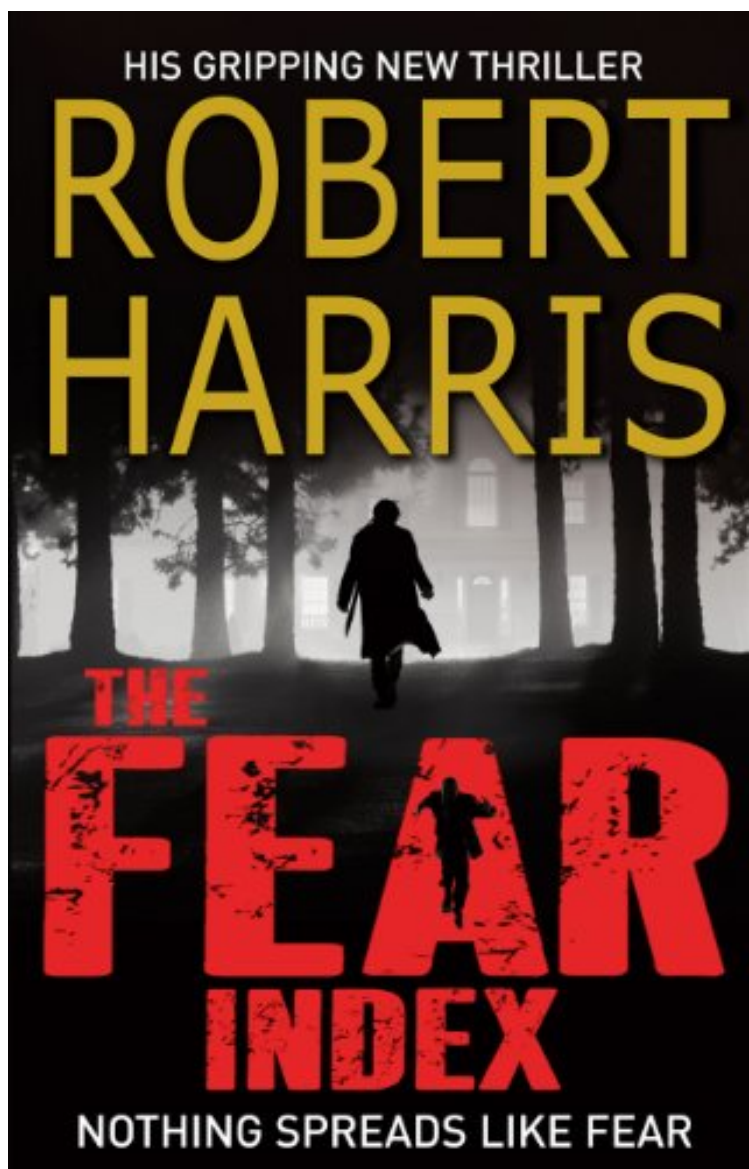


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## The Fear Index



*Par Robert Harris*  
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**Par Robert Harris : The Fear Index** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Fear Index:

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### Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurMeet Alex Hoffmann: among the secretive inner circle of the ultra-rich, he is something of a legend.Based in Geneva, he has developed a revolutionary system that has the power to manipulate financial markets. Generating billions of dollars, it is a system that thrives on panic - and feeds on fear.And then, in the early hours of one morning, while he lies asleep, a sinister intruder breaches the elaborate security of his lakeside home. So begins a waking nightmare of paranoia and violence as Hoffmann attempts - with increasing desperation - to discover who is trying to destroy him - before it's too late ...Extrait1Learn from me, if not by my precepts, at least by my example, how dangerous is the acquirement of knowledge, and how much happier that man is who believes his native town to be the world,

than he who aspires to become greater than his nature will allow. Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* (1818) Dr. Alexander Hoffmann sat by the fire in his study in Geneva, a half-smoked cigar lying cold in the ashtray beside him, an anglepoise lamp pulled low over his shoulder, turning the pages of a first edition of *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* by Charles Darwin. The Victorian grandfather clock in the hall was striking midnight but Hoffmann did not hear it. Nor did he notice that the fire was almost out. All his formidable powers of attention were directed onto his book. He knew it had been published in London in 1872 by John Murray Co. in an edition of seven thousand copies, printed in two runs. He knew also that the second run had introduced a misprint on page 208. As the volume in his hands contained no such error, he presumed it must have come from the first run, thus greatly increasing its value. He turned it round and inspected the spine. The binding was in the original green cloth with gilt lettering, the spine-ends only slightly frayed. It was what was known in the book trade as a fine copy, worth perhaps \$15,000. He had found it waiting for him when he returned home from his office that evening, as soon as the New York markets had closed, a little after ten o'clock. Yet the strange thing was, even though he collected scientific first editions and had browsed the book online and had in fact been meaning to buy it, he had not actually ordered it. His immediate thought had been that it must have come from his wife, but she had denied it. He had refused to believe her at first, following her around the kitchen as she set the table, holding out the book for her inspection. You're really telling me you didn't buy it for me? Yes, Alex. Sorry. It wasn't me. What can I say? Perhaps you have a secret admirer. You are totally sure about this? It's not our anniversary or anything? I haven't forgotten to give you something? For God's sake, I didn't buy it, okay? It had come with no message apart from a Dutch bookseller's slip: Rosengaarden Nijenhuis, Antiquarian Scientific Medical Books. Established 1911. Prinsengracht 227, 1016 HN Amsterdam, The Netherlands. Hoffmann had pressed the pedal on the waste bin and retrieved the bubble wrap and thick brown paper. The parcel was correctly addressed, with a printed label: Dr. Alexander Hoffmann, Villa Clairmont, 79 Chemin de Ruth, 1223 Coligny, Geneva, Switzerland. It had been dispatched by courier from Amsterdam the previous day. After they had eaten their supper a fish pie and green salad prepared by the housekeeper before she went home Gabrielle had stayed in the kitchen to make a few anxious last-minute phone calls about her exhibition the next day, while Hoffmann had retreated to his study clutching the mysterious book. An hour later, when she put her head round the door to tell him she was going up to bed, he was still reading. She said, Try not to be too late, darling. I'll wait up for you. He did not reply. She paused in the doorway and considered him for a moment. He still looked young for forty-two, and had always been more handsome than he realised a quality she found attractive in a man as well as rare. It was not that he was modest, she had come to realise. On the contrary: he was supremely indifferent to anything that did not engage him intellectually, a trait that had earned him a reputation among her friends for being downright bloody rude and she quite liked that as well. His preternaturally boyish American face was bent over the book, his spectacles pushed up and resting on the top of his thick head of light brown hair; catching the firelight, the lenses seemed to flash a warning look back at her. She knew better than to try to interrupt him. She sighed and went upstairs. Hoffmann had known for years that *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* was one of the first books to be published with photographs, but he had never actually seen them before. Monochrome plates depicted Victorian artists' models and inmates of the Surrey Lunatic Asylum in various states of emotion: grief, despair, joy, defiance, terror for this was meant to be a study of *Homo sapiens* as animal, with an animal's instinctive responses, stripped of the mask of social graces. Born far enough into the age of science to be photographed, their misaligned eyes and skewed teeth nonetheless gave them the look of crafty, superstitious peasants from the Middle Ages. They reminded Hoffmann of a childish nightmare of grown-ups from an old-fashioned book of fairy tales who might come and steal you from your bed in the night and carry you off into the woods. And there was another thing that unsettled him. The bookseller's slip had been inserted into the pages devoted to the emotion of fear, as if the sender specifically intended to draw them to his attention: The frightened man at first stands like a statue motionless or breathless, or crouches down as if instinctively to escape observation. The heart beats quickly and violently, so that it palpitates or knocks against the ribs... Hoffmann had a habit when he was thinking of cocking his head to one side and gazing into the middle distance, and he did so now. Was this a coincidence? Yes, he reasoned, it must be. On the other hand, the physiological effects of fear were so directly relevant to VIXAL-4, the project he was presently involved in, that it did strike him as peculiarly pointed. And yet VIXAL-4 was highly secret, known only to his research team, and although he took care to pay them well \$250,000 was the starting salary, with much more on offer in bonuses it was surely unlikely any of them would have spent \$15,000 on an anonymous gift. One person

who certainly could afford it, who knew all about the project and who would have seen the joke of it if that was what this was: an expensive joke was his business partner, Hugo Quarry, and Hoffmann, without even thinking about the hour, rang him. Hello, Alex. How's it going? If Quarry saw anything strange in being disturbed just after midnight, his perfect manners would never have permitted him to show it. Besides, he was accustomed to the ways of Hoffmann, the mad professor, as he called him and called him it to his face as well as behind his back, it being part of his charm always to speak to everyone in the same way, public or private. Hoffmann, still reading the description of fear, said distractedly, Oh, hi. Did you just buy me a book? I don't think so, old friend. Why? Was I supposed to? Someone's just sent me a Darwin first edition and I don't know who. Sounds pretty valuable. It is. I thought, because you know how important Darwin is to VIXAL, it might be you. Fraid not. Could it be a client? A thank-you gift and they've forgotten to include a card? Lord knows, Alex, we've made them enough money. Yeah, well. Maybe. Okay. Sorry to bother you. Don't worry. See you in the morning. Big day tomorrow. In fact, it's already tomorrow. You ought to be in bed by now. Sure. On my way. Night. As fear rises to an extreme pitch, the dreadful scream of terror is heard. Great beads of sweat stand on the skin. All the muscles of the body are relaxed. Utter prostration soon follows, and the mental powers fail. The intestines are affected. The sphincter muscles cease to act, and no longer retain the contents of the body... Hoffmann held the volume to his nose and inhaled. A compound of leather and library dust and cigar smoke, so sharp he could taste it, with a faint hint of something chemical—formaldehyde, perhaps, or coal gas. It put him in mind of a nineteenth-century laboratory or lecture theatre, and for an instant he saw Bunsen burners on wooden benches, flasks of acid and the skeleton of an ape. He reinserted the bookseller's slip to mark the page and carefully closed the book. Then he carried it over to the shelves and with two fingers gently made room for it between a first edition of *On the Origin of Species*, which he had bought at auction at Sotheby's in New York for \$125,000, and a leather-bound copy of *The Descent of Man* that had once belonged to T. H. Huxley. Later, he would try to remember the exact sequence of what he did next. He consulted the Bloomberg terminal on his desk for the final prices in the United States: the Dow Jones, the SP 500 and the NASDAQ had all ended down. He had an email exchange with Susumu Takahashi, the duty dealer in charge of execution on VIXAL-4 overnight, who reported that everything was functioning smoothly, and reminded him that the Tokyo Stock Exchange would reopen in less than two hours time following the annual three-day Golden Week holiday. It would certainly open down, to catch up with what had been a week of falling prices in Europe and the United States. And there was one other thing: VIXAL was proposing to short another three million shares in Procter Gamble at \$62 a share, which would bring their overall position up to six million—a big trade: would Hoffmann approve it? Hoffmann emailed OK, threw away his unfinished cigar, put a fine-meshed metal guard in front of the fireplace and switched off the study lights. In the hall he checked to see that the front door was locked and then set the burglar alarm with its four-digit code: 1729. (The numerals came from an exchange between the mathematicians G. H. Hardy and S. I. Ramanujan in 1920, when Hardy went in a taxi cab with that number to visit his dying colleague in hospital and complained it was a rather dull number, to which Ramanujan responded: No, Hardy! No, Hardy! It is a very interesting number. It is the smallest number expressible as the sum of two cubes in two different ways.) He left just one lamp lit downstairs so that he was sure then climbed the curved white marble staircase to the bathroom. He took off his spectacles, undressed, washed, brushed his teeth and put on a pair of blue silk pyjamas. He set the alarm on his mobile for six thirty, registering as he did so that the time was then twenty past twelve. In the bedroom he was surprised to find Gabrielle still awake, lying on her back on the counterpane in a black silk kimono. A scented candle flickered on the dressing table; otherwise the room was in darkness. Her hands were clasped behind her head, her elbows sharply pointed away from her, her legs crossed at the knee. One slim white foot, the toenails painted dark red, was making impatient circles in the fragrant air. Oh God, he said. I'd forgotten the date. Don't worry. She untied her belt and parted the silk, then held out her arms to him. I never forget it. *Revue de presse* "The Fear Index could scarcely be more of the moment" (*The Times*) "In *The Fear Index*, the latest thriller by Robert Harris, now heading for the Christmas bestseller lists, a brainbox hedge fund manager with little in the way of interpersonal skills discovers that his computer-driven trading system has flown out of control and threatens to send the world's stock markets into a tailspin. Anyone familiar with Mary Shelley's *Dr Frankenstein* will recognise the genre of the oddball genius consumed by his own creation - populist fiction at its best." (*Spectator*) "I would recommend *The Fear Index*, the new novel by Robert Harris that delves into the world of modern finance. The writing is as elegant as ever" (*Lionel Barber Financial Times*) "Robert Harris is renowned for his historical novels, although his eighth offering, *The Fear*

Index, could hardly be more contemporary and relevant . . . Harris writes with a deceptively languid elegance, so that the novel straddles not only the crime and sci-fi genres but also that of literary fiction. A satisfying read on a number of levels, it is strongest as a character study of a man who discovers, pace Hemingway, the true meaning of the phrase "grace under pressure". (Irish Times)"Robert Harris's eighth novel is a timely blockbuster of a thriller that takes the global financial meltdown as its backdrop, with nods to Mary Shelley's Frankenstein . . . An assuredly intelligent and deftly-paced novel, the fear of the protagonist is increasingly palpable as he's buffeted by genuinely unexpected spine-chilling twists. Perhaps the greatest thriller writer around, Harris has delivered his best work yet. A modern classic." (Irish Examiner)