



# Conditioned Response

*Marjorie F. Baldwin*

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## **Conditioned Response** Marjorie F. Baldwin

A fast-paced, Classic SciFi that reads more like a mystery with a Romantic SF thread woven in. Set in the far-future on an alien world, humanity's last remnants are trying to save the species from extinction. Huxley-ian eugenics in a Classic Dystopian caste system are artfully blended with an Asimov-ian "machine-turned-man" story by first-time Author Marjorie F. Baldwin.

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Shayla didn't ask to be a Councillor. As a Phoenician, she shouldn't have to live among the humans, let alone take part in their world. But the Seven Chiefs ordered her to go with Raif, a Proctor from the world Outside. They said they had a Plan. Well, the Seven Chiefs always had a Plan, and Shayla had plans of her own after suffering 13 years as a member of the humans' World Council.

Raif had never intended for things to go this far. A few months, maybe a year, and he could send the little Phoenician girl home again, back where she belonged. She's not a little girl anymore and now he finds himself in competition with his own progenitor for control over his Heir--and future. It's not a Councillor's job to protect a Proctor but that's just what Raif needs right now. Can Shayla save him before he loses his mind completely?

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Baldwin hooks you into her world so deeply, you'll wonder if you've been Adjusted yourself! You'll think about this book even when you're not reading it. You'll wonder if that was her Plan all along. The only bad thing to say about this book is that it ends, but it's a series book so at least the story will continue--or will it?

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Goodreads members voted this Sexy SciFi Thriller:

#1 Beach Read for 2012

#1 Hottest SciFi

#1 Human Male (non-human female) Mates

#2 Best Indie Book to Read in 2012

#3 Best Dystopian Original

#7 Best Second Chance Romance

#8 Best Social Science Fiction

#18 Best Artificial Intelligence Book

#19 Science Fiction by a Female Author

((Rankings may have changed by the time you see this. For current rankings [click here](#)))

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(This book contains strong language, explicit sexual situations and some graphic violence; therefore, it may not be suitable for all audiences.)

## Conditioned Response Details

Date : Published April 20th 2012 by Phoenician Books (first published April 2012)

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Author : Marjorie F. Baldwin

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# From Reader Review Conditioned Response for online ebook

## Kerry says

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## Cassie McCown says

I have had the immense pleasure of working with Friday on this lovely novel. She swears it is cursed, but I say great things come to those who... toil... endure... a lot... I know she has been looking forward to the release of Conditioned Response for a very, very long time, and I am happy to be a part of the process.

I'm not much for reading the same book more than once. I do it occasionally for some of my favorites, and I obviously have to read what I edit or proofread more than once, but Conditioned Response is something that can definitely be read again and again.

This is a long novel, which is common for a lot of sci-fi or epic fantasies and the like, but you never really feel like it is taking a long time. You get so absorbed in the story, in the lives of these characters, that you can't do anything but hang on every word and eagerly turn every page wanting even more. At the end, 230,000 words in, I was STILL sad it was over.

Every character is fleshed out so well, even the more minor characters. There is so much depth to each one of them and they each have their own story, sometimes only briefly touched, but you get to know every one of them in some way. This is very hard for an author to do, and Friday does an amazing job.

This is one of the most intriguing, action-packed, and emotionally charged novels I have read in a long time. I was sympathetic. I was angry. I laughed, a lot. I cried, quite a bit. I dreamt about the story. I thought about the characters even when I was not reading. I was hooked. What more can you ask out of a book—a piece of literary art?? Anything that can make you feel—anything—is a success. And Friday has a huge success on her hands. I wish her the very best with this and all of her writing endeavors.

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## Joshua Jacobs says

From page one, the tension mounts as we follow Shayla, a Phoenician woman forced to live amongst the unreasonable human race, through a web of deceit and mystery. Despite this novel's length, Baldwin will have readers gripping their seats as the story unfolds. There's plenty of mystery to keep the pages turning, and just when one issue appears resolved, another one pops up. The twists and turns will leave readers guessing until the last page.

Within just a few pages, Baldwin creates a vivid, complex world filled with political corruption. While the transition into this world is a bit overwhelming at first, Baldwin deftly sprinkles details throughout the opening pages to help her readers along. Without having read the first book in this series, I felt at times like a twelve-year-old in a college lecture hall trying to absorb all of the information, but ultimately, there was

enough intrigue in the opening chapters to keep me wanting more.

At first, I was also concerned that the humans were being portrayed as the enemy, but Baldwin's ability to not only make us root for Shayla but to accept the Phoenicians as equal is fluid, and by the end, I felt more Phoenician than human. This is largely due to Baldwin's ability to weave a story. The prose is written with a deft hand, compelling the reader to turn the page. Often times I find myself nit-picking published books, rewording sentences for a better flow, but I didn't have this problem with *Conditioned Response*. Baldwin is a skilled writer, and this novel is carefully polished.

Another strength of Baldwin's is her ability to construct dialogue. This is imperative in a novel of this length which at times is heavy on dialogue. Yet when her characters speak it is believable and compelling, quickly moving the novel along. It didn't take long to really know her characters with the level of characterization that fills the pages.

There were, however, a few things that kept me from giving *Conditioned Response* five stars. First, there were times when Baldwin rehashes information that doesn't need to be revisited, which slows the pace. I found myself saying, "I already know this!" from time to time and had to keep myself from skimming these sections.

Along the same lines, I felt Baldwin spoon fed the reader too frequently. At times, we're given too much information that isn't integral to the plot or that is implicit without a lengthy explanation. There didn't feel like enough trust between the author and the reader. Sure, Baldwin doesn't want to lose unperceptive readers who might miss something important, but this isn't a novel for unperceptive readers. I would have been happier had there been a bit more left to my imagination.

Though Baldwin is a master of developing her characters, I never attached myself to any of them. I wanted them to succeed, sure, but the connection was never strong enough to leave a lasting impression. Perhaps a bit more effort in making certain characters more sympathetic might resolve this issue.

On occasion, I also felt there were sections that were a bit too heavy with dialogue. While it is well-written dialogue, there were several large sections with little or no narration. This made me feel like I was on the outside looking in rather than part of the story, and with a novel as complex as *Conditioned Response*, I need to feel like I'm inside the story.

In the end, *Conditioned Response* is a well-written, fast-paced story about a complex world with vividly painted characters that will have readers turning pages until the very end. I highly recommend reading it.

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## **Kelly says**

### Three Stars

For me, "*Conditioned Response*" was a read that was probably hyped up beyond reasonable expectations. Somehow, I wasn't expecting it to be as good as the hype, but I also didn't expect to be so underwhelmed. For an 850 page piece, it is a surprisingly fast read. Perhaps Baldwin's greatest achievement came in one of the least emphasized areas--her creation of the Phoenicians. They were thoroughly original and well thought-out. I would be interested in learning more about their history, culture and language. Unfortunately, her star

Phoenician (Shayla, the main character), was one I utterly failed to either connect with or care about. Baldwin's male characters were a little better, but I didn't cry over anyone's death (was more along the lines of mildly annoyed).

There were hints of really good things, that I just never felt were fully worked out. Her set-up of the world, the history between humanity and the Phoenicians, the way her humanity has adapted when the only way to reproduce is artificial... That being said, I found a very anti-human/anti-value-of-human-life sentiment in the book that, for me, was very off-putting. Whether it's meant to be a theme of the book (particularly the question of an individual's value and the validity of an individual that has been programmed), I just didn't enjoy it. The conclusions that Baldwin's characters seem to come to is that only the highest class has value as an individual and anyone else is pretty much programmed and utterly replaceable. It's not a happy conclusion.

I also had issues understanding the scope of her world. It's an entire planet, but it feels very small and very contained. An epic sci-fi like this shouldn't feel like it all takes place in the same place (unless it actually does). Although I got the impression of traveling all over the continent, it never felt like they went farther than the next city over. There was also no variation presented in the traveling, no variation in the areas that provided depth to the world. It was disappointing.

For characters that were interesting (but I didn't connect to), a narrative that is basically sound (but didn't move me), and occasional glimpses of a fantastic world and race--three stars.

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### **Sadie Forsythe says**

Awesome, just Awesome. I stayed up way too late on multiple night to read it and still would have been happy for more. I just loved the characters' personalities and their interactions. They all had their own little bit of wit that was distinctly different from one another. I did wonder how it was that the bad guys continued to get away with their depravities, since everyone seemed to know about them. But not enough to get huffy about it.

What I loved the most about the story is that Baldwin was willing to let people be unhappy. Don't get me wrong I love a happy ending, but it always feels disingenuous when plots spin like pinwheels to bring one about for everyone involved. Let's face it. Life is hard. People don't always get what they want. They die or are left dissatisfied for a million other reasons. I really appreciate that Baldwin was willing to allow her characters this slice of reality in their fictional world. I'm not saying no-one leaves the last page of *Conditioned Response* happy, just that I liked the balance.

Baldwin is, quite frankly, the kind of writer that leaves other feeling inadequate. She is definitely playing with the big boys. I would happily compare her to Asimov, Huxley or Heinlein. Not only was it clear and easy to understand, it never felt forced and always managed to find the right tone for the scene. I am in awe...and I'm not really one to fawn over people. I just can't wait to read the rest.

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### **Vered says**

Earthlings have abandoned Earth and settled on a planet inhabited by a humanoid species, the Phoenicians.

The two species generally do not interact; the results are usually tragic when they do. There is one exception: Shayla has lived with the humans for half her life, and it hasn't been the happy part either. Human society has developed a rigid caste system, one that Shayla abhors. Her closest assistant, Raif, is part of a group who are viewed as disposable lesser being, to be used as their employers wish.

Conditioned Response is the 2nd book in the series by Marjorie F. Baldwin. Unfortunately, #1 is not out yet. So the first couple chapters were a catch-up on what I assume would be included in #1. Because of that, and the fact that I haven't read a classic SciFi book in ages, I found the first few chapters a bit off-setting (just warning you here). Plus I personally like tighter dialogues, while Baldwin's style includes some lengthy conversations. But once the introductions were done and I got into the style, the book began to pick up. The interactions and unfolding histories of the characters were intriguing. I fell in love with Raif who was, to me, the one who really stood out as a deep and admirable person. There were several interwoven stories and mysteries and about half way through the book, these began to take off and kept me hooked. If you're looking for spaceships and adrenalin action on every page, this is not your book. (However, the last third of the book was definitely fast action, not to mention an emotional rollercoaster). If however you like the more classical SciFi stories that analyse social issues through futuristic eyes and require a sharp mind to keep up with the details, then this might be the book for you. I'm certainly intrigued to read more in this series.

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### **Stephen St. Onge says**

Middle books of series frequently drag. Marjorie F. Baldwin has overcome that problem the way the way George Lucas did in my Star Wars: start in the middle and work out in all directions. But Baldwin is doing it more effectively than Lucas did.

Conditioned Response, the second book of the Phoenician series (Book 1 is forthcoming), throws us into the world of Shayla, a non-human woman living among the human colonists of the planet Altair . . . or is she non-human? One of the main features of this novel is that the reader is left to figure out what's going on by putting together clues that are scattered throughout. To take two examples, the humans can't leave the planet and go back to Earth, though why they can't isn't yet explained, and the Phoenicians are so thoroughly human in most ways that it seems likely that they're an offshoot from homo sapiens -- but when the separation occurred, if it did occur, is something Baldwin isn't telling us yet.

Shayla has been living among the humans for thirteen years, an unwilling mole sent among them as a teenager by the rulers of the Phoenicians, the Seven Chiefs. The Chiefs have a Plan for dealing with the humans, but they haven't told Shayla what the Plan is. Shayla has her own Plans: to overthrow the World Council, the human ruling group she's become a part of, and to leave human society with 'Charlie', and artificial life form she's been secretly and illegally creating. But Shayla also has to deal with the machinations of Councillors Dramond and Kindi, a pair of thoroughly evil men she's had many unpleasant encounters with. They have Plans of their own. She also has ongoing personal relationships with Raif, a "Proctor" (bodyguard) who's in love with her; Brennan, his illegally cloned heir; Kyree, her Phoenician Mate that she seldom sees; and Julia, her human friend, fellow Councillor, and revolutionary co-conspirator. Lurking in the background is Joshua Andrew Caine, secretive Administrator for the Council, and a mysterious group known as "the Community," who have their own secret plans and hidden resources.

Over the course of about two weeks, events play out. Baldwin constantly surprises us as her characters interact, and as layers of are peeled away to show us some of what's really going on. The characters are

well-drawn and believable, and the plot hangs together. The pace is relentless, the events believable.

By the end of the novel, some parts of Shayla's story have been resolved, but plenty remains for book #3, and much of Shayla's backstory is set to be revealed in book #1.

Conditioned Response gripped me hard from the beginning, provided a thoroughly satisfying read, and left me eager for the rest of the series. Considering this is Baldwin's first novel, I'm quite impressed. Check it out.

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### **Paul Dube says**

There is only one other author who has left me left me wanting more when I finished a book. Tom Clancy. I did not want to stop reading this story. I can hardly wait for the prequel & sequel.

Quite often, a novel has too little, or too much action. The pace of CR is perfect... enough to keep you in its grip without overwhelming the reader.

In addition, Friday's sex scene writing is another fine balancing act of titillation without being vulgar.

I have never re-read any other author. period. But this book make it easy. I read it 5 times while it was in progress and will be reading it again soon. Unheard of in my >50 years of reading...

Masterful work.

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### **Jonathan Terrington says**

Disclaimer: Read for free, provided I left an honest review

A gritty science fiction novel of this calibre is normally not my type of reading. I cannot normally bring myself to enjoy them, let alone read them. But for Conditioned Response, the second ebook in a planned series, I can make an exception.

Despite the sexuality of the book (which thankfully was not forced and too explicit like some authors) I found I could like this novel enough by the end. However the reason I cannot give this four stars goes beyond the simple sexuality and swearing. I can ignore those in a novel if the rest of the book grips me incredibly hard (they're minor pet peeves so to speak). However I was not gripped by the novel until the second half which could be me personally.

Conditioned Response was certainly set in an intriguing world. A world where a woman from a race of beings known as the Phoenicians struggles to work for her people in a human run civilisation. This is a civilisation where men appear to be sterile and where humans called Proctors are strung together out of genetic material from various donors. There also existed various methods of brainwashing or Adjusting which created a layer of intrigue again to add to the political intrigue. The Phoenicians had interesting powers as a race with the ability to harness energy and throw it out in front of them if they wish.

Despite this interesting world the plot lagged for me at the start. I found that it was only when I was about halfway into the novel that it picked up the pace and that the true action elements which I enjoyed begun.



That was when I could read about Phoenician powers in action. I think the fact that this novel was highly dialogue run rather than description run also made me less able to appreciate it. While I do not mind long periods of dialogue I do love long paragraphs of descriptive work more and there appeared to be more dialogue than description. That is not taking anything away from the storytelling or writing because the writing was excellent and the entire plot was nicely constructed. I just could not enjoy the book on my own personal level and gain most satisfaction from it.

The characters were interesting but not entirely likeable. Raif was ruined for me by what was a necessary obsession in the plot (view spoiler). Shayla also was far too naive and self centred to be entirely likeable. Still the characters did fit the story and surroundings, again a sign of quality writing in my opinion. It was simply not my preferred story type as I mentioned above. I do however congratulate the author for making a gritty sci-fi that I could actually enjoy to some level.

In summary I do fully recommend this e-book for any of my followers interested in a gritty, action filled sci-fi. It may not be to everyone's style but those who like this type of sci fi will find that it is a quality novel. The author sets out to write a particular book and she succeeds (in one of the better 'debut' novels I have read may I add). Not to mention that there are very few who have read it and as such you can be free to form your own opinion about it. I highly recommend this and feel that it should be read by those who enjoy their science fiction with a touch of smoulder and grit.

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### **Darlene says**

This felt Heinleinish! I love this kind of speculative science. Other worldly, alien beings=Earthlings, not the indigenous. The problems of two brains in one head. And Ms. Baldwin is brave enough to show love comes in many ways. There is intrigue which made this a bad book for bedtime as I couldn't put it down. I must admit it was slow starting but the set-up was needed. As opposed to other second books, this one could be a read alone, or out of order, as everything is explained without being bogged down in details.

I took my time with this book mostly due to my health. But had I been feeling great I think it would have been a book that would take a couple days.

The characters were well developed, except when they weren't. ;) When adult people can be reproduced they take a while to come into their own skin. The plot kept me wondering, how will they do this? Why is he/she acting like this? Can we really trust this guy? Or why doesn't she trust him? It just keeps you guessing. I loved it!

This was a free for review from the author. But had I bought it I would have said all I said above. It is my kind of book! Oh, and I love the afterwords, all of them. Thanks for sharing that much about the making of/writing of Friday and her works and playlist!

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### **Ellie Hall says**

**REVIEW: Conditioned Response** (Phoenician #2)  
by Marjorie F. Baldwin

*Shayla didn't ask to be a Councillor. As a Phoenician, she shouldn't have to live among the humans, let alone take part in their world. But the Seven Chiefs ordered her to go with Raif, a Proctor from the world Outside. They said they had a Plan. Well, the Seven Chiefs always had a Plan, and Shayla had plans of her own after suffering 13 years as a member of the humans' World Council.*

*Raif had never intended for things to go this far. A few months, maybe a year, and he could send the little Phoenician girl home again, back where she belonged. She's not a little girl anymore and now he finds himself in competition with his own progenitor for control over his Heir--and future. It's not a Councillor's job to protect a Proctor but that's just what Raif needs right now. Can Shayla save him before he loses his mind completely?*

*A fast-paced, Classic SciFi that reads more like a mystery with a Romantic SF thread woven in. Set in the far-future on an alien world, humanity's last remnants are trying to save the species from extinction. Huxleyian eugenics in a Classic Dystopian caste system are artfully blended with an Asimov-ian "machine-turned-man" story by first-time Author Marjorie F. Baldwin.*

*Conditioned Response* was not an easy book to review. As is my practice, once I had my own thoughts and feelings outlined I went back through the reviews others had provided. What I found pinpointed exactly the problem I needed to define in order to explain the difficulty I was having.

Many of the reviewers had loved this book and for good reason. Those who enjoy a detailed social Sci-Fi in the old tradition, where complex societies are presented and peopled by solid, complicated personalities, have found one of the best examples written recently. *Conditioned Response* is multi-layered, weaving together a number of intriguing social, personal, and political mysteries into a fast paced thriller.

The representation of this future human colony and its imperialistic disdain for the powerful indigenous people rings as true as any page of history. Caste discrimination, human trafficking, genetic regulation, sexual intimidation and violence, power-at-all-cost-manipulation of men and minds – all these things seem to rise from an inevitability we recognize in the societies we share today. And on that base the story, or more rightly stories, are masterfully built.

So, you wonder, if it was all so very good, what caused the difficulty in trying to find a fitting rating for the book. Like those who rated the story much lower, aspects I value very highly in a book were not strong, or were missing entirely.

To begin with, I found the story slow to start. That is necessary to some degree in any very complex world where many characters have to be introduced and understood in context, but I found that I was a third of the way in before things really started to move. We had not travelled further than Shayla's office or lab, and all that time was spent in dense slabs of repetitive dialogue. That tendency for the characters to launch into paragraph after paragraph of oration was tightened as the book progressed, but I found it tough going for some time. Nothing *happened* to break the weight of the initial narrative dump.

And the thing which I missed most was a deep emotional connection to any of the characters. These people had suffered and went on to suffer great traumas and violence, and yet, the reader is held at a distance. There is no feeling of experiencing the horror from within, no sharing of the pain with the main characters. No immediacy.

As an example, [difficult to find without some sort of spoiler attached] early in the story we learn that as a

very young woman, an alien child alone in a strange human society, Shayla was brutally raped by her fellow Councillor. When the event is first mentioned, Shayla herself dismisses the memory as if it was bad, but not something she chose to dwell on. Shortly after, Raif describes the terrible injuries Shayla had suffered when he first met her. These injuries were the result of the rape, and included a broken pelvis.

Now this is horrendous. This is the rape of a defenseless child, alone and attacked by someone who should have been her protector. And yet the events are narrated as if they are simply part of a distant history; we hear nothing of the anguish. None of the terror or the pain, none of the trauma this woman had survived – which any empathic reader can imagine – is brought forward with force by the author. This kind of distance left me with a coolness toward all of the main characters that I would like to have had heated.

What I deduce from this is that enjoyment depends on the expectation of the reader when they pick up a copy of *Conditioned Response* to read. Those who want Sci-Fi that does not depend on Michael-Bay-bangs and special-effect diversions will love the dense plotting and careful world-building. Those who want to feel deep connection with the characters themselves, and prefer the romantic/erotic threads of a fantastic storyline are more likely to be disappointed.

All up, I am happy to give **FOUR STARS**, because while allowing for where Marjorie F Baldwin was not strong, what she does do well, she does very well indeed.

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### Tricia Kristufek says

*There's always a Plan.*

The World Council is corrupt, but Shayla has a plan for that. After 13 years living with the humans as the only Phoenician in the Outside, Shayla is making her own plans, instead of defaulting to the Seven Chiefs - who got her into this mess to begin with! At least she has Raif with her, ever caring for and guiding her along. But things are set in motion that she can't control, Shayla must finish what she started - before it's too late.

The story is told by several of the characters, letting the reader get a glimpse of what motivates them and what hides beneath the surface. Hints of past transgressions and future possibilities abound as the Councillor and Proctor try to prepare for anything and everything the humans and Phoenicians can Throw at them.

A gripping tale speckled with war, conspiracy, love and loss, *Conditioned Response* explores the future of humanity as they interact with the Phoenicians, trying to live together on the Phoenician planet in peace. With advanced technology and mind-tampering, AI's and repros, *Conditioned Response* is a must-read for sci-fi lovers.

**\*\*Note:** I was part of the editorial team that worked on this book. Because of this, there is no rating, since it would be biased.

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### Mei says

WOW!!!!

What an incredible book!

It's been a while that I've read such an interesting SF. Everything inside will stimulate your brain: the culture is intriguing, the characters are great, the idea is fantastic. Also the writing is good - you'll follow and live everything through the characters action and thoughts.

The main(s) character(s) is a girl, Shayla (and I use "girl" on purpose) even if she's 26 years old. Then there're the male characters: Raif, Brennan, Kyree, Joshua, the Seven Chiefs... you'll get to know them all throughout the book. And you'll cry for them as I did.

If you loved Asimov and Heinlein you'll love it!

Read this book, you'll not regret it!

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### **Jane Doe says**

Amazing story! Characters are wonderfully fleshed out, you get a feeling of really knowing them or wanting to know more, because they are so interesting.

This is a super fast paced story with everything falling into place in a well thought out way, drawing you in from start to finish.

Can't wait to learn more about the history of the Phoenicians.

So glad to have found this author/story on one of the threads I follow. I will definitely be reading more by this author.

There's always a plan...many with adjustments.

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### **Mary says**

Phoenicians co-existing with humans

The relationship between the Phoenicians and humans for 400 years is the story behind Conditioned Response. The Phoenicians, or humanoids, obtained power to store and project energy and used that to control life on their planet. When humans left Earth and lived on the Phoenicians planet, it wasn't the best of circumstances to say the least.

The main character, Shayla, is a Phoenician who lived against her will with humans for thirteen years. She and fellow members of a Council wanted to start a revolution and overthrow the society. Which society would that have been for Shayla, the Phoenicians or the humans?

It is difficult to form an opinion about the Phoenicians and the humans. They both have a caste system where certain people are treated like garbage and both planets are equally politically corrupt.

As the characters are developed, we learned some reasons for their bad behaviors, which helped sway an opinion to like or dislike a character. It helped to understand their background. There are numerous characters, and I would have liked previous knowledge earlier in the book that described them more in depth. I thought a list and a one or two sentence description in the beginning would have been a good idea.

There were many situations with Shayla and her bodyguard, Raif. It involved plenty of sexual tension between the two. This is a must for every good story.

I don't claim to be a sci-fi fan; however, my review may shed light on that very fact. I wasn't sure what to expect from Conditioned Response, but as a story in general, I would have liked an introduction. A set up would have been a helpful aid to the newly sci-fi reader.

The setting seemed like one or two little rooms. There were two planets involved, but never any mention or description to any traveling that took place.

The story did have lots of twists and turns, mysteries, unusual experiences, and sexual innuendo. It is also a story you can think about and I imagine it could be a discussion starter for how we treat society today.

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