takes a couple of chapters for one to get a footing.

All the old characters make an appearance, though, albeit usually brief ones, and the new characters (in particular, Thursday's kids) are engaging. Probably the ones with the most page-time are still Thursday... but the fictional Thursdays from the books written based on her experiences. This, you might imagine, gets even more meta than usual, as Thursday in the Bookworld mucks about with the first four books we've already read (and one we haven't).

As usual, the plot threads are myriad. The main plot involves a drastic plan to raise Outlander reading rates by turning the classics into interactive reality TV, but there are also bits about Felix8's return, Aornis's imprisonment, the evaluation and training of potential new Jurisfiction agents, and a really dangerous cheese.

Still, it's not my favorite Thursday book by a long shot. For one thing, it feels rushed (as it probably should, since it was written in seven months), which might explain why the Hodder first edition is missing all footnotes; in another book, that might not necessarily be a real problem, narrative-wise, but when Next communicates with Bookworld inhabitants via footnoterphone, we're literally missing half the conversation. For another, the dangling plot points feel more dangly than in previous books, probably because Fforde knows he has three more books in which to tie them to something, but it does hurt the novel's feel as a finished work unto itself.

Overall, I enjoyed it, but it's clearly not Fforde's best. And now that he's apparently committed to Thursday for his next three novels, I find myself craving another Nursery Crime book.

Megan Baxter says

I have to say, I still enjoy these. I don't know that they are as shiny and new as when Jasper Fforde was a discovery, but I do enjoy them. I felt like the one before this was a bit muddy, if I remember correctly (it was a while ago), but First Among Sequels is a thoroughly fun addition to the Thursday Next series. I really never get tired of Fforde's voice. That's what it comes down to, in the end.

Note: The rest of this review has been withdrawn due to the changes in Goodreads policy and enforcement. You can read why I came to this decision [here](#).

In the meantime, you can read the entire review at [Smorgasbook](#)

K. says

[The whole Jenny-is-a-mindworm thing. It's so monumentally cruel and yet incredibly repetitive at the same time. (hide spoiler)]

Rachel C. says

Maybe it's because I haven't seen Thursday Next in a long time, but I really enjoyed this book!

I loved the scenes with her family - seeing son Friday as a grunty teenager whose only interest is playing guitar for his garage band, The Gobshites. (His parents are worried because he's slated to save the world 756 times, but is already three years behind schedule on his ChronoGuard career.) The scene about Thursday's daughter Jenny almost made me cry.

The plot is intricate and hard to follow, but if you just go with it in a down-the-rabbit-hole kind of way, it's quite a ride. That Thursday has her own fictional self (Thursday5 from "The Great Samuel Pepys Fiasco") as a cadet trainee is awesome.

I still think "Eyre Affair" stands alone at the pinnacle of Fforde's work, but I was glad to be once again immersed in Thursday Next's world. Fforde just plain loves books and it's infectious.

Some favorite passages below:

A "dirty" bomb:

It's a tightly packed mass of inappropriate plot devices, explicit suggestions and sexual scenes of an expressly gratuitous nature. The 'dirty' elements of the bomb fly apart at a preset time and attach themselves to any unshielded prose. Given the target, it has the potential for untold damage. A well-placed dirty bomb could scatter poorly described fornication all across drab theological debate or drop a wholly unwarranted scene of a sexually exploitative nature right into the middle of 'Mrs. Dalloway.'

A strong cheese:

Machynlleth Wedi Marw... It'll bring you up in a rash just by looking at it. Denser than enriched plutonium, two grams can season enough macaroni and cheese for eight hundred men. The smell alone will corrode iron. A concentration of only seventeen parts per million will bring on nausea and unconsciousness within twenty seconds. Our chief taster ate a half ounce by accident and was dead to the world for six hours. Open only out of doors, and even then only with a doctor's certificate and well away from populated areas. It's not really a cheese for eating - it's more for encasing in concrete and dumping in the ocean a long way from civilization.

Schrodinger's Night Fever principle:

F: "It's simple. If you go to see 'Saturday Night Fever' expecting it to be good, it's a corker. However, if you go expecting it to be a crock of shit, it's that, too. Thus 'Saturday Night Fever' can exist in two mutually opposing states at the very same time, yet only by the weight of our expectations. From this principle we can deduce that any opposing states can be governed by human expectation - even, as in the case of retro-deficit-engineering, the present use of a future technology."

L: "I think I understand that. Does it work with any John Travolta movie?"

F: "Only the artistically ambiguous ones such as 'Pulp Fiction' or 'Face/Off.' 'Battlefield Earth' doesn't work, because it's a stinker no matter how much you think you're going to like it, and 'Get Shorty' doesn't work either, because you'd be hard-pressed not to enjoy it, irrespective of any preconceived notions."

Esther says

Actually, more like 1.5 stars -- somewhere between "didn't like it" and "OK". I certainly didn't hate it, but I didn't derive much pleasure from reading it, either.

While I enjoyed the prior four books in this series, this one fell short. Much of the cleverness that made Fforde's other books so delightful has been sucked out of this book.

The "that that that that" bit in Well of Lost Plots was a bit of brilliance. This book's brilliance, unfortunately, has been reduced to something comparable to an old, buzzing, fluorescent tube; it's just kind of dreary.

If you were to pick up this book without having read the prior ones in the series, you'd be really lost. If you are a Fforde junkie, and have read all his prior Thursday Next books and need a fix, well, go ahead and read it. The joy of connecting with your favorite characters may be enough to carry you through. But really, that's where the joy is in this book -- derived from the prior ones in the series. This is certainly not a stand-alone book. And from the number of loose ends left hanging at the end, I'm supposing there are more coming.

Stephen Richter says

Thursday Next is now in her 40s, has a slacker son named Wednesday who sleeps until noon is and is suppose to save the world in the future. Plus she is tasked to train Thursday 5 and Thursday 1-4, literary versions of herself all the while working for Acme Carpet Company, now a cover for Spec Ops. Jasper Fforde once again invents a wild tale of the literary world.
