



First Shift: Legacy

Hugh Howey

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In 2007, the Center for Automation in Nanobiotech (CAN) outlined the hardware and software platform that would one day allow robots smaller than human cells to make medical diagnoses, conduct repairs, and even self-propagate.

In the same year, the CBS network re-aired a program about the effects of propranolol on sufferers of extreme trauma. A simple pill, it had been discovered, could wipe out the memory of any traumatic event.

At almost the same moment in humanity's broad history, mankind had discovered the means for bringing about its utter downfall. And the ability to forget it ever happened.

First Shift: Legacy Details

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Knitography says

I wanted to like this book more than I did; Wool is a great series and I was excited to jump back into that world. Much as I wanted to love this prequel, it just doesn't stand up to the other stories.

First Shift switches back and forth between two separate timelines. In the immediate future, a junior Congressman and former architecture student named Donald is (largely unwittingly) roped into designing parts of what will become Silo 1. In the more distant future, Troy is the leader of Silo 1, working his first 6 month shift (workers in Silo 1 alternate between 6 month work shifts and longer periods of cryogenic sleep).

The Troy timeline is well done; the author does an excellent job of conveying the confusion, despair, and sense of detachment one could easily imagine a person in Troy's situation would feel. As with the original Wool books (particularly the early ones), Howey adheres to the 'show, don't tell' rule, leaving the reader to slot various puzzle pieces together along the way. If you read the Wool books (and you really should read those before First Shift, or I don't imagine you'll get much out of this one), some nagging questions will be answered in the Troy sections, in a mostly satisfying way.

Unfortunately the Donald sections aren't nearly as well done, and in fact I could have done without them altogether. Without revealing any spoilers, the Donald sections are just less compelling to read, especially when contrasted against the much better Troy sections. The main thrust of the Donald timeline in the book is to explain the apocalypse that lead people to the silos in the first place, but the explanation Howey came up with is weak and unsatisfying. It raises a host of questions, and not the yummy ambiguous kind either - the annoyed 'but that doesn't make any darn sense' kind. The book would be so much better if it had taken place entirely in Troy's timeline and the apocalypse hinted at more aggressively than in the Wool series, but still left to the imagination. The workings of Silo 1 and the effects on it's residents would have provided plenty of material, and been more enjoyable without the dead weight of the Donald sections.

I still recommend that Wool fans read this one, but be prepared to skim through the Donald timeline like I did.

Augie says

I loved Howey's first Wool stories, collected into the Omnibus edition. I gave that book a five-star rating, but this one left me less delighted. The other stories happen in a world of Howey's creation, and it's a leaving and breathing world that (mostly) makes sense. This book, by contrast, happens in our world (or the world of 2049, anyway) and it is full of nonsensical situations. Where the rest of the Wool series seems anchored in reality, this one required several leaps of faith that I was unable to make. It's still beautifully written, and I continue to look forward to Howey's future work, but "First Shift" felt like Howey was trying to shoehorn a prequel story into the world he created with his first Wool tales.

Also, I'll echo what everyone else says about this book, which is to read the Omnibus first BEFORE reading this book, even though "First Shift" is a prequel. (Reading this one first would be like watching the end of the movie "Memento" before seeing the beginning of the film.)

Kaila says

I liked this addition to the *Wool* universe. I was unable to put it down. Once again Mr. Howey draws us in with lifelike characters that emotionally resonate, like this story has already happened and he's just explaining it to us. It's an amazing gift to make the future seem so close. It's gripping and fast paced, but still manages to retain the same poignancy we all loved in the *Wool* series.

We begin in 2049, following around Congressman Donald Keene as he is given a project to design a skyscraper...underground. How exceedingly strange! If only Congressman Keene had been blessed with the omniscience we now possess. His thoughts about the design made it much easier for me to picture the silo as it was meant to be imagined, like how seeing something through an outsider's eyes allows you to appreciate it all the more. The people who lived in Silo 18 never thought the stairs odd because they've been walking up and down them their entire lives. I cracked a smile when Donald said, "What, no elevator? Are you crazy?" I agree Donald! Had you only known what they were planning...

The second half of the story takes place in the year 2110, in Silo 1, following around a fellow named Troy. As far as I can tell he is like a Mayor from any of the other silos: only nominally in charge. I loved getting to know the inner workings of the, up until now, rather sinister Silo 1. Troy's misadventures just broke my heart, especially as we near the ending and realize what is going on. Once again the last few lines have assured that I will be picking up more of the series.

Mr. Howey, I've decided, is absolutely amazing at the small things. I am now convinced this is why his characters feel so alive, because we all have weird quirks or trains of thought, and unless your character does too, why should we believe in them? He describes a game of Solitaire exactly how I've always thought about it but could never put into words. He explains the brushing of a paper medical gown against the skin, and I can feel it because I've had one on too. It is therefore all the more blissfully agonizing as we lose the characters that have come to mean something to us.

But, **but!**, something was missing. I had a really hard time putting my finger on it at first, because if I wanted to keep reading, and it kept me up late because I *really* wanted to finish it, shouldn't it get 5 stars? **The little things is what made this story so imminently readable, but the big, overarching story is what made it lacking.** The explanation of the apocalypse just didn't hold together for me. In *Wool 5* we learn that we were the ones to do it, to push the big red button, and this is where we learn why. The reasoning was rather baffling to me. A dystopia means, at its base, that somewhere along the line mankind failed. Oh we definitely failed here, but I felt it was unbelievable. The plan must have been far reaching for it to go off without a hitch, and all the higher ups were ok with this? No one wanted to stop it? Zuh?

That bugged me, yes, but you know what? **It doesn't matter.** I loved this story, I love the *Wool* universe.

Lee says

I'm struggling with the number of stars for this one ... 3.5 stars would be my choice. I finished a couple of days ago and I've been struggling with how I feel about First Shift.

I devoured Wool Omnibus, loved it. The characters were real, they felt real. Wool-O is one of the best science fiction stories I have ever read (and I've been reading science fiction since 1966 -- I'm OLD!) I believed the sociology and psychology of life in the Silo. And I love all the other Howey stories I've read. I wanted so much to give this five stars.

But First Shift doesn't live up to Wool-O. It's a very good read, but didn't ring true to me. One quibble: senators don't have secret service protection unless they are candidates for president or are former presidents or vice presidents. So that bothered me. But that was just a minor thing.

What bothered me the most is I didn't get that much of a feeling for Donny, and I sure didn't get enough of a feeling for what was going on in the world, to understand why Donny even ran for representative and why he was so clueless. I can understand not getting that much of a read on "Troy" because he'd been drugged and frozen. Did Donny just not pay attention to what was going on in the world? What WAS going on in the world to drive the shadowy leader(s) to do what they did?

Didn't buy that a sitting Congressman (let alone two, that we know of), were responsible for such key aspects of the project or that it consumed all their time.

Really didn't buy that civilians/government agents were responsible for such a huge project -- would have bought it more if the responsible entities were the military or a corporation like Halliburton (or the usual combination of both). Didn't buy that it was all constructed in three years. Didn't buy that there were no nosy journalists or bloggers or conspiracy theorists snooping around the edges. Didn't buy that nobody involved (below the top, I mean) didn't figure out and leak the Big Picture. All this would require perfect coordination and control, which, even with the nanobots playing a role, would never happen. I didn't buy that this was a construct of Democrats. There isn't nearly enough back story to make me buy all of this.

But mainly, I didn't buy what they did. There was no point to it. They could have set up the pretext to get the people where they wanted them -- this I believed. But not what was ultimately done. There was nothing to gain -- absolutely nothing. If they believed it was inevitable, they could have just done the first thing and faked the rest and let things take their course (it's hard to write this without spoilers).

So the precipitating event doesn't make sense -- maybe it's not supposed to but I find it hard to believe there were enough sociopaths working together to coordinate something like that.

But, life in the Silos -- that part I believed. It will be interesting to follow more about the first generations of Silo life. But I'm more interested in what follows Wool 5. So, for the early generations of Silo life, I give it five stars. For the back story, I give it two stars.

So will I buy the next in the series? You bet -- but I hope it doesn't cost so much, geez!

Ted Lutter says

I've read a review that states that this book is better than "Wool - Omnibus Edition" but I don't agree. I do however believe that the book is fantastic. It's twice now that Hugh Howey was able to delight me to the point that I just didn't want to stop reading. It's possible that I found the Omnibus better as that story while connected to this one seems complete while "First Shift" will be followed by "Second Shift" and "Third Shift"? The only thing to do now, is to start on the Molly Fyde books. The problem will come when I've read

all of Hugh's books and I'm forced to wait for another. I hate that!

Ellen says

Once again, here I am in the minority. Apparently, Howey is a self-publishing god of sorts, with Ridley Scott optioning film rights and Random House giving him an incredible traditional publishing deal. Howey has made huge amounts of money from ebooks and has many, many fans.

You know, I could be one of those fans. There's something about his writing that attracts me -- that wanting to know more. However, what I've read just hasn't attracted me enough to want to spend more money.

After hearing about Wool, I read the Kindle sampler. I was curious, but not curious enough to spend almost £7 on it. Instead, I tried the much cheaper first book in the prequel. Unfortunately, it's soured me on the entire series, generally with things that I would have hoped had been dealt with had Random House published this book initially.

Here we are in the mid-21st century with early 21st-century office equipment. There are mentions of antique books, actual print books, and a brief discussion about someone who still needs paper folders, but the scene where the Senator's daughter hooks up additional computer monitors just seems out of place. And then, we get to the 22nd century where it's men only because the women would just be distracting (or so it seems). Oh my. Is the United States still such a sexist country? Here in Britain, we heard all about the recent Republican 'war' on women. Is it going to continue into the 22nd century? I certainly hope not.

Now, I could ignore or at least deal with such details better had I been given well-rounded characters and not archetypes. It's not that I need a likeable protagonist. I don't. But I do need a protagonist who seems to be more than someone from casting central. The series' premise may make an interesting film, but I prefer my literature to have fully developed characters. I can forgive some writers when they're writing for children or young adults, but I'm under the impression that audience isn't the primary target here.

Slickery says

[I didn't fully realize it until this book, but there are no gay characters in the Silos that we know of. Then this

Julia says

While I liked the Wool series, the Shift sequels were more a return to the form of Hugh Howey I saw in the one Molly Fyde novel I drudged through. Pretty uninspired, slow storytelling, focusing on the wrong things. With a lot of cumbersome dialogue thrown in for good measure. If you liked the pacing and imagination of Wool, you'll probably be disappointed with Shift.

For one thing, Howey spend far too much of the Shift novels on a pretty unbelievable and boring prequel story, which explains in detail -- far too much detail -- how the silos came to be. Here's a tip for you aspiring sci-fi writers. You don't need to establish the back story for every little detail of your universe. Sketch it in

broad brush strokes, so we can root ourselves in the story, and move on. Did George Lucas spend a lot of time explaining the month-to-month timeline of the Republic? No. It's a galaxy far far away, and that's enough. How does Joss Whedon introduce Firefly? "The Earth got used up." Cool, I understand global warming, I fill in the rest. All through Shift I was rushing to get through the prequel chapters so I could catch up to what was happening in the parts of the story I cared about. This goes double for the extremely dull re-hashing of the death of the previous silos. I could have done without the blow by blow synopsis. I wanted more from the characters I already met and knew.

Less worth your time than Wool, unless you're a deep Hugh Howey fan.

Richard says

Reading this series is like working on a very detailed and intricate jigsaw puzzle. You start reading and a few of the puzzle pieces fit together and you can see a small section of the puzzle. But it is enough to have yearnings to understand this place and people. Then additional puzzle pieces come and you are delighted to see bigger sections of the whole, yet you are always left with curiosity for more. This most recent work of our friend Hugh brings more clarity to this world by answering one of the bigger questions in my mind...how did all this come to be?

Hugh is a great writer who weaves a story with characters so well developed they feel real to you, their face is in your mind, and you could sit down to have a conversation with them.

I am also very glad that Hugh is gaining such popularity and showing the publishing world, that yes you can make it just fine without a "big house" standing in the way. I wish him great success going forward because myself and a growing list of other fans will continue to enjoy his work for years to come.

Perceptive says

It has come to my attention that perhaps I was a bit hard on Hugh "I'm not a misogynist, some of my best friends have ovaries!" Howey. Thus, a friend lent me First Shift so I could review the book, not the author. After all, don't I know that Hugh Howey is one of the preeminent science fiction authors of our time, if not ALL TIME?!?!?

So let's review. In the year 2049, a neophyte Congressman from Georgia, Donald Keene (whose intellect is anything but), comes to Washington and does absolutely nothing with regards to politics or governing. Instead, he's sucked into some sort of building project run under the aegis of a long time Senator from the same state. Donald is told the building project is a benign nuclear waste storage facility - aren't they always - and so he sits down, shuts up, and does what he is told even though warning bells would instantly ring for any normal person with two brain cells to rub together. Civics classes must have been outlawed from all Georgia high schools by 2049, because you'd think a CONGRESSMAN would be, like, dude, I don't think this is how a bicameral legislature in a democracy with three branches of government works.

But *wave hand*

Meanwhile, in the year 2110, a man named Troy is woken out of cryogenic sleep to begin his work shift in

Silo One. Shifts last six months and then the worker is put back to sleep until it is time for his next shift. Whoever decided that forced turnover every six months is the most effective and efficient way to run any kind of organization deserves any and all fuck ups and piss poor morale that ensue. Just sayin'.

Oh, and THERE ARE NO WOMEN ALLOWED in this Silo, because they would distract men with "passion." The women and children are kept asleep until some undetermined future date. Because not only did the numbskulls who designed this future society decide that forced turnover ever six months was a viable way to go, they also decided that women hold zero value as contributors to society as thinking, rational human beings. No, the mere presence of their vaginas would somehow poison the men with uncontrollable desire.

This. Is. Just. Wrong. First, it presumes men have zero control of their impulses and emotions and cannot help themselves. It's the basic assumption underlying rape culture: hey, it's not my fault I raped her, it's her fault for wearing that short skirt and see-through shirt. AND IT IS PUTRID.

Second: "Passion" is not just restricted to two people of opposite gender. Hate to break it to the brainiacs who devised this society, but if the thought was to prevent all emotional and sexual relationships by removing women - shyeah, right.

Third: WTF?!? Women can't contribute to this society? Women aren't capable of being doctors, psychologists, systems analysts, etc?! Their only value is to serve as emotional blackmail to the men woken out of sleep, and I'm guessing as potential breeders/mothering units for the new utopia yet to come?!

Back in 2049, Donald is forced to work with Anna, his old girlfriend and the daughter of the patron/patronizing Senator. Anna has a magical hoo-ha, y'all. That's the only explanation for why Donald is PETRIFIED of being within twenty feet of Anna's apparently magnetic vagina. PETRIFIED. The mere sight of Anna covered in dust bunnies after installing Donald's new desktop computer is enough to make Little Donald want to come out to play. But Donald holds firm (no pun intended). He will be faithful to his wife Helen. Even though Anna does absolutely nothing that suggests any kind of sexual innuendo and her evil seductive temptress ways appear completely made up in Donald's head.

In fact, Donald reminds me a lot of Brandon Hantz, a two-time "Survivor" contestant. Brandon's story is a very sad one, and I feel bad bringing him up. But Donald's reaction to Anna is precisely Brandon's reaction to the young, pretty female contestants on "Survivor:" because these two men find the women sexually attractive, the women must be evil harlots with no other purpose in life than to steal the virtuous young men away from their wives.

Brandon ended up having a spectacular breakdown on camera his second time on the show. Donald, I'm afraid, presents about just as stable. And sorry, Donald, but honestly? You're no prize. You have the intellectual curiosity of a kumquat, for starters. And Anna, even as thinly as she is written, could do WAY better. If she even wanted to. Not every woman wants or needs a man to feel complete, Howey.

Flash forward to 2110: Troy spends his time moping. Emo doesn't even begin to cover it. While I admire books that aren't afraid to show male characters crying, no one needs a watering can as the viewpoint character. Troy stops taking his blue pills (or are they red?) and memories of another time start to come back. Memories of a time that seem a lot like...

...2052. Donald apparently handily won re-election even though he spent all his time working on architectural plans instead of, y'know, Congressional stuff. It seems Donald didn't show up to class the day

where it was explained Representatives are elected every two years and therefore need to campaign. Donald visits the nuclear waste site where the sitting governor from Oklahoma shows up to personally hand him a clipboard so Donald can sign for supplies. Apparently governing Oklahoma is even less onerous than being a Congressman and leaves one with nothing better to do than play deliveryman in a state thousands of miles away. But what is the TRUE purpose of the nuclear waste storage site? Let's flash forward to...

...2110. (view spoiler)

Only kidding. Oh, not about the spoiler - unfortunately, that's true enough - but about the supposed genius of the twist. Didn't I see this in a Twilight Zone episode?

Meanwhile, the true purpose of the nuclear waste storage silos is revealed. (view spoiler)

Fun Facts We Learn About the Future #1: All Georgian congressmen must kiss the ring of a Georgian Senator named Thurman (whose resemblance to Strom Thurmond, party affiliation aside, is uncanny.) The Congressmen must do whatever the Senator says. Apparently his real first name is "Simon."

Fun Fact #2: In the year 2049 (I keep hearing it sung like this) Congressmen do not need to meet with constituents, other government officials, or even lobbyists. Nor do they need to campaign for re-election. No, Congressmen spend all their time working on architectural drawings, even when they aren't licensed architects and haven't practiced professionally.

Fun Fact #3: I keep using the word Congressmen, because Future!Washington is even more sexist (and also more racist, since no people of color show up anywhere) than today. Howey writes, "There was a sense in the air that the world was about to change - a woman was about to win nomination for president, only the second such nomination in Donald's lifetime. And if the pollsters could be believed, this one had more than a chance." Since Donald is described as mid-thirties, that makes him born around 2014. So, sorry Hilary. Sorry Sarah. Sorry Condi or whoever might be in the wings. Save the expense now and don't run: Hugh Howey says no girls allowed in the Oval Office. Nuh uh.

Oh, there are women in this book, but they are either the receptionist; the secretary; the wife with no other apparent life except to wait by the phone and/or walk the dog; or the (dum dum DUM) evil temptress ex-girlfriend who does nothing tempting except to deliver a computer and have a meal. Howey does include Donald's sister Charlotte, an Air Force officer who pilots drones in some ongoing conflict with the usual Axis of Evil™ suspects (c'mon, doesn't a new country get to join the Axis in the next forty years? Is it like

the Bad Guy Club for Villains, and they aren't accepting new members?) but when Charlotte learns they want her to appear on stage with Senator Thurmond and other members of the armed services, Howey has her say, "Oh God. And I'm the *girl*." So obviously, the idea that the other service members might be female is unthinkable.

Fun Fact #4: Congressmen from Georgia are so smart, they only just discover in 2049 that the CDC has a website devoted to surviving the zombie apocalypse. Quick on the uptake, politicians of the future.

Fun Fact #5: Technology has progressed to the point where nanos are used in medicine to repair cellular structures. On the other hand, people still use desktop computers, cell phones, computer mice, pens, paper, clipboards, etc. Not even a tablet device in sight. The march of progress led by companies such as Apple and Google appears to have been halted and reversed. Perhaps Silicon Valley was the Axis of Terror's™ first target. Still, I find it hard to believe that 2049 will be more like 2003 than 2013 when it comes to office technology.

We'll still be buying bestselling books in paper, however, so that's all right. I bet Simon & Schuster and Random House are happy to know their investment will continue to pay out.

Two stars for the belly laughs.

But if you are looking for a book to convince people that Howey is just woefully misunderstood when it comes to claims of sexism: this isn't the place to start.

Eric Hammel says

I have very mixed feelings about First Shift.

I was immensely surprised to find out how much I liked the first five Wool volumes. I bought into the mystery; I felt it and the exposition were handled just right by an amazing talent. I was completely satisfied by where it began and where it ended. I did not require answers to questions I considered superfluous.

When I noticed First Shift, I circled for a time. I was loath to find out whatever secrets it might yield. But curiosity won out.

I do not question writers about how they present a story as long as the story, told within the four corners the writer sets out, is satisfying, as in worth telling. I'm not going to second guess Hugh Howey. He needed to expand the four corners of the original Wool series. What I'm calling him out on is telling his story with much worse writing than he had expended on Wool 1-5, and for the absolutely paint-by-numbers plot line that was obvious a mile off. It isn't terrible, but, compared to Wool 1-5, it is completely unsatisfying.

I'm going to pass on reading Second Shift and any Wool volumes that follow it.

Daiva says

What can I say? I guess not as exciting as Wool (there's no comparison here) but still kept me intrigued

enough to know the backstory of all Silo world.

Got to read what happens in second 'Shift' installments and then I can figure out how I actually like(d) it.

Quite depressing though. Instead of that whole hope theme in Wool, we can find only mystery here....

Well...

Well...

Well...

I shall move on to the next one and see if anything changes? Yes, I shall.

Jason says

4 Stars

It has been a while since I read the wonderful books that compose Wool(Silo#1). I enjoyed the world, the plot, and the writing of Hugh Howey. First Shift: Legacy really would be a great launching point for this whole series minus the fact that it would create some early spoilers.

This novel and series for that matter is a near future post apocalyptic story. Howey has split this book into two separate points of view that are nearly 200 years apart. This makes it easy for us to get to know the two main characters and to really get into their lives and story. Howey simply writes page turners and fun easy reads.

This is a fun continuation of Wool and I cannot wait to read more. I highly recommend Hugh Howey.

Althea Ann says

Read this follow-up to "Wool" for post-apocalyptic book club.

'Shift' contains three parts, 'Legacy,' 'Order,' and 'Pact.' Each is also available as a separate publication, but I recommend the omnibus edition. I also recommend reading 'Wool' first, even though the events here precede it chronologically. If you've read 'Wool' you know the scenario: survivors of a mysterious apocalypse living in massive underground silos, struggling to survive in the face of social oppression, dwindling resources and mechanical decay. In 'Shift,' we get to find out how it all happened.

'First Shift - Legacy' shifts (haha) between two perspectives. In the near future, junior politician Donald (an unfortunately distracting choice of character name - who would've guessed?) is tasked by his mentor with work on a secret project. Donald was an architect before he went into politics, and Senator Thurman wants him to design a massive bomb shelter. The job takes him away from the side of his wife, and puts him into uncomfortable proximity to his college ex- (Thurman's daughter) - but he can't say no, as Thurman was responsible for getting Donald elected.

This story is intercut with a glimpse into the future world of the Silos. In Silo One, "Troy" awakes and is given the job of IT Supervisor. Troy is oddly unable to remember many things about his past, but he knows the scenario: the men of Silo One are responsible for overseeing all 50 silos. They wake for shifts of work, and after a few months, return to cryosleep. The situation is psychologically draining, and not everyone can hack it...

Of course, the reader knows that the two narratives must be connected, but it's a pleasure waiting for the

pieces to match up.

Amber says

I'm halfway through this installment to the silo series and I'm hooked! I'm trying to make it last but cant wait to get through it either.

update:

Just finished "first shift"! loved it and it's a great addition to the series and just makes me want more. I loved the political aspect and how plausible it seems. I'll admit, I love a good conspiracy so I'm biased, but the realism of this story kindly hits u.
