



The Age of the Pussyfoot

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Technical writer and volunteer fireman Charles Forrester died at age 37. But his insurance covered freezing in liquid nitrogen against the possibility of someday being thawed, repaired, and returned to life. Which is how he woke up in 2527, with a quarter of a million dollars coming to him from the same insurance policy. Not that he was rich—he was quickly informed that two million was a bare subsistence income. He needed a job, and quick. While looking, he somehow unintentionally insulted a man who took out a license to injure or kill him, attracted the attention of a woman who wanted to begin a relationship, said relationship being very unlike anything Forrester had heard of in his time—and he found a job. However, his employer was an alien, one of a group being held captive on Earth to keep them from getting home and giving the location of Earth to a civilization which might be hostile. And that was when things really became interesting.

The Age of the Pussyfoot Details

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Author : Frederik Pohl

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From Reader Review The Age of the Pussyfoot for online ebook

Rachel Adiyah says

This is like the idiot's version of "Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy", although in a temporal sense. The protagonist, Forrester, was killed while on duty as a volunteer fireman in 1969. For some bizarre reason the fire company agrees to pay to put him in liquid helium and attach some money to his name. After 600 years the money grows to the point where it pays for his revival and healing. He thinks he's rich because he has \$250K, and he makes the mistake of stepping on the foot of a Martian, who grew up in only 1/3 Earth's gravity and thus doesn't have strong bones. The Martian files for a license to hunt him, and goes chasing him around. He gets a girlfriend who thinks he's an idiot, and all of these "wacky" things happen. I mean, hey man, it's the future!

I got to page 75 and I abruptly realized that I couldn't read another stupid page, I couldn't stand another dumba\$\$ "shenanigan", and that I hated this book. It's supposed to be a satire on late 1960's culture, I believe (I conferred with my Baby Boomer mother at length about this and the value of money in that time during which it was written and published). If it didn't belong to the library I'd throw it out the window. Don't bother, really. Read a better book.

Manny says

He wakes up after having been frozen for two hundred years, and has to get used to 23rd century society. The acclimatization isn't all straightforward. They fix him up with a job, and he asks what his salary is going to be.

"A bit over two million dollars a week," they tell him. He's pleased! "Oh no," they say, concerned, "that's rock-bottom minimum. You simply can't get by on less than two million."

As you can see, a logical projection of current trends in Western society...

Bryan says

Want me to define disjointedness with an example? Look at the cover of the Del Rey edition of this novel... And now flip open to the introduction where Pohl writes how he is hopeful that this novel might be read by the general public at large (not just SF fans). And back to the cover again which features a many-tentacled alien in a spaceship.

But despite the fact that publishers didn't expect this book to appeal to the mainstream, Pohl certainly hoped it might.

The book scores early when the protagonist wakes up in the far future after having been frozen for centuries

to find out that his investments are now worth millions. After a bit of partying he learns that weekly subsistence wages are measured in millions...

The reader has to remember that Pohl was writing this more than 40 years ago, and he gets a lot of it right. As a satire, it's not cutting-edge anymore. But it's a nice reminder of where we've come from in the recent past, and just how much society and technology have changed in a few decades.

4 stars - a fun read, written by a consummately capable author.

Patty says

I love Frederik Pohl. His insights amaze me. I didn't love this as much as Gateway and his entire Heechee Saga series of books, but I liked it a lot. This is a quick read and an interesting point of view of what he thought 2008 would look like, from a 1968 perspective. While he set the book in the year 2527, in the afterward he said he actually thought we were about 50 years away from this "future." He wrote the book in 1968, and he got a great deal right about where we are today. Impressive!

Nick Heyns says

Loved it, mind spinning ideas. Only book that I read that predicted how crazy people of the future will be about their cell phones. He called them "Joymakers" and people could not live without them. All other Science Fiction books were talking about moon bases and holidays on Mars. Frederik Pohl actually scored a hole in one with this prediction. I read his other books, whenever I can find them, with great interest because of this story.

Ushan says

A technical writer and volunteer fireman dies in 1969, is frozen, and is revived in 2512. He has various adventures, and gets involved with the Sirians (sic - not Syrians!) who are at war with Earthlings. In 2512 there is a device called the joymaker, which is an AI-equipped cell phone that can stimulate its owner's nervous system directly; it does not appear as fantastic in the age of USB-powered vibrators and electric shock-giving Xbox mods, as it did in 1969.

pinknantucket says

I liked it, but maybe not quite as much as I liked other books I've given a ranking of "I liked it". "I liked it" is a broad category and of course you can like books for all sorts of reasons. Still, I'd be interested to read more by Frederick Pohl. The main character (Forrester) was a bit annoying as he wouldn't just shut up and read the instruction manual to his new life, but then I haven't woken up hundreds of years into the future after suffering a terrible accident like he has so I shouldn't criticise. Still I suppose a sequence of social and economic embarrassments IS the better storytelling device to reveal a society of the future.

NB I'm trying to pay attention to how cultural heritage is portrayed in science fiction, there was a museum in this one that sounded exactly like a museum from the 1960s which even now seems incongruous.

My copy: given to me by a friend, yayyy thank you!

Adam says

This was a fun book, though very short - I mostly read it all in one sitting (OK, a very long bus ride). I didn't know what to expect from this book, but the cover is no indication, that's for sure. This book had a pretty unique setting and plot - being a man transported 500 years to the future into a society that doesn't really fear death (because they can be easily resurrected), and they're consumed with luxuries but can still have a hard time affording them, and there's a backdrop of the potentially imminent invasion of an alien species. I'm sure that each of these elements have appeared in books I've read before, but lumping them all together and with their particular nuances - well, it really created an impressive and believable setting that was unlike any one thing I've read before. The characters were a bit caricatured, but not overdone like Heinlein, rather just the right amount to make them fun and relatable but still mostly believable. The plot had several different main threads (just like the setting has several different pivot points), some appearing very weighty and some less weighty, and that kept it interesting and entertaining the whole time without ever really being sure what was going to happen, or without even really knowing which plot thread was the most significant. Honestly, with all the different aspects of the book, I felt like it could've easily been much longer and dived more into this unique and fascinating world that he'd created. Nonetheless, it did end satisfactorily and tie up pretty much all the loose ends.

I came into this book not knowing what to expect, but knowing that Pohl is a great author because of his *Gateway* series. However, this was somehow still not exactly what I expected. The tone was significantly lighter than "*Gateway*", but different aspects of the book also echoed many other books I've read. The time skip and radical social change often made me think of "*The Forever War*" by Haldeman. There was a significant section towards the end that really made me think of "*Crime and Punishment*"-lite. But then he also had his own thing, such as the "joymaker". Excluding its pharmaceutical abilities, it's incredible how well Pohl predicted networked computing with individual miniaturized devices (i.e. smartphones) - and this some 50 years ago when computing itself was still in its infancy. As a whole it was a very enjoyable book with many different positive influences and a fairly unique setting and plot. I definitely recommend it to most sci-fi fans.

Scott says

Where would Science Fiction be without cryogenics, hypersleep and sundry other technological ways of re-imagining the *Rip Van Winkle* story? The useful trope that is Freezing (and reviving) people allows for authors to transplant characters forward in time into unfamiliar environments without having to negotiate the tricky, paradox-minefield of time travel, and this is exactly the underpinning of Frederick Pohl's *The Age of the Pussyfoot*.

Frederick Pohl is deservedly well-regarded in Science Fiction. *Gateway* is genuine SF classic up there with Niven's *Ringworld* in its combination of solid story and great ideas. Unfortunately *Pussyfoot* isn't in this league, and to my jaundiced eye, isn't a particularly strong book, but it's still an entertaining and occasionally

amusing read.

Pohl's central character -Charles Forrester, a former volunteer fireman - awakens from cryogenic sleep in the 26th century. Frozen after being horribly injured on the job he has been brought back to life in an era where technology has finally reached a level high enough to rejuvenate his broken body.

So far, so standard cryogenics story, but more interestingly, in the ultra capitalist future people like Forrester aren't revived unless their assets have appreciated to the point that they can pay for their own revival. Forrester has accumulated cast riches in his half-millennium in the freezer and is left with 250,000 dollars after his revival, an amount he believes will set him up for life (this is one of the amusing 1970s tells in *Pussyfoot* - If I woke up in five hundred years time with nothing but 250k I wouldn't be ecstatic - a quarter of a mill won't even pay for an apartment in 2017 Melbourne, let alone make you rich).

Of course Forrester's windfall turns out to be a few weeks spending money and what follows is a sometimes amusing fish-out-of-water tale as Forrester tries to reconcile his conservative 1970's mindset and technologically stone-age skills with the 26th Century world. Using a 'joymaker' a combined smart-phone/drug-dispenser he learns about the strange, liberated world he lives in and eventually about an interstellar conflict between humanity and the Sirians- a race that humans have attacked without provocation and eight of whose members they keep prisoner on Earth. Naturally, Forrester becomes entangled with this conflict, with consequences for both himself and humanity as a whole.

Pussyfoot is a quick read, and it's quite entertaining.

Forrester's archaic 20th century manners give rise to a number of social faux-pas, one of which sees him being hunted down and killed for fun by a group of Martians (Being killed isn't such a big deal when you can be revived the same day), and he is constantly offending people by accident and getting himself into tricky situations.

There are some nicely prescient elements to this story - for example, Forrester is constantly besieged by messages on his joymaker that he either can't or won't find time to read, much like the plague of pointless emails that we all deal with in 2017. However, he often feels deliberately obtuse in the manner of his being unable to fit in. He constantly ignores advice, even when his track record of doing so has gotten him kicked to death, and his bloody-minded ignorance grated on me.

There is satire here- the world of the future seems as stratified as our own world, and the homeless/poor are occasionally hunted for sport by the richer elements of their society. The people of the future call men from Forrester's era 'kamikazes' due to their rapid and sometimes destructive impulsiveness and decision making, contrasting them with 26th century folk who are eventually shown to be weak, indecisive and soft, lacking the spine of a 1970s guy like Forrester (I imagined him as a seventies cop type, with a big black moustache).

Despite these positives, *Pussyfoot* felt unfinished to me. The ending rushes up and feels tacked on, as though Pohl just wanted to end the story and move on to something else. Furthermore, the conflict with the Sirians is unsatisfying, and to be honest the book had me cheering for them to get revenge on humanity.

In my opinion, *The Unincorporated man* is a much better cryogenic fish-out-of-water story, and a richer satire of an ultra capitalist future. Pohl's *Pussyfoot* is an entertaining and easy read, but it left me feeling unsatisfied.

2.5 stars.

Manuel Antão says

If you're into stuff like this, you can read the full review.

WORLDNET: "The Age of the Pussyfoot" by Frederik Pohl

(Original Review, 1980-12-01)

Egads! We have met the Joymaker and it is us! While my Teleray terminal has not (yet) begun dispensing contraceptives, the rest of the parallel is strikingly clear. It brings up some interesting questions concerning how a WORLDNET will function. With the amount of netmail, messages, informational data and similar niceties flying about this VERY LIMITED POPULATION network, what would a "real" WORLDNET be like?

Ümit Mutlu says

Da??n?k ve anafikirsiz bir roman bence. Neye odaklanaca??n? ?a??rm???. Uzunca bir süre 600 sene sonras?n?n dünyas?n? ve onun farklar?n? anlatmaya çal???rken sonunda alakas?z bir yere kaymaya çabalam??. Pek sevmedim.

Mike Hagerty says

I've never been much of a sci-fi reader. My loss. I wonder what I would have thought of this book in 8th grade, when it was new. I'm sure I would have found it engaging and fun...it's certainly that. But how much of the details would I have dismissed as pure fantasy?

Pohl writes of devices, pharmaceuticals, policies and morality so clearly not of the time he wrote this (1968) that he pushed the setting of his story 500 years into the future...yet a mere 43 years later, a lot of it is already here. Pohl predicts the Internet, the iPhone and more.

It's a short book, an easy afternoon's read...if you can find a copy. Long out of print, this one deserves fresh attention and exposure to a new generation of readers.

Daniel says

Fred Pohl was more an editor than an author in his own right around the time *The Age of the Pussyfoot* was published, but this book shows just what a crackerjack writer he was (and remains!).*

Sticking to a satirical vein he explored with frequent collaborator C.M. Kornbluth in the '50s, Pohl uses the ever convenient plot device of suspended animation to plop a mid-20th century American fire-fighter in the world of the 26th century. What follows is a deftly and breezily (though never vapidly) written picaresque as our man Forrester navigates the treacherous new social and technological landscape.

This ends up becoming a delightful inversion of the pervasive "Mighty Whitey" Good-Ol'-American-Gumption-Saves-The-Day style of adventure and science fiction writing, as Forrester continually shows himself to be not only not up the task of simply living day-to-day, but also so blinded by presumption and arrogance that he takes far too long to consider that he might need to listen to other people to learn how to adjust. Through his befuddled misadventures, we get a kind of tour of a society almost entirely redrawn by technology, most obviously by the technologies of Death Reversal (rendering murder and fights to the death A-OK as long as the murdering party has his insurance and bonds in order) and the ubiquitous networked communicator and pharmacological fabricator, the Joymaker.

The Joymaker is the most famous and striking element of *The Age of the Pussyfoot*, for in it Pohl very much foresaw in the late 1960s a device much like the smartphones of our early 21st century (give it a couple of decades for the on board feel-good-drugs dispenser). Every citizen of the city of Shoggo (our Chicago) and presumably across the country possesses this device, which serves as a personal communicator, calendar and organizer, medical and mood-altering drug dispensor, and networked access point to centralized computational resources (apps on the cloud, essentially!).

As a daily user of an iJoymaker, Forrester's constant dismissal of his Joymaker's attempts to deliver urgent messages (much to his chagrin and detriment) generated a profound anxiety for me! Pohl of course intends his readers to realize just how unwise Forrester is being for ignoring his messages and communications, even while this would have been an entirely understandable approach for a mid 20th century individual unused to being perpetually "reachable". Forrester's dunderheadedness in this regard is even more striking to the early 21st century individual adapted to the world of constant contact than it was for the works contemporary readership.

The Age of the Pussyfoot's plots hums along at a healthy clip, and never slows down for long, but plot is not as important to the work's success as Pohl's phenomenal and well thought-out world-building and his feel for how technology shapes human actions and perceptions. As such a sense (and its capable expression) is one of the essences of successful science fiction, *The Age of the Pussyfoot* earns a place as a fascinating (if not really profound) gem of satirical SF.

*This review was written about a year before Mr. Pohl passed away in September 2013. The "and remains" refers to his blog "The Way the Future Blogs", which is being carried on by his wife Elizabeth Anne Hull with some material he had written that hadn't yet been published.

Denis says

Frederik Pohl's "The Age of the Pussyfoot, (1969 and shorter Magazine version 1965)" is not regarded, or referred to, as are his collaborations with Cyril Kornbluth, such as "The Space Merchants," and his excellent Gateway series, though, perhaps it ought to be as it is also an excellent example of the subtle cynical satire he and Kornbluth are known for.

Often, the genesis of a sf novel comes from an inspiration set off by a new scientific discovery or the development of a new technology. The author might speculate as to how this new item might develop over time; how it will affect society, its customs and culture. Pussyfoot, according to Pohl's biography, the inspiration came from a non-fiction article written by Robert C. W. Ettinger, that came across his desk while he was editing IF magazine in 1964. The article was about an actual proposition of a system of freezing human beings by way of Cryonics so that they might be thawed out at a future date and so on, thus you have this novel.

The most interesting aspect in this case is that forty-five years later, it isn't the idea of Cryonics that stands out, but rather it is another element that was referred to throughout the entire story which he called a "joymaker." This was based on an M.I.T. Project MAC which consisted of "two big IBM 7094's, plus half a dozen or so servant computers, that are available to anyone with a remote-access console in his home or office..." He goes on to explain that it is hooked up through the telephone lines (or perhaps at a future date via radio). He assumed that this bit of technology would eventually be minimized and become portable... Hey, Fred! This is a smart phone!

His characters are entirely dependent on these things and he even shows the unique kind of anxiety and helplessness one would have if his or hers happens to breakdown or get lost.

There are many other interesting social elements to this tightly written novel. A book that perhaps fits better with current time rather than when it was originally written.

João Sousa says

In my opinion Pohl was the weakest link of the well-known collaboration with C. M. Kornbluth, but still I think that this book is quite solid to deserve a read. It has some few psychedelic elements here and there, although sometimes plot develops too quickly with no time for the reader to wander in this chaotic future world.
