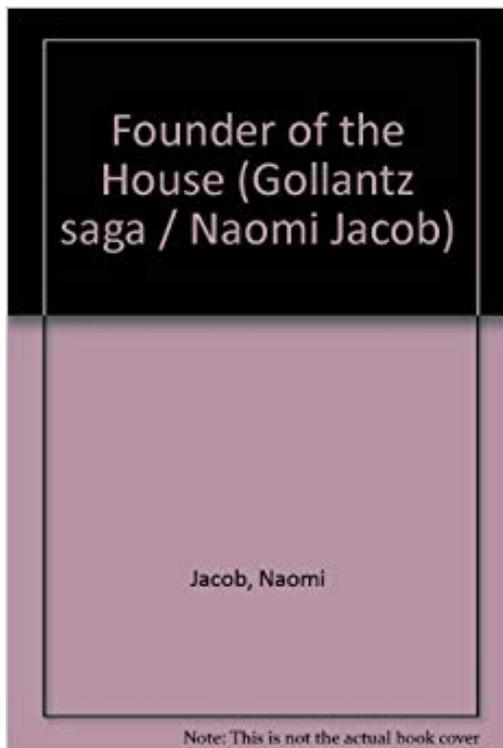


Founder of the House (Gollantz saga / Naomi Jacob) by Naomi Jacob



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Reviews of the Founder of the House (Gollantz saga / Naomi Jacob) by Naomi Jacob

Ichalote

I had the pleasure of reading the first book in The Gollantz Saga, The Founder of the House, of which I was pleasantly amused in a most grand way. See it's even making me talk as they did overseas in the late 1800s when fine things were popular, as in the setting of the book. But in all serious, I was breathtakingly, yet surprisingly, entranced by this novel! I heard once that her family stated that it's too bad that she didn't ever write more than one draft of her novels before publication, well, why mess with something that would have been pure perfection for her time!

The novel was first published in 1925 and is written in the way that most great novelists did at the time, with a "telling you the story" approach rather than a plot driven by dialogue or action. It was as if it was indeed a family story passed down through the generations, even though in reality it was from her imagination.

I was immediately transported in time, as with the ghost of Christmas past, and given a view inside generations of the Gollantz family. I felt through her story telling as if I was an outside observer, which I think was kind of entertaining. It was kind of like watching a stage play. I think that is how the best of most older story telling was done. She writes in this time period beside other great novelists such as F. Scott Fitzgerald (The Great Gatsby came out that year too), Edith Wharton, Ernest Hemingway, Virginia Woolf, and Louis Bromfield (whose many books graced the silver screen). I'm saying her style matches each of these, though it does resemble the story telling of Wharton and the desire to show the frivolity, human nature of people, and unrequited love among those of various social classes as Fitzgerald.

In *Founder of the House*, you find a love story in multiple generations--unrequited and meaningless love, but then with great grace she reaches to us through her characters to show how one deals with that type of love; the love between father and daughter; husband and wife; father and son; brother and son--in all shapes and form. I was enthralled by each interaction, whether feeling happy, then sad, or thoughtful or distraught for each character. But in all, and without preaching, if you read closely between the lines and think about the story, you'll see Jacobs underlying messages about how to live life and interact with others or overcome pain and sadness.

Beyond that, this book is about a Jewish family. A successful family who deals in trade and interiors and runs the shop, *The House of Gollantz*, but who are very honest and reliable. She never wavers from the fact that each generation of this Jewish family is honorable and that is how they come to be successful. She makes sure that her characters, especially the last protagonist, Emmanuel, who is the grandson of the man we read about at the beginning of the book, is portrayed and has a dislike for the Jew who swindles and does bad business. She is quite aware of making that distinction. With that, she allows her Jewish family in the book to align with the important people of England, Vienna, and ironically, England again by the end of the story. She showed with great care how they COULD be equals (at that time in many European countries, Jews were not allowed to socially integrate with aristocrats, only respected for business). Her male Jewish characters are incessantly falling in love with this Baroness or that one, who fall for their good looks, but are married, and it's scandalous of course. It brings us suspense in romance without one ever barely giving the brush of a kiss. Ah, it was *Gone with the Wind* type of romance set in 1800s Europe among antique glitz and glam, dinners of rich foods and wine.

The detail with which she describes the furnishings, art, and china within the House of Gollantz was astonishing. She must have had a passion for it as well, because the characters passion for their work came through in my reading. It made me passionate for these place settings and interior furnishings. I want to buy something from their shop; sit in a Henry the XVI chair and drink from Ming china! She takes great care in the description and details of her character's personalities, clothing, appearance, and eating habits as well. I could absolutely visualize in my head each of these characters. The Gollantz father, Hermann, and his son, Emmanuel, with their immaculate dress and the importance they put upon clothes, made me think this must have been her own personal nod to her Jewish grandfather who was a tailor.

Being half-Jew herself, Jacobs spoke out against the discrimination of Jews in her own life. In this saga her family is Jewish, she brings to the reader an understanding of the hard-working Jew and what they had to offer, more than she spent lecturing. I think any reader then, or now, can take

away lessons in equality from her story without ever realizing it. I was swept up in the romance and story and suddenly I was understanding more than I thought I knew before. Her books would do well to be studied for how they promote equality among religious and ethnic groups. It's a lesson-how to get along with others and break down stereotypes- we can still learn today, even if the times have changed.

I loved this paragraph, for example, when Hermann, in speaking to his son, and said (and keep in mind the story is in the last 1800s-the novel written in 1925):

"You see, an honest Jew is accepted, but not acclaimed. A dishonest Jew is acclaimed as such by everyone. One honest Jew remains one honest Jew, one dishonest Jew is hailed as a type of his race.'...'Listen, Emmanuel, for this is something you must remember always. We are a scattered people, we are sheep without a shepherd, we come from all corners of the earth, we are denied rights and privileges because we are not, politically, a nation. Yet we are judged as a nation by the rest of the world, and the judgement passed on us, as a whole, is the lowest judgement passed on one of us as an individual."

And there are even more touching and amazing quotes in her novel that should be really not be forgotten and be read and taught and discussed in literature, history, and race and ethics classes worldwide. Her depth of thought is quite enamoring and her story telling, in essence, is captivating. What a woman and author! She truly strived to break down barriers. There are so many underlying messages in this book that I could go on for hours.

I completely fell in love with this book, and as the end of book is a sort of cliffhanger, and another stage of the whirlwind story is to begin, I'm ready to dive in to the rest of the story. I hear the second book, *That Wild Lie*, might be coming soon, and I'll be first to click download. I can't wait to read the whole saga.

I highly recommend *Founder of the House* for readers who truly love great literature and storytelling, old-fashioned romantic melodrama, the lure of 1800 Europe society, and the struggle among class and distinction. I can truly see why this was a best-selling novel. It's like Colleen McCullough's *The Thornbirds*, but set in a different place and time. It would make a great made-for-television historical mini-series if they still made those!

*I was given this book in exchange for honest review.

Tamesya

The Founder of the House is the start of an epic family saga which focuses on the trials and tribulations of the Gollantz family, who are antiquities sellers amongst the great and the good of C19 Paris. In this time of social and political unrest, the Gollantz family and in particular, Emmanuel Gollantz, must try to live up to his father, Hermann's principles of reliability, sincerity and respect, but in a time of turmoil this is sometimes hard to achieve and even harder to maintain.

The Founder of the House is the first in a seven-novel series which will see the Gollantz family develop over several generations, when the politics and policies of a bygone era will be shaped by world events on a grand scale. There is much to enjoy in this opening story, the locations of Paris, Vienna and London are well described, however, as with any new series, there is much to take in and at times the narration, may seem a little dated to modern readers, but it's worth persevering with, as there is a wonderful awareness of time and place. The Gollantz family live through momentous times and I enjoyed becoming involved with the many twists and turns in the novel.

In this fiftieth anniversary year of the death of the author, Naomi Jacob, it is especially appropriate that some of her best books should be brought back to life. There's something quite special about the introduction of a forgotten set of books, and to give them a new lease of life, for a new audience, only adds to the pleasure of discovery for a new generation of readers of romantic fiction.

BoberMod

This is the first book in an epic series which tells the story of a Jewish family through the ages. It starts with the tale of Hermann Gollantz, who lives the best years of his life in Paris, buying and selling antiques and collectibles to the cream of Paris society. His work allows him wealth but not the position of his non Jewish peers. Nevertheless Hermann navigates his way through the complex, social structures deftly and with a sense of honour and loyalty to his race and family that is both commendable and at times acts as a strait jacket.

He moves his family to Vienna and the story continues through the eyes of his son Emmanuel and the way he comes into his father's inheritance both socially and in business.

There are twists and turns and this is a real, family saga, told in a magnificent sweep of time and space. It is rich in detail, historical, social and personal. It is dramatic and sentimental and engaging and the characters, although taking a while to build into the richly rewarding people you come to know by the end of the novel, are worth persevering with.

I look forward to reading the second novel on its release.

anonymous

Reading the second volume. Excellent series.

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