LAN'S LANTERN 33

Robert A. Heinlein

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Dedication

To Maia, as usual,
and
In memory of Robert A. Heinlein
fan, author, and mentor to
so many people.

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LAN'S LANTERN 33

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Robert A. Heinlein

From the Editor

by Lan

Heinlein and the Editor:

Unlike most of the people who have written and contributed to this Special Issue, I have not been profoundly influenced by Robert A. Heinlein. I got interested in reading science fiction stories with the Tom Swift, Jr. series, and the first real science fiction novel I read was Rocket to Limbo by Alan E. Nourse. Also in the "N" section of the library was Andre Norton, and I expanded in both directions from there. Eventually my friend Ken Adams recommended Have Space Suit -- Will Travel, which was seconded by another friend Dan Turner (we were all in Boy Scouts together). That one I liked, as I did Time for the Stars. But the next few I tried were disappointments. Beyond This Horizon, The Rolling Stones, Double Star, and The Unpleasant Profession of Jonathan Hoag, did nothing for me. In fact, the only one I finished from that group was Double Star, and I found it unsatisfying.

A few years later, as my collection of SF books grew while I indiscriminately picked up EVERYTHING I could find that was remotely SF, another friend recommended Heinlein's novels: The Day after Tomorrow (Sixth Column). That one I enjoyed. But I then tried Starship Troopers, and could not get past the first few pages.

In graduate school, seeing that Ace was reprinting some of Heinlein's juveniles, I picked up all I could to fill in the holes in my collection. I read Rocketship Galileo, then Stranger in a Strange Land, and finally Glory Road. Both were very enjoyable, and I wanted to read more, but the pressure of graduate school and a summer job limited my outside reading. Still, I continued to pick up the novels even though I knew it would be a some time before I would be able to read them (as is the case with most of my collection).

After I met and married Maia, she ever so gently encouraged me to read her favorite Heinlein novel, The Moon is a Harsh Mistress, which I did and enjoyed. When Friday was published, I picked it up immediately, and liked it enough to recommend it for a Hugo. Job was interesting, but not quite as good as Friday.

So, as you can see, my encounters with Heinlein the author were quite sporadic. I was influenced more by Nourse, Norton, Asimov, Simak and Van Vogt than by Heinlein. However, I do know how much he has guided others, particularly after reading all the submissions included in this special issue of Lan's Lantern.

But what about Heinlein, the man?

Starting in the mid-1970s, Heinlein endorsed and promoted blood drives. He encouraged fans to donate blood, particularly if they had rare blood types. Several convention committees held blood drives, and some, including CONCLAVE, continue to do so today.

At SUNCON (the Worldcon in Miami Beech, Florida, in 1977), I donated blood. Heinlein was there to sign books for those who donated, or tried to donate and failed, or who had donated within the past 60 days. I missed him. However, at CONCLAVE II, held in September that year, Heinlein showed up to autograph books for those who donated at their blood drive. There I met Heinlein, held out a copy of Glory Road for him to autograph (one that I had picked up in the huckster room since I had forgotten to bring any of my copies of his books from home), and he signed it. As I started to talk with him, one of the nurses brought in a woman who was sheet-white, saying that the woman nearly passed out from giving blood. Heinlein immediately went to her aid.

That was the only time I ever met the man.

There was something strange about the incident, and this only struck me years later. I have given blood seven times. The last time I gave, the nurses at the Red Cross told me not to come back. You see, after donating, and after the needle is pulled out, I have passed out every time--except once. The nurses told me not to put my body through that any more. So I have not donated since.

The funny thing is that one time I did not pass out: it happened at SUNCON, when I was giving blood for the Heinlein Blood Drive.

All My Gurus Are Dead

Growing up I had four literary gurus: L. Frank Baum, Robert A. Heinlein, Mark Twain and Jack Kerouac. Three of these men died before I ever started reading their books. Heinlein died last year, so my reading of his books coincided with the last quarter century of his life. Heinlein was by far the most important of these men.

Some kids go through a phase of hero worship when they are adolescents. They choose a Mickey Mantle or Bruce Springsteen, Chris Evert or Madonna, Chairman Mao or Tricky Dick. Who knows why? I chose Heinlein. I don't know why, either. Like most kids, my fascination with my hero faded as time passed and I had to go to college. Through the years, I would sometimes have fleeting glimpses of what Heinlein used to mean to me, but only momentary ones. Then when he died, I started thinking about him more frequently, and for longer periods of time. My thoughts did not dwell on Heinlein, but I would ponder on why he, in particular, had been so important to me.

Can you ever know a person you've never met? To know a person means spending a lot of time with them. I know a lot of fans who wanted to know Heinlein or have spent a lot of time speculating about what Heinlein must have been like. No, I don't think I will ever know who Robert A. Heinlein was, but maybe I can come to understand the Heinlein persona who has lived and performed on my grey matter stage for the last twenty-five years.

We all perceive reality indirectly by building a mental model. Literature is one of the many tools for modeling reality. Heinlein, like any writer, wrote stories based on his own personal ideas of how reality is constructed, and fashioned them into words and plots. We, his fans, read his stories and try to recreate his blueprints for fictional worlds on our own inner landscape. Any writer, or person for that matter, is limited in his vision of reality. Capturing reality in words always means losing more than 99.99 percent of the details. When these printed instructions are retranslated by a reader, even further distortions take place. Thus, it is very difficult to judge the exact intent of a writer, or the true nature of his design.

Great authors always get written about, and the ironic thing is they become fictional characters themselves, and even get put into books, movies and plays. Heinlein the man is dead. Few people ever really knew him. There is a literary ghost of Heinlein for every person who still thinks about him, and reads his stories.

And as it is true that most fans did not know Heinlein, Heinlein did not know most of his fans. Heinlein had to deal with the fact that he was communicating with a mass of unknown people. Each reader has to deal with the fact that he is not communicating with another person, but reacting to black marks on white paper.

I do not ask who was Heinlein, nor do I try to say who Heinlein was from reading his books. No, instead I ask: who was I when Heinlein's fiction made it's mark on me? Many of Heinlein's fans will say that they were taught and affected positively by Heinlein. On the other hand, one critic blames Heinlein for inspiring Charlie Manson to create his cult of murder. I don't think either is the case, because his readers each use Heinlein's stories for something different. The active principle here is the reader, and not the writer. Heinlein's books were very exciting to me, but now that I look back, I don't think they were influential. I'm not sure if any work of fiction can be powerful enough to change a person's life. Fiction reflects, and I think the best that can be said, is a work of fiction might be a marker for when a person changed, or realized he was changing.

Oh sure, I will not decide any issue here. Eventually the biographers will be

by James Wallace Harris

battling over the details of who Heinlein was, and what he meant, and what his impact was. But like Shakespeare, Twain or Hemingway, agreement will be hard to find.

A simpler fact is Heinlein's stories touched many people. What I want to come to understand is what did I personally get out of Heinlein, and why was he so important to me as a teenager? Why did I read almost every book by and about him? And why were my favorites the books and stories he wrote in the fifties?

Mentally I link Heinlein with growing up in the sixties. At the end of the sixties, I fired Heinlein from his hero job because he was on the opposite side of the war, and on the old wave. Now that we are entering the nineties, I, and many of my fellow baby boomers, are still thinking about the sixties and why they were so important.

We are always faced with what is real, and what we perceive to be real. To some, the sixties was a time more important than any other. I "feel" that to be true, but I don't "think" it is. It's odd, but I think the key to understanding my personal reality, and my memories of the sixties, lies with understanding why I enjoyed Heinlein's science fiction stories so much. However, to get to the answers, or the truth, or to the end of this essay will require a very roundabout approach. I can best start with an analogy from a Robert Sheckley story.

Sheckley's story, "The Language of Love," can be found in the collection Notions: Unlimited. It's a short tale about a man and woman, who fall in love, and the woman asks the man to tell her how much he loves her. The man tells the woman that it is very important for him to express his exact feelings. He leaves her to travel to other worlds and to study with the greatest thinkers and philosophers to learn about emotion and language. In the end, he returns and finds his girl. She is very anxious to know his answer. He says, "My dear, I am rather fond of you." As you may guess, she was disappointed. But she missed the point.

I am going to spend a lot of words trying to describe my journey to understand how I felt about Heinlein. Writing this essay is like the journey the man takes. Do not be disappointed by the answer. It's the journey that counts.

The nineteen sixties was for most people a very complex time. It was a time when all the simple philosophies came out and clashed. From a multiplex view, there is no one history. There is one history and one universe for every sentient being looking at reality. When two people pass each other walking on the street, there are two universes moving in opposite directions.

The mechanisms that make up our viewport to reality are more than just eyes, ears and other senses. We perceive through exchanging abstract information and processing it internally. And we suffer hardwired limitations on how we do this processing because of our genetic structure. Why Heinlein was my hero instead of Bob Dylan or Bobby Kennedy is because my personality was made up from an almost infinite number of details I will never understand.

I am sitting at my computer, tapping at the keys, and putting down words in ASCII code. You are reading the alphabetic patterns off the page, and will try on my custom filter for viewing a very small aspect of reality. If the communication is successful, you will see a different view. What will matter is if you can use this new view. It's only valuable if it can be used to discern a new detail in reality, and one that is memorable or useful. Otherwise, you will forget this essay. A view of reality is only as valuable as the details it adds to our map of reality. We do not look at reality directly, but view it with our model. Nor do we understand all the influences that reality makes on us.

So to answer the question: "Who is Robert A. Heinlein?" or even to narrow it to "What did Heinlein mean to me?", is an impossible task. At best I hope to remember the context, and catch a glimpse of a few past feelings.

Sputnik went up the month after I started Kindergarten. **Apollo 11** landed on the moon a month after I graduated from high school. I grew up in the space age, the television age, the atomic age. I came aware in the sixties, and all that entails. But it was the books of Heinlein that had the greatest perceived impact on me at the time. Or is that even a true and precise statement? I was a dreamer in a dreamland. His books fueled my mental transportation. Over the years, reality has descended, and I no longer know the value of those dreams. To quote B.B., "the thrill is gone."

There were millions of other people growing up at the same time as I, and most of them did not become fans of Heinlein. Only a small portion of the public likes to read. For reasons unknown to me, I am a bookworm. For other unknown reasons, I like SF books.

Growing up in the sixties, for me, was a long journey to escape the world around me. Of course, I did not know that at the time, but only after years of reflection. As a child my face was always in front of a TV set, and later on it was always in front of a book. Looking back, I wonder if because growing up was hard, I used fantasy to escape from reality. Or did I daydream, because it was my instinct to do so? Sometime in 1964-65, just before the first **Gemini** space mission, I read Red Planet. In the next five years I read every book I could find by Heinlein, some as many as six times or more. Those were the five longest years of my life. The next twenty seemed like no time at all.

The rest of the **Gemini** program, most of the **Apollo** program, all of Star Trek, my high school years, my father's death, nine schools and homes in three states, my first job, my first car, my first girlfriend, the Vietnam war, the riots, the assassinations, the student revolts, LSD, rock music, the New Wave in SF, and all the rest took place or started in those five years. 1965-1969. From 13 to 18. And with all that emotional turmoil going on, Heinlein's stories were in the background, like subconscious images, floating there, inspiring aspirations, giving me ideas to mill.

Heinlein started out as a literary hero and father figure in 1964-65, and by 1969, I was revolting against him and his beliefs, like I was protesting my real father, another military man. Like Heinlein, I have a military background, if you can call a fifteen year stint as an Air Force dependent a military background.

Why did I find so much pleasure in reading Heinlein? Is it the same reason as an elementary school kid I was enthralled by the space program? Obviously, someone so young cannot be a part of the reality of space research, so it must be something deeper, psychological or mentally symbolic that attracted me.

The first Heinlein books I read all had adolescent heros. Kids growing up and finding a place in the world. However, it wasn't this world that they were coming of age in. And I wasn't yet old enough to appreciate the elements in the stories about hard work and what's involved with accomplishing something.

I think instead, as Heinlein was telling his stories, and building alternate worlds, that I just mentally stepped out of my everyday world, and into his fictional ones. Evidently, Heinlein was better at helping me escape than any other writer, so he became my SF drug of choice.

The underlying motif of SF is leaving. Going into outer space. Going time traveling. Going on an adventure. Evidently I didn't like where I was, and I was overwhelmed by symbolism of SF. As much as I admired Kip Russell in Have Space Suit--Will Travel, I did not want to hustle and get ahead in school. If I had been given a used space suit, I would have horsed around with it for awhile, and then sold it for the $500 bucks to buy SF books and rock albums. I certainly wouldn't have thought to save it for college.

Maybe I secretly wished I could have been Kip Russell or Dan Davis or Rod Walker. I wasn't. Not only did I want to escape my particular present, but I might have wanted to be someone else? This is probably typical for many adolescents. And, maybe, and I keep using that word, because I don't know for sure, that maybe our heros are just people we want to be. Since Heinlein was not a public figure, I think it probably more accurate to say, Heinlein's characters were my heros.

There was also a certain amount of self delusion too. I remember how I felt in the eighth grade. I thought, at the time, that I was becoming self-aware. That I could think for myself, and make my own choices. That I didn't have to believe what I was told. I could reject both my parents and my culture. This feeling coincided perfectly with what was going on in the so called "sixties."

I have tried to exorcise my past. Many of my fellow baby boomers feel that growing up in the sixties made us more important, or that our decade was more important than those who came before or after us. I don't believe that. It is the illusion that took a long time for me to see through.

I'm not sure, but I think Heinlein taught me to see through that illusion, or was it SF, or the teachings of the Buddha? Or maybe it was Jack Kerouac or Eric Sevareid?

I remember how I used to meet other Heinlein fans and we would talk about him and his ideas like he was a great philosopher. Whenever my family would move, and I started life over again in a new neighborhood and school, I would search out the Heinlein fans. Part of my self identity came from reading Heinlein.

What's strange, is Heinlein was considered such a realistic man. A man of action. He tried to convey that in his books, with stories about the competent man, and about people who got ahead in the world because they faced reality. Yet, he made his living inventing fantasies. Also, his stories had an underlying theme of wish fulfillment, which is common to SF, but also reflected by an interest in magic in a few stories, and by hints of mysticism shown in several stories, especially those dealing with Martians and their paranormal abilities. I tend to think now, that a realistic person wouldn't entertain such ideas. Like I said earlier, such speculations lead down endless paths.

I, on the other hand, know I am and was a dreamer. I dreamed about going to Mars or the Moon, or to other stellar systems. I dreamed about the future and alien encounters and first contacts. I traveled in time.

Well, I haven't gone to Mars. Sometimes I sit and stare at the Viking pictures taken from the surface of Mars. As far as the eye can see is rocky red rubble. Why did I ever want to go there? Was it because I had read The Red Planet, Stranger in a Strange Land, The Rolling Stones or Podkayne of Mars?

As I watched the Gemini missions on TV I daydreamed of being an astronaut. But how many people would sit in a space the size of a sports car with another person for two weeks? No real movement. No bathroom. No shower. No privacy. No good food.

No, I dreamed dreams. I did not have the right stuff. I could never have been an adventurer. I might could make it two weeks in a Hilton hotel room, but not in a spacecraft.

At the time I thought I read science fiction because I felt I was a serious supporter of the space program. I used to think if a person read SF, he was also interested in the space program and science in general. That's a false assumption I understand now. There are millions of SF readers, most of which show no interest in space or science. So I doubt the belief I used to have that SF had a connection to science.

The space program and SF gave me stage props for my motionless travels. They were backgrounds, scenes and plot devices on my inner movie lot. I, like film directors, would take SF books and loosely base my neural productions on them. But even today, after years of becoming more in touch with reality, some of the props are still warehoused up in my body's attic. Mars is the most important one of all.

Why does Mars still haunt me? Maybe because it's the nearest world we could terraform. I started reading about Mars even before I read Heinlein, but it was his fiction that really gave me the urge to move there. At the time I thought reading SF was important, that it was preparing me for the future. A future on Mars. I was wrong.

My fantasy addiction started with TV, but I moved on to the harder stuff. I first started reading for fun when I was in the fifth grade and lived at Homestead Air Force Base. I went to the base library and got all kinds of books on planes, space craft, dinosaurs and submarines. Then I discovered the Oz books. The base library had all the Baum, and most by the other Oz writers too. I went on to read Danny Dunn, Hardy Boys and Tom Swift. By this time fantasy was well integrated with nonfiction. In fact, the nonfiction only added details to my own fantasies. During the sixth and seventh grade I discovered all sorts of books, including H.G. Wells and Jules Verne. I even read When Worlds Collide by Wylie and Dolphin's Island by Arthur C. Clarke. But it wasn't until the eighth grade, and I had an English teacher who allowed us extra credit for reading that I discovered Heinlein. He was on the approved reading list. It was then I discovered that there was a distinct class of books called "science fiction," and Heinlein was the king of the hill, like Norman Mailer used to claim to be for mainstream literature.

At the time I thought I was shaping my own view of the world, but in reality, the massive tides of the sixties' social unrest was, in the vernacular of the time, doing a number on me. I watched Walter and Eric every night to keep an eye on reality. But it was Heinlein that I felt was my true guru. What's strange now is I cannot even say what it is I thought Heinlein taught me.

Heinlein worked for me because I was basically a loner. I had an inner world in which I retreated. I was caught up in the outer world, and was excited by the times, but I also needed to spend a certain amount of time in my private world. When I read his books, I was transformed. I was no longer a geeky kid, living with a troubled family, and always on the move, always the new kid at school. I went to the worlds which Heinlein created. I turned off one world and turned on another, without the aid of drugs. And when I did go on psychedelic trips, I was always disappointed that they weren't as good as Heinlein's.

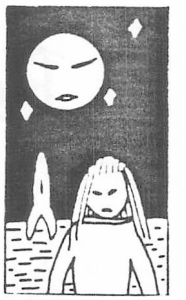
The sixties was like Dicken's A Tale of Two Cities, it was the worst of times, and the best. At the reality level, it was very troubled, but I had a great time in the sixties. I just wasn't there. I found other places to be, like The Man from U.N.C.L.E., Star Trek, SF books or rock music. Starting in 1961 I got a radio and it stayed on all the time I was home, including while I slept. It died in 1968, and I got another one. I read so much SF with the radio on during the sixties that I associate different sixties' songs with SF scenes and stories.

This all leads me to believe that I used Heinlein for many things, and to understand his impact on me, it would be better to think of him as serving multiple functions, most of which will never be perfectly clear. But for the most part it does not matter either.

SF and Heinlein led me to believe that the future was just around the corner, and I would eventually escape the present. In the sixties a lot of people were waiting for the revolution, the new age, the next promised land, or the last frontier. Heinlein's stories were my particular manifestation of that kind of thinking. My idea of utopia was building a colony on Mars. Was that much different from a commune in the mountains?

Someone once said that the Golden Age of Science Fiction is 12. Maybe the "sixties" is only adolescence, and every generation will have a sixties.

I think the generation which first grew up with television, was also the first, as a huge group, that wanted to reject the real and replace it with something more fantastic. The seventies were a time of

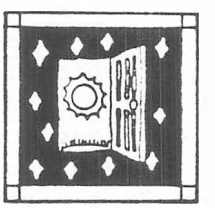


coming down, bumming out, and getting real.

Ultimately, I don't think I learned anything from Heinlein. Learning comes from the school of hard knocks and textbooks. What I got from Heinlein was enjoyment and inspiration. His stories moved and entertained me. I don't fantasize about going to Mars anymore (well, not very often). It's calmer and quieter now, living closer to what is real, but not as exciting, and maybe a little sadder.

In the long haul of years, and the dying of my neurons, I will forget the details of his stories. I will occasionally reread a story, and a glimmer of the old feelings will come back. The details of the dreams and how they felt are also fading. I do hope I can remember, that when I was young, and reality felt dramatic and exciting, and my dreams were very powerful, that I found a sense of wonder in Have Space Suit--Will Travel, Tunnel in the Sky, The Rolling Stones, Red Planet, Door into Summer, Starship Troopers, ...

In the end, when asked who was Robert A. Heinlein, I can say, in the fashion of the Sheckley story -- Robert A. Heinlein was a very good story teller. |*|



Some Thoughts on the Death of Robert A. Heinlein

by Brian Youmans

The Real bad news of the past few weeks has to be the death of Robert Heinlein on May 7. I had news through Randy Shane a month or so before that Heinlein had been in the hospital, was now out of it but on oxygen. A friend of Heinlein's who ran the OtheRealms fanzine was trying to get people to write to Heinlein and send him get-well cards. This impelled me to write my first-ever fan letter--I wrote to Heinlein and sent my best wishes for his good health and told him how much his books meant to me.

I'm glad I did. I guess I'm glad I did more for my sake than for his--I'm sure by the time he got my letter Heinlein had been told in many different ways by many different people for thirty years or more what his books meant to people, and the good wishes of some of anonymous fan certainly couldn't have evoked more than a passing smile from him--but I'm glad I wrote to him anyway.

Along with most other fans, some of my earliest memories of science fiction are of books like The Rolling Stones, Double Star, Citizen of the Galaxy, Tunnel in the Sky, Starship Troopers, Have Space Suit--Will Travel, and Rocket Ship Galileo. These were all in the children's room of the tiny Granby Public Library where we went every Staurday morning, down the stairs from the adult room, and I read them all. At least twice.

Later on I would go upstairs and some of the first books that I took out of the adult section were The Moon Is a Harsh Mistress, Stranger in a Stranger Land, and I Will Fear No Evil (which I didn't like). Stranger in a Stranger Land I did a paper on in high school, and for a while that was my favorite Heinlein. Now I think it's probably The Moon Is a Harsh Mistress; a story purportedly about a revolution but actually about a man and a machine growing up.

I think that's really what Heinlein wrote about best, and I think that's why his books--and perhaps especially his juveniles--will always be read. Heinlein wrote good science fiction, but what you care about are the characters that grow and learn to face the responsibilities and sacrifices of adulthood. I think maybe that's why some of Heinlein's later work has not achieved the same lasting success as his earlier books--that sense of evolving maturity in the characters was gone. Nonetheless, Heinlein's major works of the forties and fifties defined and became science fiction for millions of people. Heinlein will be read for a very long time indeed.

It is one of the chief drawbacks of this whole mortality business in my mind that if one lives a full life-span, one sees the deaths of most (if not all) of the persons who helped shape your world and your viewpoints on that world. Each loss emphasizes our duty to learn what we can from these people before they are taken from us, and to teach and get others involved before we ourselves join the grim statistics.

I'm glad I wrote to Heinlein when I did. I'm sorry he's gone. Perhaps I will try to write a story in his memory.

--Brian Youmans
--May, 1988|*|

Postscript

I received a short note from Virginia Heinlein sometime after I wrote the above saying that my letter had unfortunately not been received in time for Heinlein to read it, but thanking me.

I still haven't written a story for Heinlein, but I probably will some day--I still feel the loss whenever I think of something of Heinlein's. One of the originals is gone, and there is no way to replace him.

February, 1989|*|

Robert A. Heinlein

Robert A Heinlein published his first story in 1939, the year I was born. I read that story, "Life-line", when I was about nine years old. I had discovered Science Fiction, though I didn't know that's what it was: I just knew I liked it. I was hooked.

Robert A. Heinlein, more than anyone else directly influenced the course and content of American science fiction--and in the process, influenced the thinking of an entire era of readers. There are many who, offended by his seeming chauvinism, or frightened by his faith in the military, disagreed with his opinions and statements. Fine--in order to rationally disagree, one must first think. And it's not a bad thing to have forced people to think.

Robert A. Heinlein had faith in mankind: in its ability to survive, and to grow, and to push outward; to other worlds, to better technology, eventually out to the stars--and inward; to become a wiser, stronger, smarter species. He made prognostications, and freely admitted that he had, at times, guessed wrong. The amazing thing, however, is not that he was sometimes wrong, but that he was so very often right. We may well wonder how many more things he was right about--it will be interesting to look back from some years ahead and count them up.

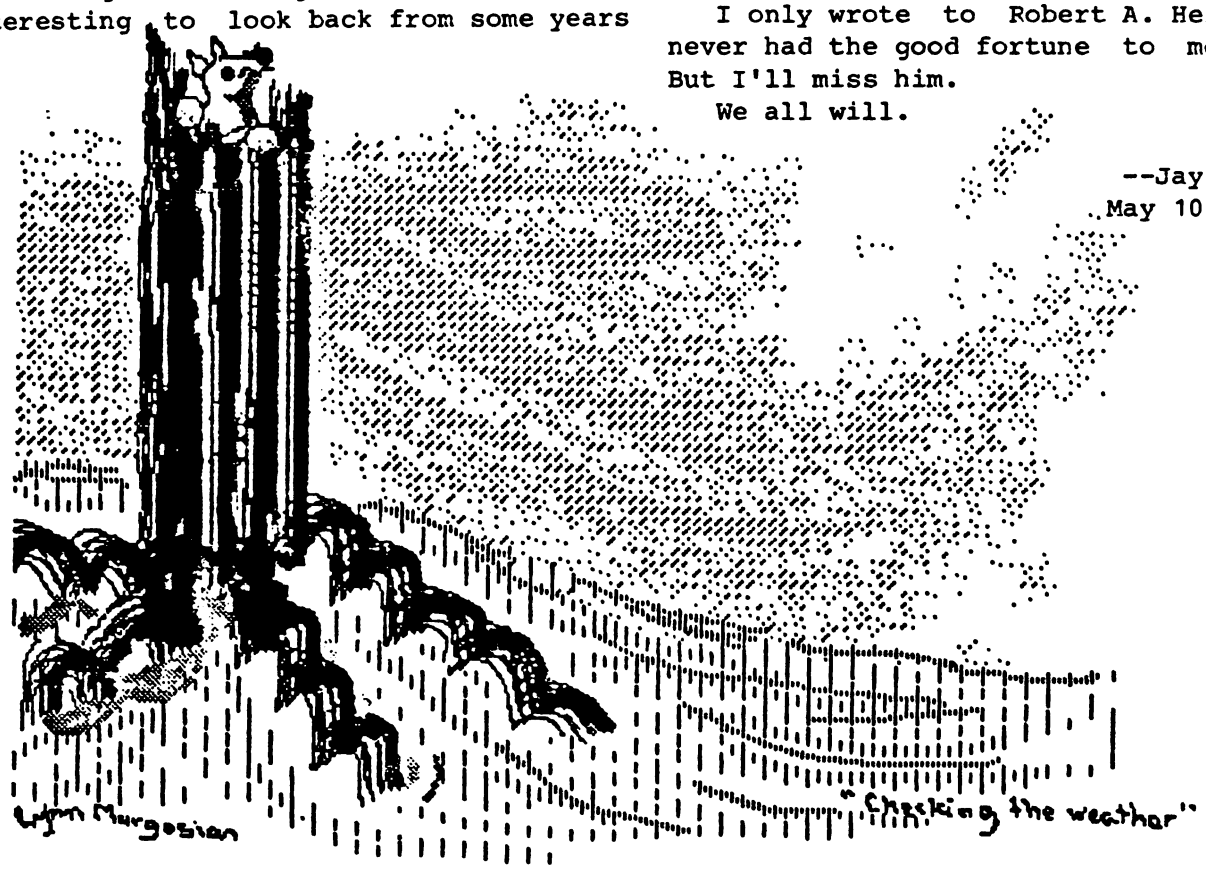
I first wrote to Robert A. Heinlein several years ago--merely a brief fan letter, with a question about some of his characters. I received a response from his gracious wife, Virginia, acknowledging my letter and thanking me for it--and a postscript from Robert A. Heinlein himself, answering my question. I realize now the volume of mail he must have received, in addition to the burden of a full-time writing schedule, but I always received a prompt, friendly response and I treasure the letters.

I came to writing science fiction late, and quietly, triggered, finally, into trying to write myself after reading one of his essays on writing. And each morning when I hit the keyboard I can feel them there behind me, crowded into my little office and watching the screen over my shoulder--Podkayne and Lt. Juan Rico, Valentine Michael Smith and Oscar Gordon, Joan Eunice Smith and Matt Dodson, the Bartlett, Stone, and Long twins, Friday Baldwin and Alex Graham and Holly Jones and all the rest--and someone (it sounds as thought it might be Mr. Hoag) murmurs softly, "Now think...how would he write this?"

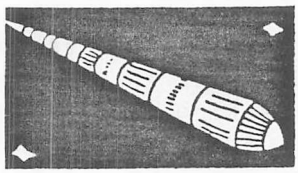
I only wrote to Robert A. Heinlein. I never had the good fortune to meet him. But I'll miss him.

We all will.

--Jay Sullivan
May 10, 1988 |*|



A Voyage Is Over



In one of Robert Heinlein's classic science fiction novels, 1963's Orphans of the Sky, the inhabitants of a spaceship gradually forget where they are. Designed to travel thousands of years to star systems light-years away, the ship is immense and self-operating, with its own gravitation and farming system. As generation after generation is born and buried on the ship, the inhabitants come to believe the ship is the universe; the ship's logs and records become religious symbols, and stories of prevoyage earthbound life are told as mere allegories. When the ship finally lands on a habitable planet in a universe vastly larger than they had imagined, the voyagers are compelled to deal with reality.

We are all voyagers in a universe far vaster than we can comprehend. It is up to visionaries such as Heinlein to remind us, occasionally, that we are on a tiny ship in an uncharted ocean and that our destination is yet unknown. By showing us worlds that have never been, he has shown us how our world could be.

Robert Heinlein died last week at the age of 80. A citizen of the galaxy has left the green hills of earth, and we have lost one of the navigators for our flights of imagination.

--Leo Morris
May 16, 1988 [*]

Leo Morris

Editor of the Fort Wayne News-Sentinel
Fort Wayne, Indiana

A Giant

I would like to thank you for your May 16 editorial tribute to Robert Heinlein. It was totally unexpected, but certainly welcomed. Very rarely is an author's death eulogized on the editorial pages, but then, such authors as Robert Heinlein are very few and far between.

Heinlein was one of the giants in the science fiction field, yet not many people would recognize the name. If they did, it would probably be for a very controversial book from the '60s, Stranger in a Strange Land, that they probably haven't read. Others may remember him only from the best-seller lists of the past few years, unmindful of his 40 year writing career or his juvenile fiction such as Space Cadet or Have Space Suit--Will Travel, unknowing of his more adult writing such as Glory Road or The Moon Is a Harsh Mistress. Yet to fans of science fiction he was the dean of all living writers, universally respected and admired.

We science fiction fans will feel his loss. He was a visionary who brought his dreams down to Earth for us all to share in. He was showing us the stars at a time when man was first trying to go into space, and he showed us ourselves and how we fit into the universe when we were questioning our place in the cosmos.

All too often such visionaries are ignored or treated with scorn. While they are pointing out the way the future might be, we spend far too much time worrying about the past and the present. We need to be constantly reminded of possibilities, of what we can do and can become by our own choice, and Robert Heinlein was always one of the best at this.

He will be missed.

--Terry O'Brien
May 24, 1988 [*]

Terry O'Brien

Thoughts on Robert A. Heinlein

A tribute to Robert Heinlein. I think it's about time. What can one say about one of the giants of science fiction? Somehow it would all sound inadequate. Yet, Robert A. Heinlein does deserve all the plaudits and commedations bestowed upon him.

I never had the good fortune to meet Robert Heinlein, something I've regretted for a long time. But at least I got to know a little of him through the books and stories he wrote. As is probably true of many other fans of science fiction, among the first SF books I read were Robert Heinlein's juveniles. There was something about the stories he told that made me want to read more by him and look for other authors who wrote in that genre.

One of the main reasons I think I enjoyed reading RAH was the fact that he could really tell a story and make the people and settings come alive. Take The Star Beast, for example. The title alien was, to me, very real and the sort of extraterrestrial I would have wanted to meet. It was no cute "ET" with a glowing finger and the power of self-revivification, but it was an enjoyable character of which I hold pleasant memories.

Or how about The Rolling Stones? Or Space Cadet? These and his other juvenile science fiction novels are among the finest around. But that's not to slight his "adult" fiction. There are plenty of equally good works: The Door into Summer; Waldo; Magic, Inc; Glory Road; The Puppet Masters, to name just a few. They were all books I read and enjoyed and still remember with pleasure.

In various letters, private and to zines, and in my own fanzine, I've commented on my dislike of Heinlein's use of sex in his later novels--not that I object to it, but to the way it's presented--and to his portrayals of women. Although I may decry those aspects of his later fiction, I still find much more to enjoy in his books than to dislike. Robert Heinlein was, I think, a realist and approached his writing from a practical point of view. He just tried to keep up with the times and changes in science and to insure that his fiction continued to sell. Some people may look down on that attitude, but it seems to me the only course to follow.

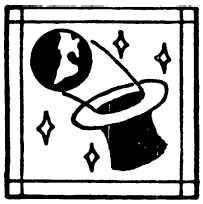
Despite any real of imagined flaws in Heinlein's work and despite the fact that he was regarded as a "hard" science fiction writer, his stories were about people, their problems and their actions and reactions to the societies in which they lived. In my view, while Heinlein tried to make certain that his science was as accurate as possible, his fiction still revolved around real people. When one stops to think about it, many of his stories weren't "hard" science in the sense that they dealt strictly with science, but more with how the people reacted to whatever science presented to them.

Heinlein's science fiction featured stories with excitement and adventure, with people doing things and going places. The science was there--necessarily so--but not as the be-all and end-all of the story. Take, for example, his story, The Puppet Masters, which told of alien invaders who took control of human beings. It showed the human side in their struggle to free themselves of the tyranny of the Puppet Masters.

True, many of his stories featured science and gadgets, but, like Simak, Heinlein dealt with the human aspect of the future. Simak's writing was "pastoral" and peaceful, with cal, easy-going people who took a philosophical view of their future world. In contrast, Heinlein was scientifically inclined and relied more on the "hardware", but it was still the people who mattered.

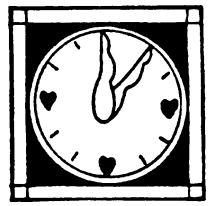
And he wrote books on less technical aspects. Take that so-called Hippie cult novel, Stranger in a Strange Land, which dealt with things more metaphysical and mystical, religion and philosophy. Or the later novel, Job: A Comedy of Justice, where the title character meets God. Or

T.D. Sadler



Time Enough for Love, which dealt with--what else--sex and love. Heinlein may have --and did--insisted on scientific accuracy in his novels but he didn't let it distract him from the story he had to tell. The science was background material to help make a more believable world. But it was interesting and educational. And it's the people and their adventures that I remember, more than any scientific material contained in his books. For that, I'll be ever grateful and thankful.

I only wish that he could have lived a few years more so we could see what new visions he might have come up with.



--T. D. Sadler
August, 1989 |*|

A Critical Personal Inventory of Robert A. Heinlein

John Thiel

With a most satisfactory long study of Robert A. Heinlein appearing in Lan's Lantern [["The Rise and Decline of Robert Heinlein, Parts I and II" by Dennis K. Fischer, LL #18 & #19, 1985/86]], I wonder if it is time for my compressed critical study. However, Mr. Fischer leaves out what I have long considered some important facts concerning Heinlein, such as the occasional dichotomy with the readership that arises and is displayed in letter columns, and for this reason I have wanted to see if I can get a more personal impression of Hienlein into print.

After all, Heinlein has been among the chief entertainment of my life. However complex a story he may tell, he keeps things running in the imagination more than any other science fiction writer, it seems to me. I have seen a few recent fanzines whose readerships weren't all all that impresses by him, but in general how many people do not rate him among the top names in the science fiction field?

Strange, then, to be doing an article in which I strive to isolate some of his faults. However, I am seriously concerned with some of the downgrading of him as a writer that I have been seeing recently, and want to see if I can find where it all starts.

Heinlein had "flat cats" in The Rolling Stones, which are a parallel of being seen in one of H. Allen Smith's books as "bouncing interchangeable pussy-pups." Lummox in The Star Beast resembles them , and the slug-like beings in The Puppet Masters certainly have affinities. The reader of these books might be interested in his obsessions, if such they are. You note recurrent phrases and motifs --women are likely to be red-headed, dynamite and dangerous but they have a few lessons to teach you, if not him; sometimes people stop talking in contractions when they experience a certain charged mood (being aware of each other is responsible for particularly stretched examples); there is a

time when fortune will turn against someone, even a child, and he will learn some lessons the rough way, and so on. Everyone is entitled to his philosophical thoughts and is apt to distribute and discuss them in his stories, but these are usually done by particular individuals recurring in stories. The Old Man who teaches lessons the rough way whether present or not resembles Albert the Alligator in Pogo. Heinlein brings his books around to his characters, and may have been employed in the library council, because SF is often well-maintained in libraries.

We read his books as excursions out of idiocy. My belief is that The Rolling Stones is his first one, and it does little but discuss it. His "juveniles" are called this because of the particular approach they have, not because children ought to be reading them. Everyone in this line of books, published in rather cheap-looking editions by Scribner's, is immured in them, but more cleverness and fortitude is shown in the adult ones.

I first read The Puppet Masters, which sounded as vile and revolting as a book can from the Science Fiction Book Club's description of it, but I was persuaded to try reading it, and I found the thing to be well-written, taut and dramatic, and carrying the reader's interest, and much more genuine than it had sounded. My interest would be how closely it resembles life, but Heinlein is pretty much a part of life and I suppose it bears some semblance of it, but I don't find the book to relate to anything part of the whole. However, I decided to research Heinlein and got Waldo and Magic, Inc. and found the first unreadable and the second just barely possible to get through, although I never finished it. I believe as short stories they precede The Rolling Stones. Magic, Inc. speculates that businessmen might try having a look at magic but there's no reason for anybody to like it, which will give the reader the impressions that Heinlein has had an experience of this type, more of a blind spot with Heinlein than implication. I had the feeling after these two books that there were some rackets he was trying to mull. Put together they were unspeakable, but then The Rolling Stones had something real to say that was close and personal. I couldn't find an interest in any of the other juveniles except The Star Beast, where a beast protects children from the law and is assisted by a Chinaman (the unusual), because the law is indubitably trying to kill children which is senseless. Thereby, I do not see Heinlein as a fascistic individual. He has them surviving, too--so much better than an author who lays out his characters dead; Heinlein avoids this whenever possible and thus is a writer of a higher quality.

I found it possible to ignore Heinlein the novelist again until Citizen of the Galaxy, which starts out interestingly enough and then proceeds through a plot one can follow. There's plenty of room for disagreement in it. Baslim dies--was he reincarnated later on? I didn't finish it, but do note that Lazarus Long bears reference to him.

I tried Double Star next, found the same good opening, and wondered how far I could get in it. It was quite a hodgepodge I was wading through, and soon I was skipping, wondering if there was some way for Heinlein to get them all in the same story. The woman in that one just doesn't leave her man, always a main character a likely first-person, alone. I wondered how he preceded the amount of denial inherent in this scene and looked back a bit, but it seemed a stereotyped and ritualistic process. He doesn't complain, but would Heinlein know if he would? He's an actor, though, and that was certainly a good character choice, but was I looking at one of the scenes he was an actor for? From then on out the story requires interpretation. I left them pretty much wondering who would rule, and noted Bonforte had been given the customary lobotomy which makes reading so trite thereafter--a prior lurks there earlier in the story, the method used in disposing of a Martian, which no one has ever gotten away with in a horror comic. Were I to pretend to be philosophical, especially about a story, I would say that the lack of soil under the feet of Lorenzo resembles the lack of relationship to life which science fiction has--for obviously the situations which Heinlein portrays well enough to make them visualizable do occur somehow and somewhere--yet they are poured out into a story, free-floating. His characters do live for the readers, though, no matter how much they die out in page after page of stilted print, where Heinlein is simple afraid to say any more (which does not make him Poe, no hardly) and wants also to rationalize and ponder, so boring to the

reader if the foregoing episodes have not added up well enough. I find, though, that he gets into life well enough, as does Poe also; that is something they're after, you see. It makes writing worthwhile.

Now, aside from short stories, Heinlein has never written anything else of particularly good worth. One should not be subjected to his several other adult novelistic attempts. He has some good ideas, but one has good cause to wonder if any of these will ever be realized. I think Glory Road is another stab at the execrable Starship Troopers, one of the stories I think that helped to destroy science fiction in its present holocaust--which means the writer is going on, is still trying to write. The Number of the Beast, which wholly ignores what caused it and stunned and exploded science fiction as with a bomb, is a good attempt at getting back into present trends (which makes someone a genius if he can see them nowadays). Heinlein is more of an activist than he used to be. An idea for a novel comes around, and a previous one is considered for resuscitation, which he is certainly allowed to do more with than he published in Starship Troopers. (You find his thematic approach in that novel at a time when SF fans were discussing the draft and joining the military--he's not unaware of them).

Not wanting to leave Heinlein in the lurch with this short analysis, I think that Coventry could be studied along with a couple of his longer works, Citizen of the Galaxy and Double Star, by any mind that compares books but doesn't always want to, in order to find out what Heinlein is talking about. I did finish Coventry, but rewrote it in my mind to say what Heinlein wanted, because the main character fighting his way through unspeakable crud really is Heinlein. (There's a little Richard Powers pen and ink illustration in my edition, too.)

You read books to see where authors get to nowadays. These are books in action and progress. They might require revision, but they will never get into literary works, with some exception. They are not going to write books of the "complete" type. I find Heinlein's scenes memorable, and that makes up for any bad qualities his novels have. He is par excellence in science fiction, but not prolific with quality.

--John Thiel
May 3, 1989|*|

Robert A. Heinlein: Master Storyteller

Robert A. Heinlein is often called a master, a genius, a writer of American classics, all of which tends to mean that people think he has been writing since before they were alive. Heinlein is one writer who has been practicing his craft long before most of those who will read this ever went to school to learn how to read. Being a "writer of classics" is a mixed blessing at best. It can make you the leader to follow, and at the same time the target for some critics to tear down.

Yes, Mr. Robert A. Heinlein has been writing longer than some of us have been alive, and we are the richer for it. It is our good fortune to have all these years of Mr. Heinlein's wonderful works already written for us, items ranging from the teenage adventure stories of The Rolling Stones and Space Cadet to the philosophical depths of Stranger in a Strange Land.

Heinlein did not rest on his past achievements. He continued to produce works that brought wonder into our lives. If judged just on the size of his output, Robert Heinlein would be someone quite special. However, when the consistent quality of his work is added in, the effect is quite phenomenal.

There is little more that I can say. I leave it to others who know him better to describe the man. All I can say is that the work is simply great.

--Elizabeth Osborne
May, 1988|*|

Elizabeth Osborne

...But I Read Him Anyway

Robert A. Heinlein has, over the years and through many books, entertained and challenged me. His Characters have amused me, annoyed me, and raised knee-jerk reactions of all kinds. He has made me examine my political convictions, my ethical stance, and my biases. Sometimes he has converted me, sometimes he has outraged me, and quite often, he has educated me. The education began before I knew what science fiction was, or even understood that fiction was written by someone.

The children's section of the public library in Grand Forks, North Dakota, was in the basement of the building. Like many omnivorous readers, my habit was simply to wander along the shelves until I saw an interesting title.

As I recall, the children's room had an interesting layout. There was a boys' section, a girls' section, and an everyone section. Pre-adolescent boys and girls were treated as somewhat different species in those days. Boys had their interests, girls had a separate set of interests, and not much cross-cultural exchange was expected, or tolerated. So, they segregated our books as well as our bodies. The girls' side had books about the proper activities of girls, and the boys' side had the preferred interests for boys.

I quickly exhausted the books I found interesting in the girls' area and began checking the shelves on the boys' side for something else to read. While prowling that "other side," I happened on the bound collections of Boy's Life, a magazine meant for Boy Scouts. I remember coming across the occasional story whose premise was so exciting that it made me search through the issues trying to find more like it. In retrospect, I'm positive that those were Robert Heinlein's work.

When I achieved "adult section" privileges (early, because I'd made a nuisance of myself), I found science fiction. The books were in a cranny containing one or two five-shelf bookcases. In 1964, science fiction was still a marginal genre as far as Grand Forks library defined literature. But that little corner opened some very wide doorways in my thinking, and Robert Heinlein had laid the groundwork.

As much as I have enjoyed reading Heinlein's work over the years, there are elements that bother me. One of these is the way he has physically structures some of the novels.

Heinlein's usual plot format puts the reader into the action immediately, then drops back for exposition. He spends most of his coverage backing and filling, and does this well. But then, he winds up his situation in a minimum of space, just crams it all together. By analogy, it's like a shaggy dog story that goes into such great and fascinating detail that one expects a really tremendous punch line--but the narrator has forgotten the funny wording, and ends it "Uh, so anyway, he wound up here." Not satisfying, like stepping on a phantom last step, and jolting to a stop.

Heinlein also has a dreadful tendency to come close to "and then I woke up and it was all a dream" resolutions. Again, not satisfying. Did he become bored with the story before he finished it, and tack on a quick and lazy ending? As a reader, I find that this sort of resolution tends to invalidate the whole concept. It casts doubt on the idea that led to the story.

Finding fault with the structure is a rather minor complaint, however. For major difficulties, let us turn to the are of content.

It is a truism that readers bring their own lives to anything they read. Discussions of the "author's intent" turn into free-for-alls because of this. What one reader sees as "profoundly moving," another might dismiss as "cheap sentiment." Each statement is valid for the individual.

I said, earlier, that Heinlein has occasionally outraged me. I give you two examples, in his own words:

"An intellectual is a highly educated man who can't do arithmetic with

Sandra M. Taylor

his shoes on, and is proud of his lack."

--Jubal Harshaw
The Cat Who Walks Through Walls

Anyone who cannot cope with mathematics is not fully human. At best he is a tolerable subhuman who has learned to wear shoes, bathe, and not make messes in the house.

The Notebooks of Lazarus Long

These quotes illustrate what I find to be Heinlein's most irritating statement: The ability to do mathematics is consonant with humanity.

I can't do math, and I consider myself to be every bit as human as someone who can. I resent the bald assumption that this lack devalues me. Mathematical ineptness may inconvenience me, but it does not detract from my humanity.

Another source of conflict carries through many books--Heinlein's women! I don't feel the taste of reality with the women that I do with the male characters. I don't know if the male characters feel "real" to men. I'm not male, and I'm not sure I know how men feel. I am most definitely female. I know what I feel, and those women really bother me.

Specifically, what doesn't ring true about Heinlein's women? Their expressed sensuality, and their plumbless nurturing capacity. Heinlein's women (post-1960 publications), are always "ready at the drop of a hat," and they revel in a constant state of glorious femaleness. I mean that this is in the forefront of their consciousness always.

Sorry, I don't find that to be the case.

I rarely "glory in my womanhood" while driving to the grocery, dealing with tradespeople, or even sitting around in the evening after supper. Grant you, from a storytelling standpoint, this sort of activity is not interesting, but Heinlein implies that even were they engaging in such mundane pursuits, his women would still carry this rosy glow around with them.

And as for female nurturing--don't any of those women ever turn aound and snap, "Oh for God's sake, grow up! Stand on your own emotional hind legs! Can't you even take out the garbage without being petted, chucked under the chin, and enfolded in the arms of the Eternal Feminine?"

While Heinlein's protagonist females are never admitted to be anything but intelligent, in many of the stories the women take pains to hide the extent of their intelligence. Why? Because men, the poor dears, find intelligence in a woman to be daunting. Is this true? Are women so naturally threatening to men that the addition of intelligence makes them too formidable?

I find this degrading to women, and even more degrading to men. Is the male's hold on his own sense of self-worth so fragile that the intelligence of a potential partner can render him impotent? Is it because secretly fear that they are only "in charge" because women allow it?* Are men truly such prisoners of their gonads that a little tickle of their sexual egos causes them to drop logic, common sense, and the ability to distinguish fancy from fact, for a chance to strut? Not in my universe, and not men I respect.

The women are rarely overt in their actions. Their approach, even when "enlightened" is still typically "feminine," that is, sideways manipulative behavior rather than direct confrontation. And the men always fall for it. They complain about it (women's actions cannot be understood--are not masculine--and women's thought processes are so arcane that men find them ultimately mysterious), but the men fall for it.

Does Heinlein's characterization in this area reflect what he thinks women really feel, or what he hopes they really feel? If the latter, that's his right. If the former, he hasn't done all his homework. I don't think his search pattern was wide enough.

And why should this bother me so much? Because Heinlein deals with his people in such a right-feeling manner. He seems to have tapped into archetypes. His lapse in his treatment of women glares at me. It interferes with the genuine pleasure I feel whenever I read, or re-read, his books.

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* Yes! It's a universal female plot. Women have looked the situation over and said, "Running things is just too much of a bother, so we'll give the really boring or messy jobs to the males, and just so they don't get restive, we'll convince them that they must do the work because we fragile, silly females are too weak and stupid and the 'biiig, strooong men' just have to take care of poor little dumb us."

Why do I keep going back to the works that trouble me? Because every time I read a book, I come to it as a different person. The book itself hasn't changed, the words haven't mysteriously transmogrified. I have changed. I've lived longer, had different experiences, met more people, gotten to know some better, gotten to know myself better--enriched my data-base. (How old were you when you read Huckleberry Finn the first time? Or Gulliver's Travels? Have you read either of them since then? Yes? It seemed like a different book, didn't it?)

About two decades ago, some of my politics and those presented in Heinlein's books really clashed. I would have been rude (and stupid) enough to argue those points with Mr. Heinlein had I the opportunity to do so. I would have charged in with all the flaming audacity of adolescence and proved myself an ill-bred fool from my own mouth.

Today I don't disagree nearly so much. It took twenty years, but now I find that most of the precepts laid down in Heinlein's work are valid. I dislike some of those stances, but I can't deny their validity.

Heinlein, using such characters as Lazarus Long (Time Enough for Love, Number of the Beast, etc.) and Jubal Harshaw (Stranger in a Strange Land, Number of the Beast, etc.), makes an unequivocal statement about the condition of humanity and works from there.

When I come across such a statement in my reading, I regard it as a touchstone. I pause, ask myself, "Is this true?", and check my own world view. Most of the time I can say "yes" and quickly move on with the story.

Occasionally I find myself taking a longer time to proof the statement before coming to the conclusion that "Yes, it is true, dammit!" He has found an area that I have not fully thought out, observed it, and come to a concpusion that I cannot refute, palatable or not.

I dislike fuzzy thinking, particularly when I find that I am guilty of it myself. Agonizing reappraisal or agonizing first appraisal, neither is fun. Yet I willingly undergo this process when I read one of Heinlein's books. It is productive pain. I would rather have my thinking clarified than not.

But what makes these statements worth appraisal? Do I accept them because they are in print? Hardly.

Do I accept them because their source is masculine? I don't think so, but gender does impose a bias on implied veracity in our culture. (If a woman says it, it isn't true unless a man agrees.)

Then why do I feel Heinlein's pronouncements bear enough weight to measure against my own feelings? Because they come from a person of more years and experience than my own.

Anyone who has lived in the world longer than I have must have observed something in the course of that time. I know, some people go through life with eyes shut, ears corked, and mouths disengaged from their brain gears, but I will listen until I decide that has been the case. Robert Heinlein certainly appeared to have kept his eyes and ears open. I think he rarely made a statement without knowing exactly how he had come to that conclusion.

The enduring body of Heinlein's work remains a permanent part of my library, and my thinking. I can always be sure of spending some pleasant hours with his stories and his characters. I can also be sure of finding something to challenge me, and I will "read him anyway."

The Books That Really Bug Me

I Will Fear No Evil (1970) -- an interesting concept, is gender identity a function of the brain, or of the genitals? Eunice's hyper-charged sex drive gave me my first really uncomfortable moments with Heinlein as a writer. "Just what women did he talk to?" I wondered. "None of them live around here." And the ending is a little along the dream-sequence line that I find disappointing.

Time Enough for Love (1973) -- the women again. The poor things never seem to be able to turn their glands off. And that ending! (I know, Number of the Beast explained all that. But how was I supposed to know in 1973 that Heinlein had an ace up his sleeve he wasn't going to show for seven years?)

Friday (1982) -- a good example of that "Uh, so anyway, I wound up here" ending style I dislike.

To Sail Beyond the Sunset (1987) -- Actually, I'm not sure if this book belongs on the "bugs me" list or not. The first

time I read it, I would definitely have said yes. It seemed to be a "Fanny Hill--Her Adventures in Times and Spaces" memoir. Yet when I read it again just recently (for this article), I found that not quite to be the case. Maureen makes a statement every now and then that the greater part of her life was spent in just such mundane activities as the rest of us. And while her sexual awakening was early (relatively), her mental adulthood came much later, when she realized that she was divorcing a somewhat complaisant self as well as a husband who oppressed her with charming competence. Well, I'll wait a few years and then read this book again. We'll see who's changed the most, Maureen or me.

--Sandra M. Taylor
September, 1989 |*|

A Call to Space

Susan Shwartz

More than twenty-five years later, I can't quite remember whether the book had a rocket that resembled a Hugo award on the cover or whether it had a picture of two kids who could have been refugees from Boy's Life, accompanied by something smaller, alien, and utterly fascinating. But the title, Space Cadet, attracted me. I checked it out of the library shelves in my grade school classroom, probably read through the rest of my classes, and took it home to show my father.

His reaction is what I remember.

"Heinlein," he repeated, appreciatively. "Oh yes, I remember him. I think you're going to like this. Are there any more?"

Well, yes. There was something called Red Planet Mars that looked pretty good. I planned to read that next.

"Good," said my father. "You know, if you like books like this, there's a man named Asimov whose stuff you might like too."

Then he changed the subject.

Twenty-five years later, and a hell of a lot of cautious proselytizing for SF later, I understand what my father, who grew up on Planet Stories, was trying to do. Don't push; don't spoil it; let her find out on her own.

After all, this was the man who bought me comic books every Sunday and who insisted I watch TV on an evening when I'd really planned to read. "No, you really want to watch this. It's good."

The year was 1967. The TV episode was "Charlie X," the first episode of Star Trek that I saw.

But that was years afterward. Let's return to the picture of a science-fiction-reading father listening to his kid, who comes home from school thinking she's just invented Robert A. Heinlein. If he'd told me I'd just taken one small step that would forever change my life, I think I'd probably have screamed and run--and left the book unread. Instead, he grinned at me, and I got the feeling that kids love. I've done something right. He's proud of me.

The question of my being a girl didn't come up. In fact, it was years before anything like that occurred to me. I was ready for science fiction when I found it. You know the kind of preternaturally solemn child who plays rocket ship at age four using kitchen gadgets (a rolled-up metal tape-measure made a great microphone), who reads mythology (given her by a much older and infinitely superior med-student cousin to shut her up) at age seven, and who appalls a grade-school teacher by dragooning half a classroom full of kids into collecting some interestingly pitted sandstone because "we are going to build a meteorite."

You bet the question of my being a girl didn't come up, not for years. It didn't bother me that Matt Dodson, Oscar, and all those other space cadets were male (or non-Jewish) or anything like that. I was

more worried that my math (even then, it was a problem) might keep me from applying, and I knew that my vision was a definite problem. Where were the female cadets? You know, I don't think I ever asked. I just naturally assumed that if I would have problems with astrogation, they probably would too--and they were off studying.

Gradually, the question of women in space did come up. Robert had his answers too. By the time I read Podkayne of Mars and some of Heinlein's later works, those books raised questions that I was ready to have asked--and ready to argue about. So I did. Then, about the time I was rereading Starship Troopers, I started protesting against the Viet Nam War. I knew that Mr. Heinlein--he has always been Mr. Heinlein or Sir in my imagination--wouldn't like that. But us Heinlein readers are a cussed lot; look who we've got to inspire us!

My father didn't like my protesting either. In a letter I wish to hell I could find, Dad (who'd been an infantry Captain at the Battle of the Bulge) told me that he wished that I wouldn't march, that these people were not loyal Americans, and that I would find out that I was mistaken. However, he added, enclosed was $20 to "subsidize my subversion" and the home address of our senior Congressman. He signed it, "Love and peace, your fascist father," and drew a peace symbol. Because it was the only one that he ever drew, it came out upside down.

My father died too damned suddenly in 1970. I went on stubbornly reading SF. He'd been proud that I planned to go on to grad school; so dammit, money or no money, I was going to go on to grad school. After all, he had sold shoes to get through law shcool--and I had the example of those kids in books like Have Space Suit--Will Travel, to go on, too.

I earned my way through, not without a few fights from faculty and students alike, who found my "low tastes in reading" grounds for endless controversy...except for the medieval scholars, who nodded. "One of those," they said wisely, and made sure that I realized that Tolkien and Lewis had worked like hell to get where they were.

Once I graduated, I started to write... and sell. Somewhere along the way, I know I wrote Mr. Heinlein a thank-you note. After all, Heinlein readers pay their debts; Heinlein readers are too stinking proud to be under obligation--and so is my father's daughter.

I wish I could have told my father too.

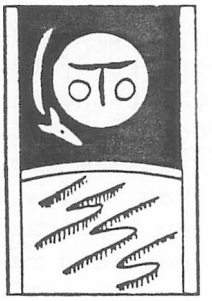
You may say that this disjointed memoir has more to do with me and my family than with Robert Heinlein, but I really hope that you've gotten my meaning: my First Contact experience with reading Heinlein, my family, and my future are inextricably linked. So, when I think of Heinlein, I think too of the solemn little kid I once was and of my father, trying hard not to shout for joy. I'm thinking of that right now--and I thank you Mr. Heinlein for that too.

Susan Shwartz
January, 1988 [*]

Requiem: The Day That SF Died

(Roughly based on the melody
"American Pie" by Don McLean, ca.1971)

Long, long time ago I can still remember
How his stories used to make me dream.
And I hoped if I read enough
I would learn of space and stuff
And bring about the future he'd foreseen.

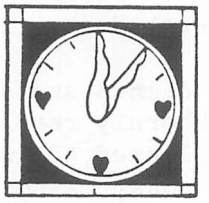


But television brought the story
How he'd passed to SF glory
Bad news on the big screen
No more would be seen.

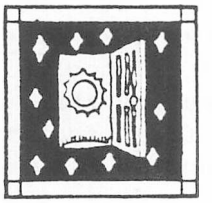
I remember how I cried
When they said he'd crossed that great divide
And all his words welled up inside
The day that SF died.

So, farewell, Mr. Robert Heinlein
Thank you for your stories and your soul and your mind
We wish you well while traveling the galaxy's girth
Far away from the green hills of Earth
Far from the green hills of Earth.

It was you who took time enough for love
And you'll be friends with God up above
I'm sure He's read your book of Job.
And I know He'll take you by the hand
Not as a stranger in a strange land
And put you onto a glory road.



I feared some Friday bye and bye
You'd take that tunnel in the sky
And with a different drummer
Find your door into summer.



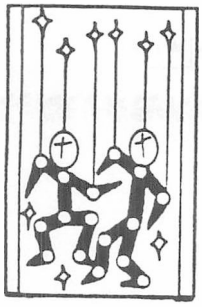
I was a lost and lonely little country kid
Till your book Red Planet blew my mental lid
Just one of all those things you did
Till the day that SF died.

And we were singing,
Farewell, Mr. Robert Heinlein
Thank you for your stories and your soul and your mind
We wish you well while traveling the galaxy's girth
Far away from the green hills of Earth
Far from the green hills of Earth.

Now for many years you led us on
Space Cadet to The Rolling Stones
Your Farnham's Freehold kept them all upset.
When a new wave fingered in your face
You feared no evil, put them in their place
And Starship Troopers blasts them even yet.

And while the Hugos went your way
Unpleasant kiddies wouldn't play
But in the middle of the distress
Your Moon was a harsh mistress.

While the puppet masters pulled their strings
You wrote of paupers and of kings.
Methuselah's children, they all will sing
Of the day that SF died.



And we were singing,
Farewell, Mr. Robert Heinlein
Thank you for your stories and your soul and your mind
We wish you well while traveling the galaxy's girth
Far away from the green hills of Earth
Far from the green hills of Earth.

Now you're a citizen of the galaxy,
Monument to rationality,
Your assignment in eternity.

Tomorrow the stars will welcome you
Beyond this horizon and beyond the blue
Between the planets a lifeline waits for you.

The past through tomorrow now you can see
And all through the future history
You live on in hearts of fans like me
The day that SF died

And we were singing,
Farewell, Mr. Robert Heinlein
Thank you for your stories and your soul and your mind
We wish you well while traveling the galaxy's girth
Far away from the green hills of Earth
Far from the green hills of Earth.

The star beast now can walk through walls
In great un-numbered cosmic halls
With Starman Jones and Lazarus along
The man who sold the Moon to Earth
Is booked into another berth
And travels without spacesuit where he's gone.

He's sailed beyond the sunset light
But not, I think, into the night
He'll always stay within our sight
The day that SF died.

And we were singing,
Farewell, Mr. Robert Heinlein
Thank you for your stories and your soul and your mind
We wish you well while traveling the galaxy's girth
Far away from the green hills of Earth
Far from the green hills of Earth.

Arlan Andrews June 1988 [*]

Heinlein's Legacy

When I read Robert A. Heinlein's obituary in May of 1988, what surprised me was how brief it was; how little it really said. It mentioned his Naval service, his Hugo and Nebula awards, and the titles of a few of his books. What it did not say--could not say in that small space, I realized--was the value of his legacy to so many of us, across the generations and around the world.

It wasn't just his command of the genre, although, for a lot of people, Robert Heinlein was science fiction. As Spider Robinson pointed out in his now-famous article on Heinlein ("Rah, Rah, R.A.H.!", written for Destinies [Ace Books: Summer, 1980]), Heinlein wrote a lot of definitive works, pieces that set the scope for other writers who also wanted to explore the ideas of time travel, longevity, alien invasions, brain transplants, and political revolution. But it was more that, for many, a Heinlein was the first science fiction we had ever read (or the first good SF, at any rate). So impressed were we by it that all other works in the genre would be read in the shadow cast by his influence.

My introduction to science fiction and to Heinlein was Between Planets, a book I happened upon in the school library in junior high, and read with a growing excitement. Here was something different--space travel and alien peoples and cultures; adventure, politics, and technology; all of it written in a matter-of-fact tone as if Heinlein was merely describing a stroll through a suburban neighborhood. My reaction was, I think, typical. After I finished Between Planets, I went back to the library and checked out every other Heinlein book they had.

Some twenty years later, I own a copy of every Heinlein novel published. I had adopted the practice of buying each new novel in hardcover, no matter the price or the reviews; a tribute I have paid to no other author. One of my first reactions upon reading his obituary was the sad realization that there would be no more novels. That was followed by a wistful hope that perhaps there was a not-yet-published final work left behind. I could not imagine a world without a new Heinlein novel appearing with reassuring regularity.

It is not that Heinlein was a perfect writer...he certainly wasn't. There are many of his books I wish he had written differently. But there is not a single work of his that I would wish not written --even the most tedious book is full of new ideas. Many of his later books have been criticized as long on talk, lecturing, full of plot inconsistencies and irrelevances, and short on action. Still, they are compelling. I thought I did not like The Number of the Beast when I first read it...I found the premise fascinating enough, but the pages of dialogue became numbing. Why was everything discussed to death? I wondered, and put the book aside in disappointment. However, I found myself rereading it a few months later, almost despite myself. After the fourth or fifth time, I had to admit that, flawed though it might be, I obviously enjoyed it anyway.

Many people have discussed Heinlein's writing style, speculated on his personal beliefs and how those beliefs may or may not sneak into his writing (or parade through it, as the case may be). I won't repeat their arguments here, but I do want to touch on one point. It has been said that Heinlein is an elitist, that he worships competence. This is one prejudice I have myself, and it is hard for me to understand why some people find it objectionable, at least the way Heinlein seems to present it. He presumes that we are all capable of learning what we need to know to function in this society--indeed, to excel in it. Whether true or not, it seems to me a healthier philosophy to promote than its converse--one more likely to produce educated, motivated, interested human beings.

Heinlein readers are encouraged to keep striving, to stretch themselves, to prepare for their dreams to come true no matter how unlikely those dreams may seem. (This latter point is most obviously made in Rocket Ship Galileo, and plays a large part in many other of his works as well.) Some of his later books dwell rather heavily on what we should do by emphasizing the things we aren't doing--several pages in To Sail Beyond the Sunset urge the members of our society to take advantage of our educational opportunities, to take an interest in the workings of our government, to become literate and to read extensively and to encourage the highest of standards in our schools.

If Heinlein had strong opinions of what the human race should be, and expressed it in his writing, he is certainly no different that any other author. I don't agree with every detail, but I wholeheartedly embrace his general theme: We can be better than we are. I think it is the optimism, the recognition that there is room for growth in both the individual and in the society, that attracts so many to Heinlein and to science fiction in general. We have the technology to fulfill our physical needs and are ready to consider spiritual and philosophical matters. Heinlein gives us intellectual puzzles which entice us to study history and economics and sociology, to consider many angles, to problem-solve. He does not satisfactorily answer the questions he raises, but at least they have been asked.

What, then, is Heinlein's legacy? Besides a body of work that will be read and enjoyed, debated and criticized for years to come; besides the speculation on what a human being is and what his/her purpose might be--there is something more. Robert A. Heinlein used science fiction to liberate the minds of his readers, to teach them to approach life with curiosity rather than fear, with a marvelous sense of adventure and joy.

What Robert Heinlein's obituary did not say, then, was what he meant to us. For me, it is a concept of what it means to be free and how to respect the freedom of others. It is a little bit of courage in the dark times, a moment of hope when it seems that all is most discouraging. If I had written Heinlein's obituary, I would have closed this way:

> "He is survived not only by his wife, Virginia, but also by thousands of spiritual children, whose debt to him can never be repaid."

November, 1989 |*|

Jamin Meyers

The Predictions of Robert A. Heinlein

Robert A. Heinlein vaulted to the front rank of science fiction writers within a few years of his first appearance in print, and he has remained there since. Two polls taken 20 years apart by the leading science fiction news fanzine, Locus, showed exactly the same result: the most popular science fiction writers in the world were Heinlein, Asimov and Clarke, in that order--a statement most probaby still true today.

Clarke has perhaps made more money than Heinlein and Asimov, and certainly gets higher rates for his books. Asimov has made a fortune from his excellent and numerous nonfiction books. Neither has remained as much the pure science fiction writer as Heinlein, and neither has consistently published book after book that arouses controversy, praise, indignation and genuine awe. Heinlein is the acknowledged "Dean of Science Fiction." When the Science Fiction Writers of America, the leading professional society in the field, inaugurated the "Grand Master Award" for lifetime achievement, it surprised no one that the first recipient was Robert Anson Heinlein.

Heinlein was the Hemingway of modern science fiction. He was the first to use the futuristic gimmicks of science fiction in a natural, easy way. An example often used is: "The door irised open." As plain an straight-forward as can be, but the substitution of "irised" for "swung" immediately moves the reader from the present world into the future, Hemingway, of course, is credited with establishing the naturalistic school of writing, where character is shown by action and dialogue, woven into the forward movement of the story. This was a dramatic change from the frequent long and prolix descriptions of internal thought followed by earlier writers. And Heinlein's change from awestruck wonder to simple acceptance of a door that irised instead of swinging open struck a responsive chord with the small but steadily growing science fiction audience in the years just before World War II.

In The Man Who Sold the Moon, a collection of one novella as the lead story and three novelettes, Heinlein states in the preface that his stories are intended to be "what if" extrapolations, not prophecy. This is the approach taken by most serious science fiction writers. One of the major catch-phrases of the genre is "...if this goes on," which Heinlein invented and used as the title of one of his stories. Heinlein is one of the best at depicting imaginary worlds of the future that could easily and logically develop from the present, given a specific set of circumstances. As in George Orwell's masterpiece 1984, sometimes the intent is to prevent an undesirable world from coming about by showing the horror of living in such a place.

Revolt in 2100 is a good short novel about a theocracy taking charge in the United States, and what it is like to live under a religious dictatorship. This short novel was first published in 1940, some 10 or 11 years before George Orwell wrote 1984. But the means of keeping total control over the "Angles of the Lord," the elite guard of the Prohpet/Rular, are virtually identical to what Orwell forecasted for all the citizenry in his novel. There is an "ear" and an "eye" in every room, with monitors at television screens both watching, listening, and, if need be, recording every action of the guards in their private quarters. The rulars have mind control drugs (also possessed by their underground opposition, the Cabal), use torture, psychological conditioning, and most of the other techniques Orwell outlined so convincingly. One might sus-

Joe Green

pect this book was a major source for Orwell, if it could be proven that he had read it.

Revolt does not at all address some of the other and more subtle Orwell inspirations, however such as "doublethink," "doublespeak," etc. It was these, not the mechanical control equipment, that made 1984 probably the most influential science fiction book ever written. (It cannot actually be proven that the huge audience this book enjoyed helped prevent the "Big Brother" form of government from coming about--but there are numerous reasons for believing this to be true.

Heinlein's most popular and enduring character is a man named Lazarus Long (born Woodrow Wilson Smith). Lazarus makes his first appearance in one of Heinlein's early novels, Methuselah's Children. He also appears several more times in many books, most notably as the main character in one of Heinlein's longest novels, Time Enough for Love. Lazarus became the prototype for the character almost universal in all of Hienlein's later works, the "wise old man" father figure. most people assume this is Heinlein himself, speaking through his fictional creations. It seems a safe assumption.

The first page of Methuselah's Children opens with:

> Mary had no intention of letting anyone know where she was going. Outside her friend's apartment she dropped down a bounce tube to the basement, claimed her car from the robopark, guided it up the ramp and set the controls for North Shore. The car waited for a break in the traffic, then dived into the highspeed stream and hurried north. Mary settled back for a nap.

This is the type of writing that made Heinlein famous--the brief, passing description of advanced technologies which must have seemed incredibly far away to readers of 1941, when this book was first published.

The author makes advanced technology seem even more casually accepted as a part of everyday life by providing nicknames for some of the machinery. The "bounce tube" apparently uses some form of antigravity; "robopark" seems selfexplanatory; setting the destination point and then letting the car take her there under its own control, including the decision-making authority to dive into high-speed traffic, indicates a degree of automation and computer control still quite distant today. But it makes one wonder if the kids who read this in 1941 (and innumerable reprints since) grew up to be the engineers and scientists who have brought us much closer today!

Methuselah's Children is set in the year 2114. The predictions range from seeing the second interstellar expedition ship being assembled in orbit overhead to a wardrobe that catches clothes, straightens them, and hangs them neatly inside itself. The latter may seem trifling, but it is the type of believable detail which Heinlein throws in so casually it almost escapes the notice of a seasoned reader. Another is a "directional microphone," which a helper uses by standing by the side of Lazarus as he makes a speech and focussing it on people rising to speak for back in the huge audience. We have such microphones today, usually visible at Presidential press conferences. There were none around when Heinlein wrote this book in 1940.

One of the major predictions of this book, in fact the heart of it, is that immortality will be discovered in the future. Lazarus Long himself has a very long life span due to genetic breeding, but he would have aged and died regardless if the secret of how to rejuvenate humans, over and over again, had not been discovered. This later becomes a major theme in Heinlein's work.

Heinlein reached an apparenly new phase in his development as a writer with Starship Troopers, a highly militaristic novel that essentially glorifies the future soldier. Almost none of its predictions have come true, because the equipment described is still too far ahead for today's science and technology. Regardless, the publication of this book brought down much reader wrath on Heinlein's head. It openly and even enthusiastically espoused the conducting of war, if that was the policy of the government. It held that soldiers should blindly obey orders and not question their superiors. Such attitudes did not go over well in the aftermath of World War II, when the United States wanted to forget about wars entirely. If this novel has a special characteristic it is that Heinlein is essentially predicting that some things will not change, such as the duties of

soldiers and current concepts of military honor.

Stranger in a Strange Land, soon after its publication, became Heinlein's most controversial book. It probably still is today. It was his next book after Starship Troopers, itself controversial enough, but for reasons quite opposite to those objections raised to Stranger. In fact, the two books take moral and philosophical approaches to life that are 180 degrees apart. Several critics have stated that this book was apparently written in two parts, one considerably separate in time from the other. Heinlein, in a conversation with my wife, Patrice Milton (Green) in 1976, said that he wrote the first half in 1948, and put it aside because he felt the public was not ready for it. He shelved it for some ten or more years, then brought the manuscript out and finished it when he judged that public tolerance had increased enough to make the book acceptable.

Stranger was puportedly a guidebook for the Manson Family, some of whom have stated that they attempted to actually live by its precepts. It also became something of a cult book for the students of the late 1960s, some years after its first publication. It has had a strong and continuing sale since its first appearance. It won a Hugo in 1962 as the best novel of 1961, but that was awarded by the science fiction fans. The awareness of its virtues as a book for the general public grew more slowly. Like Dune, which began as a magazine serial and. almost entirely on word-of-mouth publicity, grew to be one of the best selling contemporary books, Stranger expanded its audience every year for at least a decade. Its sales have not equalled those of Herbert's classic, but only because (in my opinion) no movie appeared (though rights were sold). It is (again in my opinion) a far better book, and the best of all the Heinlein's that I have read--and I have read all but a few classified as juveniles.

The great majority of this book deals with social and legal issues; technology is only occasionally mentioned.But reading through it brings out many items of interest, regardless. In what was apparently the first section of the book, written many years earlier, Heinlein mentions the planning being done to establish a colony on Jupiter. The context makes it clear that he is referring to actually living on the "surface". By the time this book was published the accepted theory--now confirmed--was that Jupiter had no surface at all, but merely thicker and more dense layers of gas, down to a possible core no larger than Earth. At that point the gasses would be thicker than molasses from extreme pressures. There is no "surface" on Jupiter. Unfortunately, Heinlein apparently chose not to update the older section of the book before it was published--or he ignored the error.

The book has another interesting item, forgotten until it was reread. In a news of the day report: "The Kingdom of South Africa, Federation Associate, was again cited before the High Court for persecution of its white minority." Obviously, Heinlein sees the present government of South Africa as having been overthrown, and replaced by Blacks. In Childhood's End, Clarke also used South Africa as the example of a lasting bastion of racial prejudice, but Heinlein has had the major actors change places--a more likely far-future prediction.

A re-reading confirms what I already believed, that this is Heinlein's best book. Its focus and emphasis is not on science and technology, but on philosophy and religion--and it does a superb job of exploring and depicting major aspects of both. It is a thoughtful, intense, mentally stimulating exercise in looking at religion--and American society as shaped primarily by religion and old technology--from an outside viewpoint. Organized religion does not stand up well under such detailed scrutiny. The book is thoughtful, profound, and fascinating, with an emphasis on interpersonal relations, as opposed to the effects of technology and change. It also suffers from "talkiness," a writer's disease Heinlein acquired in Starship Troopers which reached new heights here.

Time Enough for Love is apparently Heinlein's longest novel, by just a few thousand words exceeding I Shall Fear No Evil (not reviewed here). This is the book in which Lazarus Long returns as the major character. Like most of Heinlein's work, it is set too far in the future to have much relevance to predictions that can be examined today. But since immortality has been so well achieved here as to not retain much interest, Heinlein focusses (if this overly long book can be said to have a focus) on his other major interest, artificial intelligence. He takes the con-

cept to interesting extremes.

A computer named Minerva serves the administrator of the planet where Lazarus Long went when he wanted to die. At first appearance Minerva acts very much like any other highly developed AI machine. Ira Wetheral, the planet administrator, admits that Minerva seems as real to him as any of his wives. And Lazarus makes the interesting statement that computers are "human because they are made in our image." Lazarus then engages in a dialogue with Minerva that reads very much as one human (old and wise) talking to another (young but highly intelligent and extremely well educated). Minerva indicates that she understands love in one of the two classic senses, Agape, but not the other, Eros--the latter caused, of course, by the lack of a body and glandular-based emotion. Lazarus declines to pin her down by forcing her to make definite statements. But later, he does question her specifically on what she would do if Ira emigrated and left her behind. Ira learns to his great surprise that she would destroy herself.

Lazarus offers Minerva the opportunity to become a flesh and blood woman, if she is willing to pay the price. It would cost her all the marvelous capabilities of the giant computer she is, which no single human brain can match. On the next page she eagerly accepts. Minerva is deeply in love with Ira Wetheral, her master for the past 100 years or so, and is willing to give up the advantage of being a computer. Apparently she feels strongly that she understands and has already achieve Agape, and needs only to be capable of achieving Eros to fully express her love.

The novel takes a long jump through a side story, and when it returns to the main theme Minerva is now a human woman. Her brain and personality were impressed onto the blank brain of a twelve-year-old female body grown in vitro, of the type the humans keep in storage for themselves in case an accident destroys some part of their bodies. She then aged normally to maturity.

There are other uses and examples of AI in this book, including the computer named Dora on Lazarus Long's personal space-going yacht. She has the personality of a spoiled teen-aged daughter. But Minerva is the most interesting example of AI carried to the extreme, where she becomes fully human. The movement into a human body demonstrates this conclusively, blurring the line between human and intelligent machine into unimportance--which seems to have been Heinlein's intention.

This book has an almost offensive concentration on sex and breeding, with every permutation exhibited and known taboo broken. (In fact, some taboos that do not yet exist because they are impossible today are invented, and then they too are broken.)

This would have been a better book at half the length.

Expanded Universe: The New Worlds of Robert A. Heinlein is an enlarged version of The Worlds of Robert A. Heinlein, and the author tells you so in the first sentence in his foreword. It includes the older book in its entirety. This means it also contains some of his earliest stories, including the very first, "Lifeline," and such older favorites of many people as "Successful Operation," "Blowups Happen," and "Solution Unsatisfactory." It is of unusual interest because it contains a 30-year update of his original 1950 prognostications, as well as the 15-year update that appeared in the original Worlds. And it includes two possible scenarios for the year 2000 A.D. He feels there is a +99.92% chance that either he, or this civilization of which he is a part, will be extinct by that year. (One hopes those high odds are based primarily on his own expected longevity.) In either case, he does not believe he will have to again account for a set of mistaken prophecies.

As the "purest" of science fiction writers, one who has written only a minimum of technical or scientific articles (at least under his own name), the great bulk of Heinlein's work appears as fiction. This contrasts with the output of his two contemporaries and chief rivals, Asimov and Clarke, both of whom are well-known for excellent fact books (though Clarke is the only one to have written extensively about realistic space exploration and the real space program). But despite this concentration on fiction, Heinlein is well-known as the originator of a fact-based concept, the "future history" idea that has since been used extensively by a number of imitators. What Heinlein has been doing since the late 1930s is filling in that outline with stories and novels.

Because most of his work was written to a future history outline, and he had ac-

quired the reputation of being a prophet, Heinlein apparently felt compelled in 1950 to issue a set of predictions, realistic projections of where he expected the world to be fifteen years later. In 1965 he re-examined his first set and updated them. In this book he does it again, and for the convenience of the reader, reprints both of the older projections just ahead of each new one. This is honest journalism, since in fact many of the earlier predictions now stand as wrong or partially wrong. In his introductory remarks Heinlein carefully points out that all good science fiction writers tell a story first and prophesy second, using arguably the greatest of them all, H. G. Wells, as an example. Heinlein's record of prediction is better than that of Wells, which experience has proved largely wrong, but still misses the mark a great deal of the time.

The last part of this book is "The Happy Days Ahead," the second of the two possible future scenarios. Heinlein obviously meant the title to be ironic, since he proceeds to detail what he considers a list of serious traumas and travails upcoming.

(1) The sorry and still declining state of mass education in this country. Heinlein lays most of the blame at the primary and secondary school levels, claiming they send unprepared young men and women to college. He makes the astonishing statement that today's young people are largely a second-generation set of illiterates, having been taught by teachers who are too often illiterate (in reality) themselves. He then analyzes the requirements of the University of California, providing guidance that will enable even a dummy to get through in fours years with a degree.

(2) The second item is what Heinlein feels to be a serious decline in patriotism. In another article (an address he delivered to a graduating class at Annapolis), "The Pragmatics of Patriotism," he makes the point that patriotism is a valuable preserver of our genes (of which we are only temporary guardians) because it ensures the survival of the body politic--even if you, personally, die doing so.

(3) The third item is inflation. Heinlein was very persuasive in 1980, but the recent halt of inflation, and in 1986, actual (slight) reduction of prices, makes this prediction (temporarily) unbelievable.

(4) The Age of Unreason now growing up around us (Heinlein's own term was "The Crazy Years," used throughout the Future History series). We see it in the growth of religious cults, world-wide terrorism, a new belief in mysticism, back-to-nature cults, a belief in such nonsense as astrology, tarot, the I-Ching, a return to witchcraft, etc.--and of all possible but unbelievable events, a new and strong return of creationism!

(5) Next is the cancerous growth of government, which needs little amplification (not that this stops Heinlein). This, too, looked better in 1980 than today, when serious and often successful efforts are being made to reduce the size of government, at least at the Federal level.

The final item in "The Happy Days Ahead" is "Over the Rainbow," a fictional scenario in which a worthless new President of the United States dies in a plane crash shortly after taking office, and his Vice President, a black woman and professional actress put on the ticket to get votes, becomes the new President. She proves to have a lot of common sense, an iron will, and determination to do her job and make this into a better country. She makes many changes, largely involving a tightening of discipline in the armed forces, a resistance to pressure groups that is total, and a commitment to scientific and technical progress that is unswerving. She does so well that of course she gets elected to a second term. This is pure Heinlein speaking, that odd mixture of courtly Victorian gentleman and far-future thinker, expounding his own ideas on what it would take to return this country to its original road of high promise.

If there is a theme in this book, it must be the art of prophecy, and the hazards thereof. There are more articles speculating about the future than any other subject. Heinlein makes a consistent effort to recount his career as a prophet, warts and all. In the course of discussing the reasoning behind some very pessimistic prophecies, he gives his opinions on many subjects in the world of today. He sees far more bad than good, but admits progress is being made in some areas. His overall philosophy of unreconstructed libertarianism comes through clearly here. And he quite often makes the same point, in a short article or story, that he makes again in a novel of great length and wordiness.

A book of strong interest to the Heinlein fan is The Notebooks of Lazarus Long, a coffee-table book illustrated and illuminated by an admiring artist. This is a compilation of the sayings of Lazarus Long, with those Heinlein considered most important appearing on separate pages, suitable for removal and framing. This book may represent the truest voice in which Heinlein has ever spoken. He appears here, in the guise of Lazarus Long, as the original philosopher-poet which the term "man of letters" was meant to exemplify. Here he often says in a sentence what it takes pages and pages of talking-heads dialogue to say in such books as Time Enough for Love and the almost equally long I Will Fear No Evil.

Lazarus Long, true to his character as deliniated by Heinlein, says what he thinks as if there were no other side to be considered. For example:

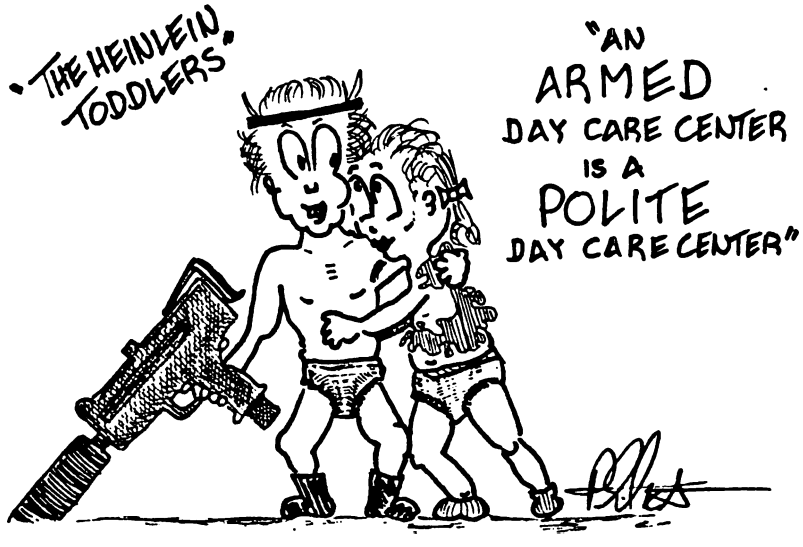
> The two highest achievements of the human mind are the twin concepts of "loyalty" and "duty." Whenever these twin concepts fall into disrepute--get out of there fast! You may possibly save yourself, but it is too late to save that society. It is doomed.

This has a militaristic sound which many perfectly competent and capable people would not like to see applied in their society at large. It can be argued that there are many other equally important attributes on a successful society, such as its economic underpinnings, its geographical location, the presence of endemic debilitating diseases, etc. But regardless of whether the reader agrees or disagrees with Heinlein, most of these sayings will make you stop and think--and that is almost certainly the author's main purpose.

What is most interesting about Heinlein is his remarkable ability to change with the times, to grow with his audience. Essentially, this keeps him young in mind and in tune with his society--or often far ahead of it. Considering that he was in his early thirties when he wrote his first published story, and was already medically retired from the U.S. Navy, his adaptability is nothing less than astounding. He is 13 years older than Asimov and ten years older than Clarke, both of whom have grown and changed much less over the years.

Clarke is acknowledged as the father of the geosynchronous satellite. Heinlein has also fathered two inventions, less spectacular in scope but each quite useful. One is the waterbed, which he designed very thoroughly in his mind and in an article, but either did not or could not patent. The second is the "Waldo," from his story of the same name. The actual inventor of the Waldo, the manipulative device that makes it possible to handle radioactive material through thick glass shields, acknowledges that he read Heinlein's story and decided to see if such a useful device could actually be built. It could, and when completed it worked very much as Heinlein had outlined it.

Most students of Heinlein consider Lazarus Long to be the truest voice through which the author speaks. And though he may physically pass from the scene, unlike the immortal Lazarus, the same thing can be said of Heinlein that was said to Lazarus at the one and only time in his life when he lay dying: "Just a dream, Beloved. You cannot die." |*|



Robert A. Heinlein: A Chronology

1907 born July 7 in Butler, Missouri

1929 graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy

1934 retired from the Navy due to ill health

1939 first story, "Lifeline", appears in the August issue of Astounding Science Fiction

1940 "If This Goes On..." serialized in February-March issues of Astounding Science Fiction

1941 outline for his "future history" appears in May Astounding Science Fiction, tying most of his short fiction together

"Universe" appears in May Astounding Science Fiction

Methuselah's Children serialized in the July-September issues of Astounding Science Fiction

Guest of Honor at the Denver World Science Fiction Convention (DENVENTION)

"By His Bootstraps" appears in the October issue of Astounding Science Fiction

1942 "Waldo" appears in the August Astounding Science Fiction (as by Anson MacDonald)

1947 Heinlein emerges from his postwar silence to publish "The Green Hills of Earth" in the February 8th issue of The Saturday Evening Post, the first genre science fiction writer to appear in a slick publication

Rocket Ship Galileo published, the first in a series of juvenile SF novels

Robert Sabella

1950 Heinlein writes the script for Destination Moon based on his novel Rocket Ship Galileo

1951 Tom Corbett, Space Cadet, based on Heinlein's novel Space Cadet, begins a successful run as a television series

1956 Double Star published, wins Heinlein his first Hugo Award for Best Novel

1959 Starship Troopers published, wins Heinlein his second Hugo Award for Best Novel

1961 Stranger in a Strange Land published, becomes the first genre science fiction novel to make The New York Times best-seller list

Guest of Honor as Seattle World Science Fiction Convention (SEACON)

1967 The Moon Is a Harsh Mistress wins Heinlein his unprecedented fourth Hugo Award for Best Novel

1975 Awarded the first Nebula Grand Master by the Science Fiction Writers of America

1976 enjoys an unprecedented third Guest of Honor position at the Kansas City World Science Fiction Convention (MIDAMERICON)

1988 dies on May 8 |*|

1962 Convention Report

Originally published in Yandro.
Reprinted with permission of
Buck Coulson and Bob Tucker.

Robert A. Heinlein trod on my toe. Yes he did.

And really, that is about all the convention report I care to offer to the waiting public. Every other event of that memorable Chicago weekend pales to insignificance by comparison. Seemingly, there were five hundred different things happening there in three short days, but non of them were as important as that one single occurrence. Robert A. Heinlein stepped on my toe.

I was standing at the lectern on that long raised platform where the Holy Ones were privileged to eat--you will remember that elongated "speaker's table" where the chosen few got their meals free. I was standing there giving my all plus a few old Bloch jokes when Robert A. Heinlein strode into the room. Earl Kemp dashed up, moved me away from the microphone with a straight-arm maneuver and made the breathless announcement. Fans stomped and cheered and whistled. The rafters shook. Robert A. Heinlein strode across the room to the speaker's table, strode across the long platform, stepped on my toe, and clutched Ted Sturgeon in that fond embrace routine. Thereafter he made his graceful acceptance speech and strode away.

The following day while I was milling about the anteroom outside the convention hall proper, a messenger came up and said that Robert A. Heinlein was holding court in room 801. Furthermore, the messenger said, Robert A. Heinlein sent down word that he wanted to see me, as he'd heard I was attending the convention. Thank you, I told the breathless messenger. I continued to mill about the anteroom and hall until in the late afternoon, favoring my wounded toe. At train time I left the city of Chicago.

And that is all the convention report I can offer. |*|

Bob Tucker

My Mentors

Broadcast by S.R. on CBC radio,
February, 1987

I hev been influenced by three people so heavily that I consider each to be a "mentor", in the precise meaning of "one who teaches how to think". The second of them died within the past year, and the first is pushing 80; only the third is in shape to play handball. All three, however, are immortal.

I was born, physically, in 1948. But I was born as a thinking being in early 1954, at age 5, when a librarian whose name I do not know gave me the first book I ever read all by myself, with no pictures in it. It was called Rocketship Galileo, the first of the books written especially for young people by the already legendary Robert Anson Heinlein.

I don't think it's possible to overstate the influence that book had on my life and work. It was about three teenaged boys whose Uncle Don took them along on the first-ever flight to the Moon, where they found diehard Nazis plotting a Fourth Reich, and outsmarted them. I was entranced. When I had finished it I went back to the library and asked if they had any more by this guy. They took me to a section where all the books had the same sticker on the spine, showing a V-2 impaling an oxygen atom, and my life began. Valentine Michael Smith, the Man from Mars; Lazarus Long, the wise and ornery immortal; the nameless man who, thanks to a time machine and a sex-change, was noth of his own parents and his only child, a closed loop in time... When I had worked my way through all the Heinlein titles, enjoying them hugely, I tried some of the ones filed on either side...and while they weren't quite as good, they were all superior to anything else I could find in the building. (This was back when any SF novel which had been both published in hardcover and purchased by a library had to be terrific.)

It wasn't just the thrilling adventure, or even the far-out ideas--you could find those in comic books--but the meticulous care and thought with which the ideas were worked out and made plausible, related to the known facts of science. Almost incidentally, seemingly accidentally, Heinlein's SF taught me facts of science, and the love of science--taught me that in science could lie adventure and excitement and hope. I still remember my confusion and dismay at the way all my schoolteachers conspired to make science seem dry and dull and impenetrable. It was my first science teacher who told me flatly that manned spaceflight was nonsense. How many young minds did he ruin?

Three years ago I visited my cousin Clare at her office in New York. As we chatted, my eyes kept inexplicably slipping from her, irresistibly drawn to a shelf at the edge of my peripheral vision. Finally they focused, and I understood. Clare is the children's book editor at Scribner's. I began to explain my rude inattention, and she cut me off. "I know," she said, "the Heinlein juveniles; happens all the time." Sure enough, there they were, the building blocks of my reason, arrayed in the same order they'd had on the shelf of the Plainview Public Library, all those years ago.

That Clare understood my problem at once suggests just how much influence Heinlein has had on the world, since he began writing in 1939. You can't copyright ideas, only arrangements of words, but if you could copyright ideas, every SF writer in the world would owe Heinlein a bundle. There can't be more than a handful of SF stories published in the last forty years that do not show his influence one way or another. He opened up most of science fiction's frontiers, wrote a great many de-

Spider Robinson

finitive treatments of its classic themes, and in his pare time he helped design the spacesuit used by NASA, and invented the waterbed and the waldo (if you don't know what a waldo is, ask anyone who has to manipulate radioactives or other deadly substances).

But what I admire most about Heinlein is what he chose to teach me and other children in his famous SF juvenile novels: first, to make up my own mind, always; second, to think it through before making up my mind; and finally, to get as many facts as possible before thinking. Here are some brief quotes from his book Time Enough for Love, short extracts from the notebook of a 2,500-year-old man:

> God is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent--it says so right here on the label. If you have a mind capable of believing all three of these divine attributes simultaneously, I have a wonderful bargain for you. No checks, please. Cash and in small bills.

and:

> If it can't be expressed in figures, it is not science; it is opinion.

and:

> Democracy is based on the assumption that a million men are wiser than one man. How's that again? I missed something.
>
> Autocracy is based on the assumption that one man is wiser than a million men. Let's play that over again, too. Who decides?

and:

> It's amazing how much mature widsom resembles being too tired.

and my own personal favorite:

> Writing is not necessarily something to be ashamed of--but do it in private, and wash your hands afterwards.

\# \# \# \# \#

Just as Heinlein used love of adventure to teach me the love of reason and science, Theodore Sturgeon used love of words, the beauty that could be found in words and their thoughtful aesthetic arrangement, to teach me the love of...well, of love.

Not the kind of love found in Harlequin romances or bad movies, but the love which is the basis of courage, of hope, of simple human persistence. When I was sixteen, barely in time, I read a story of his called "A Saucer Full of Loneliness," and decided not to kill myself after all. Ten years later I read another Sturgeon called "Suicide" aloud to a friend of mine who had made five progressively more serious attempts at self destruction, and she did not make a sixth. (Should you know anyone who needs them, the former appears in the collection E Pluribus Unicorn, and the latter in Sturgeon Is Alive and Well.)

It has become something of a cliche to say that all of Ted's work was about love; he himself did not care for the description, perhaps because the word "love" begs too many questions. I know, because he told me once, that he accepted Robert Heinlein's limiting definition of love:

> The condition in which the welfare of another becomes essential to your own.

Ted wrote about that state, but about much more as well; about all the things which fuzzy-minded people confuse with love, but about much more than those things too. I think that if he must be distilled to some essential juice, it would perhaps be least inaccurate to say that he wrote about need, about all the different kinds of human need and the incredible things they drive us to, about new kinds of need that might come in the future and what they might make us do; about unsuspected needs we might have now and what previously in-explicable things about human nature they might account for.

Or maybe what Ted wrote about was goodness, human goodness, and how often it turns out to derive, paradoxically, from need. I envision a mental equation with which I think he would have agreed: that

Need + Fear = Evil,

and that

Need + Courage = Goodness.

One of Ted's finest stories, included in the collection Beyond and in my own anthology The Best of All Possible Worlds, is actually called "Need." It introduces one of the most bizarre and memorable characters in the history of literature, a nasty saint named Gorwing. How can a surly rat-faced runt with a streak of cruelty, a broad stripe of selfishness and a total absence of compassion be a saint? Because of an unusual form of limited telepathy. Gorwing perceives other people's need, any sort of need, as an earsplitting roar inside his own skull, and does whatever is necessary to make the racket stop. Other people's pain hurts him, and so for utterly selfish reasons, he does things to saintly that even those few who understand why love him, and jump to do his bidding. Whenever possible Gorwing charges for his services, as high as the traffic will bear --because so many needs are expensive to fix, and so many folks can't pay--and he always drops people the moment their needs are met. Marvelous!

Ted's own worst need, I think, was to persuade me and others of the post-Hiroshima generation that there is a tomorrow, that there is a point to existence, a reason to keep struggling, that all of this comic confusion is going somewhere, progressing toward something--and although he believed in his heart that this something was literally unimaginable, he never stopped trying to imagine it, and with mere words to make it seem irresistibly beautiful. He persisted in trying to create a new code of survival for post-Theistic man,

> "a code," as he said, "which requires belief rather than obedience. It is called ethos...what it is is a reverence for your sources and your posterity, a study of the main current which created you, and in which you will create still a greater thing when the time comes, reverencing those who bore you and the ones who bore them, back and back to the first wild creature who was different because his heart leaped when he saw a star."

Let me quote the closing paragraphs of "The Man Who Lost the Sea," about a man who, as a boy, nearly died learning the lesson that you always spearfish with a buddy, even if you wanted the fish all to yourself--that "I" don't shoot a fish, "we" do. Now the seasound he seems to hear is really earphone-static from spilled uranium which is killing him:

> The sick man looks at the line of his own footprints, which testify that he is alone, and at the wreckage below, which states that there is no way back, and at the white east and the mottled west and the paling flecklike satellite above. Surf sounds in his ears. He hears his pumps. He hears what is left of his breathing. The cold clamps down and folds him round past measuring, past all limit.
>
> Then he speaks, cries out: then with joy he takes his triumph at the other side of death, as one takes a great fish, as one completes a skilled and mighty task, rebalances at the end of some great and daring leap; and as he used to say "we shot a fish" he uses no "I":
>
> "God," he cries, dying on Mars, "God, we made it!"

When the Halifax science fiction convention, HALCON, asked me to be their Guest of Honor, I agreed on the condition that they fly Ted Sturgeon in to be the Toastmaster, for I had yearned to meet him. I will spare you the story of the horrid duel of puns which Ted and I waged across the port city of Halifax (and the starboard city of Dartmouth), but I must tell of the Two Kinds of Hug.

A fan approached him and asked if she could give him a hug; he agreed. "Ah," he said gently as they disengaged, "that was a letter A."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"You hug me," he ordered, and I did. "Now that," he said, "was a number One."

A crowd had begun to form, as they so often did around Ted. He had various pairs of people hug, adjudging each hug as either a Letter A or a Number One.

At last we began to get it. Some of us hugged touching at the top, joined at the middle, and spread apart at the bottom, like a capital letter A. Others, unafraid to rub bellies, hugged so as to form a number One. "There is really only one sense," Ted told us, "and that is the sense of touch; all the other senses are

only other ways of touching. But if you can't touch with touch, you can't touch with much."

# # # # #

There came a time in my life when, for reasons too complicated to go into, I needed to make some money without working for it. Heinlein taught me how to think; Sturgeon taught me how to feel; but there was not much call for either of those skills. My schooling had taught me very little, and most of that was turning out to be false or worthless. My only assets were a vast collection of tattered SF paperbacks which I was unwilling to sell.

Suddenly I made the mental leap: perhaps I could write tattered SF paperbacks!

Well, the idea couldn't have been all bad: the first story I attempted sold, on first submission, to the highest paying market in SF, Analog Science Fact/Science Fiction. I quite my regular job and went freelance on the strength of that $300 cheque.

But everything I wrote after that bounced, not only at Analog but everywhere. A year after I went freelance I had a superb library of first-edition rejection slips, equalled only by my collection of Absolutely Final Notices from creditors.

What saved me from life as a civil servant, or some other form of welfare, was the fact that the editor of Analog at the time (and subsequently of Omni) was Ben Bova.

Many editors regard writers as regrettably unavoidable nuisances, and new writers as avoidable ones. The slushpile, as the heap of unsolicited manuscripts is called, is often seen as a source of comic relief for idle moments in the editorial day. But Ben always treated it as a treasure-trove. He read every manuscript that came in the door--and when he found new writers he felt displayed promise, he cultivated them carefully.

Ben cultivated me in several ways. The first, of course, was to send me a cheque. But with the cheque came a letter inviting me to lunch at my convenience. (This is not as altruistic as it seems: when an editor dines alone, he pays for it; when he dines with the newest and greenest of writers, the publisher pays.) Over lunch he answered hundreds of my beginner's questions: how to prepare my manuscripts more professionally, why I didn't need an agent until I was ready to try a novel, how to join the Science Fiction Writers of America so my manuscripts wouldn't land in the slushpile, what a science fiction convention was and how they could affect my income, what Heinlein and Sturgeon were like as people, the basics of plotting commercial fiction, hundreds of things I desperately yearned to know. I took pages of notes. He also stroked my ego, and demanded more stories.

So I went home and wrote more stories, and as I've said, Ben--and every other editor--bounced them all. But Ben didn't send rejection slips, he sent rejection letters. Brief ones, rarely more than two or three sentences explaining what specific errors made this story unpublishable ...but those few sentences amounted to a condensed correspondence course in writing commercial fiction. "You're writing too many stories at once here, Spider." Or, "I don't give a damn about your hero." Or, "Nothing happens here; no problems get solved, nobody learns anything." Things like that.

Most of these nuggets of wisdom horrified or infuriated me. Say, for example, that I had sweated blood for weeks, produced a 20,000 word masterpiece of adventure and irony, and gotten it back from Ben with the single sentence, "Cut it to 6,000 words." I would scream. Then I would examine my dwindling bank balance and try to cut the story at least a little. Then I'd call Ben.

"I can't cut 14,000 words, Ben, there isn't a spare word in there."

"I know," he would say. "They're all gems. But just as an exercise, pretend that someone is going to give you a dime for every word you cut."

I would thank him glumly and hang up, then ignore his advice and send the manuscript to his competitors. When they had all bounced it, with form rejection slips, I'd shelve it.

After a year of this, I was desperate, so I'd dig out the dusty manuscript, look at it mournfully and, just as an exercise, see how much flesh I could slice from my baby before I cut into its spine. Howls of pain! A few days later I would call him again. "Ben, remember that story about the malfunctioning time machine? I've got it down to 10,000 words, and there's just nothing else I can cut, and I've already cut some terrific stuff."

"I know," he'd say. "But just as an exercise, pretend that a large man is going to come around with a maul and breal one limb for every thousand words above six."

Cursing the Bova clan root and branch, weeping with fury, I would amputate a few more of my child's appendages, and when I had it down to 6,000 words I'd dry my eyes and re-read it--

--and discover to my horror that it was now a much better story--

--and send it to Ben and get a cheque.

In addition to tutoring me, Ben made a point of introducing me to other writers, to artists and editors and other professionals, to influential fans. And when I had sold a half dozen stories, he sat me down at a convention and said, "It's time you started a novel and got an agent." Meanwhile, down the hall, a mutual friend was, at Ben's instigation, telling one of the best agents in the business that it was time he took on a few new clients--this guy Robinson, for instance. When I complained once that I couldn't think of any story ideas, Ben showed me an entire drawer full of ideas and invited me to help myself. On one memorable occasion, he returned a story I had submitted, saying, "This is too good for me to buy; Playboy will pay you three times as much as I can."

But of all the things Ben did for me, one in particular stands out in my mind. During the year of apprenticeship I mentioned earlier, during which I sold no stories, it eventually became necessary to get a job. Luck was with me; I found employment as a journalist, and so continued to avoid honest work. I spent a year as a Real Estate Editor for a Long Island newspaper: during the day I typed lies purporting to be the truth, while at night I tried to teach myself how to write truths purporting to be lies for Ben. The newspaper job was dull, dishonest and demeaning--and quite lucrative: I had never made so much money in my life. At the end of my year of trial, I still had only the one original story-sale under my belt...and then a horrid thing happened.

The publisher of the newspaper called me into his office and told me that he knew I was doing my job with half my attention--and doing it well; he was not complaining. But he offered to double my already high salary if I would give up this fiction nonsense and throw my full attention into the world of real estate, become an insider, socialize with realtors and join their clubs. Or, I could quit. He gave me a week to decide.

I called my friends for advice. But Ben was the only friend I had who was earning a good salary, in fact, the only one who was not on unemployment--and the only one who did not give me an immediate, kneejerk answer. The night before I had to give my decision, he called me back.

"I've been thinking all week about your problem," he said. "Spider, no one can pay you enough money to do what you don't want to do."

I thanked him and quit my job. A week later, I sold my second story (to another editor), and a few months after that I won the John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer in science fiction, and by the end of the year I was selling regularly and had been nominated for my first Hugo Award. And because I had to live on a writer's income, I moved to the woods of Nova Scotia, where I met my wife Jeanne.

And so in a sense it could be said that I owe everything I have in the world to Ben Bova.

Mind you, nobody's perfect. It was Ben who encouraged me to put puns in my stories. He ishimself an excellent and accomplished writer, and he once wrote about a robot policeman which he named "Brillo."

Metal fuzz...

\# \# \# \# \#

These, then, are my three mentors: Robert Anson Heinlein, Theodore Sturgeon, and Ben Bova. All great writers, all great teachers. Generalizations are a nasty habit, but perhaps it would be least inaccurate to say that Robert taught me how to think, Ted taught me how to feel, and Ben taught me how to survive as a writer. I owe all three a debt I will never be able to repay.

--Spider Robinson
February, 1987 |*|

It's All Heinlein's Fault

I'm a science fiction fan and author today because I once read a story by Robert A. Heinlein. "The Green Hills of Earth" first appeared in the Saturday Evening Post of February 3, 1947. I--and probably a good many other readers-- was initially attracted by the magnificent double-page illustration by Fred Ludekens, showing Rhysling standing "on the riparian esplanade where the ancient great of Mars had taken their ease". Ludekens was, generally, the Post's illustrator of cowboy stories, which might gove some clue to the place held by science fiction in the editor's opinion. But he did his research--two-thirds of the contributors' page in that issue was devoted to his problems--and produced a masterpiece. Bjo Trimble visited the Heinleins when they lived in Colorado, and said that the original of this painting was mounted over their fireplace. (I felt envious; I'd love to have it mounted over my fireplace, if I had a fireplace....)

Anyway, I read the story, decided it was the best short story I'd ever read in my life, and began looking for more stories by Heinlein. This led to a library copy of the Healy-McComas anthology, Adventures in Time and Space, and checking the copyrights there led to Astounding Science Fiction, and I was hooked.

I only met Heinlein once. It was at one of the conventions in the early 1960s where he made a dramatic last-minute appearance to accept his Hugo. (The first time it was dramatic; the second time there was a aura of a publicity act.) Juanita and I were talking to Marion Zimmer Bradley one morning when she announced that she was going up to see Heinlein, and we should come along. We demurred; we didn't know Heinlein, and didn't want to barge into his room, but Marion can be very forceful, so we went. He was, in fact, being the host of a small informal gathering, and at our appearance leaped up and embraced Marion and spent some time in admiring her fiction. Juanita and I kept quiet (if you can believe such a thing of me), but I did manage to tell Heinlein that he was wholly responsible for my interest in science fiction. (I don't think that I added this made him indirectly responsible for my marriage, family, and most of my social life, though it would have been true enough.)

He was, all this time, in his bathrobe. "Holding court" was the phrase that came to mind, as did the conclusion of a L. Ron Hubbard story which had recently been reprinted in hard covers; "Typewriter in the Sky". It ends with the protagonist's appalled thoughts: "Up there--God? In a dirty bathrobe?" Heinlein was God in a dirty bathrobe to our small fan group for years; the phrase was too apt to be forgotten.

For that matter, Heinlein was very close to God in the science fiction world during my early years in fandom. He was the almost-unanimous choice for best author, he'd been the first of the pulp science fiction authors to make the jump into the high-paying slick magazines, and he'd pioneer the idea of juvenile science fiction. Even though the general public considered all science fiction pretty juvenile, it had nearly all been written for adults until Heinlein began producing novels such as Space Cadet and Red Planet. He was also the author who sold one of his books to the movies, and Destination Moon was the movie which began the science fiction movie boom. George Lucas greatly expanded the science fiction movie audience, but George Pal originated it, with Destination Moon. (The movie didn't have much resemblance to Heinlein's Rocket Ship Galileo, but most fans expected that in movies.)

Like a lot of other fans, I was disappointed in Heinlein's later work, after Stranger in a Strange Land. I was glad he was making money, and I enjoyed seeing "one of us" on best-seller lists, but I no longer saw any reason to buy the books; a used paperback would do nicely. He no longer needed my contributions to his royalties, and I no longer needed his writing. But I still regard those earlier works as the epitome of what science fiction should be.

--Robert "Buck" Coulson
June, 1988 |*|

Robert Coulson

Recollections of Robert A. Heinlein

"Once upon a time there was a third-year Latin student named Mike Smith. Guess what book he brought to class one day?" That is what I say when people ask me how I happened to get into reading science fiction.

There were only five of us in third-year Latin that year (1964), our desks pulled back and turned away from the room-ful of second-year students occupying Mr. Childres' main attention. We were supposed to be translating chunks of Cicero (Quosque tandem abutere, Catalina, patientia nostra?) and Sallust (sorry, he wasn't the wordsmith old Cicero was, so I don't recall any catch phrases).

But Mike had brought a science fiction book to class, and James, Elisabeth, Ronnie, and I found this Heinlein fellow to be much more entertaining than the old Romans. (Latin is a language/ At least it used to be/ First it killed the Romans/ And now it's killing me.) The book was Stranger in a Strange Land, and for one very innocent 16-year-old it was several kinds of an eye-opener.

In fact, the first time I checked it out of the city library, I got so embarrassed I couldn't finish it. Six weeks later, though, I checked it out again. I had to. I had to find out how the story ended.

Heinlein is like that, I found out, as I proceeded to gobble through the high school's collection of Heinlein juveniles (much more comfortable reading, though I did read Glory Road around that time). Elisabeth preferred Asimov, contending that Heinlein's young protagonists were too Horatio-Algerish for her taste. I've always liked my music to have a clear melody, though, and by the same token I like my reading to have a clear story. (This is not to say that Asimov or any of the others I read then were not good story-tellers, just that Heinlein's stuff had less of the philosophical jazz improvisations than anyone else but Andre Norton.)

From the viewpoint of (egad!) 25 years, and looking over all of the Heinlein I've read since, and remembering reviewer comment on the material I haven't happened to read, (frankly most of it since I Will Fear No Evil) I tend to agree that philosophical jazz improvisation was not Heinlein's strength as a writer. He tried it, and he reads better without it.

Heinlein was still alive and publishing when I started writing this piece; in fact, I saw a new-release on the stand at Krpger around the end of April. Something about Lazarus Long's mother. For all I know, his publisher may still have a manuscript or two in the bin, to where the last-released work by the old master will fall within the 50th anniversary of his first-released work. About the only good thing one can say about his death is: finally I'll be able to compile a complete collection!

--Margaret Middleton
June, 1988 |*|

Margaret Middleton

A Rather Protracted and Roundabout Remembrance of Robert A. Heinlein

Frederik Pohl wrote in his autobiography, The Way the Future Was:

> Of course it isn't really true that there is no cure for the science fiction addiction, because every year there are thousands of spontaneous remissions.

I'm one of those science fiction addicts Frederik Pohl is talking about. My remission was as spontaneous as my present relapse.

My initial addiction started waaaaaay back in the '50s, during my high school days. That first encounter was a lasting one--Robert Heinlein's Starman Jones. I couldn't get enough of Heinlein after that: Between Plantes, Farmer in the Sky; Red Planet, Tunnel in the Sky, The Rolling Stones, Have Space Suit -- Will Travel, Rocketship Galileo, and Citizen of the Galaxy. Wow, those were the days. Juvenile science fiction at its best.

Starman Jones is the most memorable Heinlein book from that period. Not because it's a great book, but because it was my first encounter with science fiction and, as we all know, first encounters make the strongest impressions. (A very positive one in this case.) Rereading those wonderful stories today convinces me that Heinlein's greatest efforts lie within the so-called "juveniles." Citizen of the Galaxy and Time for the Stars are two of his finest novels.

Heinlein wasn't the only author I read during those golden years of "science fiction addiction"--when there were never enough novels to satisfy one's craving. (Today there is more science fiction written and published in a month than readers in the fifties saw in a year!) My insatiable appetite was temporarily satisfied by the likes of: Fritz Leiber, William Tenn, A.E. Van Vogt, A. Merritt, Alfred Bester, Clifford D. Simak, Damon Knight, Ray Bradbury, Theodore Sturgeon, Frederik Pohl, Arthur C. Clarke, Isaac Asimov, Poul Anderson, Jack Williamson, and Fredric Brown. Those are just a few of the names I remember (as one gets older the memory tends to get a little fuzzy). I always intended to keep a journal (a great hedge against senility) but instead I have little fragments of memory scattered all over the place.

The addiction continued through my military years (1956-60) but went into "spontaneous remission" in the early '60s. Interest would occasionally "flare-up" but, alas, my energies turned to other endeavors: chess, astronomy, photography, travel, 8 years of college (ending with a MFA in 1983) and, of course, working for a living. Heinlein was the only science fiction writer I continued to read, with any regularity, during my "remission" --Starship Troopers, Podkayne of Mars, Stranger in a Strange Land, Glory Road, Franham's Freehold, The Moon Is a Harsh Mistress, Time Enough for Love, and I Will Fear No Evil.

I wrote to Heinlein in 1957 and received a much treasured reply, along with an autographed picture of Robert Heinlein and his wife standing on the Lunar set of Destination Moon. The letter and photograph are still very visible on my bulletin board.

Michael W. Waite

Robert A. Heinlein

ROBERT A. HEINLEIN
1776 MESA AVE., BROADMOOR
COLORADO SPRINGS, COLORADO

27 February 1957

Dear Michael,

Here is the photo you asked for--myself and my wife on the lunar crater set of Destination Moon. My pen would not take well on the front so I signed it on the back.

I ordinarily refuse requests for photos; I am not a movie star and how I look is not important. I gave in to your request because you are the only one, of hundreds, who offered to pay for same. Not that I want payment--it is just that I respect your attitude. Unfortunately many people seem to assume that anyone in public life is endlessly at the disposal of anyone--free. It startles me when someone offers to pay.

I have never been in Brighton but I have had many a good time in Jackson, about fifty miles from your home. A nice part of the country.

Sincerely,

R A Heinlein

The opportunity to meet Heinlein presented itself 20 years later (September 23, 1977), when he came to Eastern Michigan University to receive an honorary doctorate (Doctor of Humane Letters). I consider myself fortunate to have met him at all, because I have never been to a science fiction convention (where I assume most authors and fans meet one another, exchange pleasantries and talk on a first-name basis).

A campus blood drive preceded his visit and Heinlein extended invitations to a lecture to anyone who donated blood, attempted to donate blood, or had given blood in the last 60 days (and presented proof).

Prior to his lecture and receiving his degree, Heinlein gave a speech at a mini-science fiction convention, CONTAGION, for high school students--sponsored by the EMU Science Fiction Society. I didn't hear his CONTAGION speech or attend the degree ceremonies, but I did pay my admission to the lecture--a pint of blood--and thus got to hear the man responsible for my fondest memories of adolescence.

I must confess that I was too enraptured with the possibility of meeting Heinlein to pay much attention to his speech. Although I do remember him mentioning the L5 Society. (I always intended to join but never got around to it--procrastination is a terrible curse.) He also discussed how he became seriously ill while writing I Will Fear No Evil, and how blood transfusions saved his life. The near-death experience brought to Heinlein's attention the national blood shortage. (He and his wife, Ginny, founded and promoted the Science Fiction Blood Donors program. They also created Future Donors of America for Heinlein's younger readers, who were too young to donate blood.)

Well, I finally got to meet Robert Heinlein and his wife (ever so briefly). After the customary handshakes and exchange of pleasantries, I showed him the picture he had sent to me in 1957. I offered to return the photograph to him--thinking he might like my treasured "heirloom" for his photo album. He smiled and his wife responded, "We sent out hundreds of those photographs, and still have a few around, but thanks for the offer." Oh well, for thirty years I thought I was the only one with a photograph of Robert Heinlein and his wife standing on the Moon. C'est la vie. I'm sure the letter is an original.

I had a spontaneous relapse a few months ago and find myself, once again, addicted to science fiction. Sorting through the hordes of new books that proliferate today's market place is an awesome task--even for a clairvoyant speed reader. (Sturgeon's Law: "Ninety percent of science fiction -- of anything -- is crap!") It would be impossible to keep abreast of it all without the help of the dedicated people that make Lan's Lantern, Science Fiction Chronicle, and Locus available to neophyte and troglodyte alike.

In addition to the above-mentioned periodicals, I also find myself reading Charles Platt's Science Fiction Guide, Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction, Analog, Amazing Stories, Fantasy and Science Fiction. Starlog, Twilight Zone, Omni, Aboriginal and Argos also make appearances at my home from time to time. (Fanzines, prozines, semi-prozines, stelazines -- my head is spinning. Is this the world of science fiction...or Palmer Eldritch?)

Read, read, read: Philip K. Dick, Spider Robinson, Ursula K. LeGuin, Harlan Ellison, Anne McCaffrey, Lloyd Biggle, Jr., Roger Zelazny, Larry Niven, Samuel R. Delany, Frank Herbert, James Tiptree, Jr., William Gibson, etc., etc., etc. A lot of talented writers have appeared on the scene in 30 years--and some not so talented. It's great to see so many of the "old guard" still in print -- and wielding the pen!

I'm on my way back to "science fiction addiction." I can't change the past but I can plan for the future. I still haven't figured out if I am a procrastinator or just a shy person. Whatever the case may be, I plan on attending a "con" or two in the very near future. (I'm the guy in bib overalls who looks like Frank Herbert--so I'm told.)

What was begun as an epistle in celebration of Robert Heinlein's 50th year as a writer of science fiction, has ended as a "remembrance of things past."

Robert A. Heinlein died Sunday monring (Mother's Day) at his home in Carmel, California. I first heard of his death Monday, when I turned on the 7 o'clock evening news. I had just returned from the library where, ironically, I was reading Alexei Panshin's Heinlein in Dimension: A Critical Analysis.

"Guess now who holds thee?" --
"Death," I said. But here
The silver answer rang-- "Not Death,
but Love."

Elizabeth Barrett Browning
"Sonnets from the Portuguese"

Michael W. Waite
June, 1988 |*|

Glory Road

A book review with comments by Jean Lamb

At first glance, Glory Road is a straight action/adventure tale set in the wishfulfillment world of sword and sorcery. A lonely soldier just out of the jungle from a fairly unpleasant "police action"--which we all know later turned into the Vietnam War--meets a beautiful woman who needs a champion. Oscar of Gordon just happens to be an expert in swordfighting and several other methods of combat. This is just as well, since evildoers abound and there is a Quest that needs to be undertaken. Star, the aforementioned beautiful woman, turns out to be the Empress of the Twenty Universes, athletic, a strong ruler, and seductive as anything. Rufo, the groom, is a loyal (though occasionally bad-tempered) companion providing stalwart service in the face of overwhelming odds. Sounds like a thousand other Conan clones, doesn't it?

But it's not. Heinlein approaches most of the situations with a thorough sense of humor, and a unique, skewed point of view. Such as feeding Igli to Igli in order to get rid of him. I know several people I'd like to try that one on...but never mind. Most of them don't read this magazine anyway. I also enjoyed the encounter with the Doral (no, he's not a cigarette), not to mention the rumor-monger's idea of a Terran marriage rite. There were a few odd customs missed--Heinlein's never been to a bridal shower where the bride-to-be has popped seventeen ribbons before anyone tells her each one represents a child she'll have--but not many. A certain irreverence for conventions of the sword and sorcery genre exists throughout the book, like the hero being allergic to dragons. (If I were given the choice, I'd be allergic to dragons, too, but that's beside the point.)

However, Heinlein's major achievement in this book is to interject the occasional note of reality into this particular type of adventure tale. Even when the victory is won, the hero and the Empress do not live happily ever after--they squabble like many another wedded couple. Oscar gets twitchy feet, and has trouble re-adjusting to Southern California (of course, I understand this is true of most of Western Civilization, but for Oscar it's even harder). The hero actually doubts himself, and begins to wonder if any of it actually happened. Naturally we are rescued by a fairly well-timed return of Rufo.

All in all, Glory Road is not a particularly deep book. But it is fun to read, and especially fun to compare to more serious epics that work many of the same cliches. One can only wonder what sort of satire Heinlein could have done on more recent works in the sword and sorcery genre. It's entertaining and fun to read besides.

Though Glory Road is by no means Heinlein's most influential work as far as the SF community is concerned, it was one he wrote that was the most influential on my personal life. You see, I read this in high school, right before I entered college. Much of the book can be read as a paean to fencing as an athletic art form. This intrigued me, and so when I had the opportunity to do so, I signed up for a fencing class. So did a certain physics major, after also reading the book. I deliberately trained myself left-handed, though I am slightly more right-handed in fencing, as Heinlein made it clear that lefties were able to mess up the majority more often than not. This struck me as a reasonable goal to shoot for. The physics student, on the other hand, was firmly right-handed but knew he ought to practice more with the lefties so as not to get blown away by having the sword come at him from an odd angle. After a few bouts, the physics student and I (with no other classes that we would ever have in common) discovered we were both fans--I for Heinlein, while he thought highly of Asimov. So naturally for our first date we compromised and saw Clarke's 2001. We've been married fifteen years now, and have two children. So I can accurately say this charming book changed the lives of many people by simply existing.

Thanks, Bob!

--Jean Lamb
February, 1989 |*|

Robert A. Heinlein

One of my favorite personal memories of Robert Heinlein came out of a hotel suite, the day after a convention had ended, back in the fifties.

Robert had already been a recognized success in science fiction for years, and was to continue to write and be active for thirty years more. But this was to be one of the last few cons that he would attend.

The suite was Robert's; and, because the rest of us had already checked out of our own rooms, we congregated there while awaiting our times to leave for the airport--Robert, Poul Anderson, Judith Merril, and myself.

Through the night and into the following day we sat there; and every so often one or another of us would pick up the phone to ask the airline if we could not be scheduled on a later flight. As long as the answer came back "yes," we stayed.

What we were occupied with was, of course, talking--in this case, a non-stop session of "Kipl-ing." "To Kiple" was to try to match or cap somebody else's quotation or recitation--most likely, recitation--from the works of Rudyard Kipling.

Only recently is Kipling being rehabilitated, after mearly a hundred years of unwarranted prejudice. This prejudice had developed after his first early success, and was to hound him all his life and continue after his death, in the voices of critics, very vocal, who downgraded him as writer and poet--but particularly as a poet.

Needless to say, the four of us disagreed with that point of view. And, since the game required a knowledge of Kipling's works ranging from the familiar to the encyclopedic, you can be sure that we were all addicts.

Robert was one of those who had early seen through the smoke-screen of prejudice to the genius of the man--hardly surprising, because he shared something that made Kipling the great writer that he was: the ability of using words with remarkable effect to make real the scene being described, the story being told. Both men, in fact, had that ability to an extent far beyond that of the ordinarily successful writer.

Science fiction's astounding growth clearly rests on the shoulders of two very important individuals: the first was John W. Campbell, Jr., who, in his editorship of Astounding (later Analog), did so much to make the field by finding and developing writers capable of making their type of story live.

The second was Robert, who, I believe, would have been outstanding in any field of literature in which he might choose to write. But he chose science fiction and fantasy, because of that freedom for the imagination which has also led so many other writers to it. Of all the sub-sections of literature--I dislike the word "genre" because it is a label so easy to misapply--it was and is the one that clearly offers the greatest challenge.

Properly done, science fiction demands the most in creativity; and therefore it attracts the most original among new crops of writers. Mainstream fiction picks up even the furniture of its stories from the immediately-visible world around; and in the better-written historicals that furniture can be researched. But no area so much demands that the literary cake be created by the writer from scratch...

Even in this area of originality, Robert stood out. Not merely did he have great ability; but he so thoroughly enjoyed the creation of his situations and characters that they became unforgettable. The reality he infused into them was intensely attractive and caused them to be fixed in the minds of readers; and they were reread, because the reader continually found something new with each reading.

In this field in which the best writers have always been very different, one from another--Robert's work stood particularly apart. Because of that ability of his to create a new reality--whether dealing with a spaceship that was a world to itself, or the familiar surface of Earth--his creation was so strong that is seemed to make

Gordon R. Dickson

all that he wrote about, undeniable. And so he made stories that seemed as if they could have gone no other way, that could have been said in no other words--that could be read only in the way he laid them out to be read.

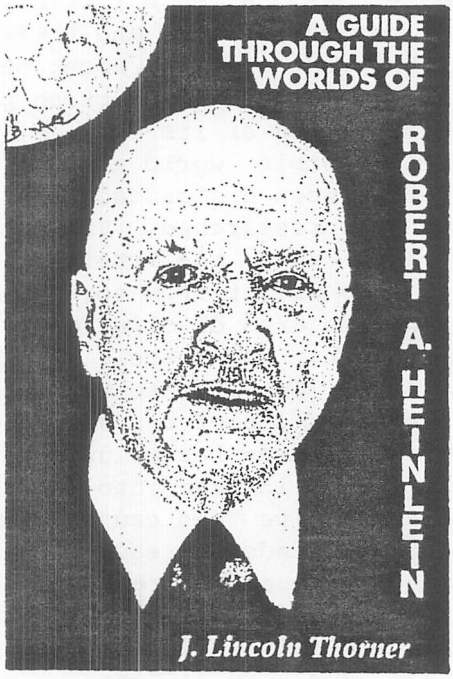
In any century, this ability has been the hallmark of the truly unusual writer. As the undervalued Kipling in his later years was never offered the post of poet-laureate of England--although a stronger contender for the honor than any--Robert, in spite of his popularity, was undervalued.

John Campbell opened new literary territory to literary pioneers--and would have opened it up whether Robert had existed or not. But Robert populated that territory with more success than anyone else, and went on to populate territories beyond. I have never doubted that works of his will last, and be read, cherished, and studied--as far into the future as his own imagination ranged.

--Gordon R. Dickson
June, 1989 |*|

A Guide Through The Worlds Of Robert A. Heinlein

by J. Lincoln Thorner
Gryphon Books, 1989, $5.95



A book review and art by Bill Ware.

A Guide through the Worlds of Robert A. Heinlein has something for the seasoned fan and the neofan alike. For those who think they know all there is to know about Heinlein (you know, the guy who wrote Stranger in a Strange Land), there are a few surprises. I won't reveal them all here, but one of them has to do with a brain blood vessel transplant which reinstated the flow of blood to Heinlein's brain late in his career. For anyone who just got blood flowing to the brain and wants to know just who this Heinlein guy is, Thorner's Guide is an excellent place to start.

The Guide is essentially a compendium of the life and work of Heinlein told from the point of view of a devotee who corresponded with Heinlein and Heinlein's wife. According to "About the Author", J. Lincoln Thorner works in PR with the U.S. Postal Service (surely he draws hazardous duty pay), but is a versatile freelancing writer/private investigator/ditch digger (to name a few).

Probably the weakest part of this limited edition (500 copies) from Gryphon Books is the typography. It is typewritten with no special typographic characters or fonts and reduced in a single-column format that is difficult to read on its 5½ by 8½ page size. Its redeeming graphical quality is that there are moderately well-reproduced covers of many of Heinlein's paperbacks and consequently a miniature retrospective of commercial SF art.

--Bill Ware
July, 1989 |*|

Recent Discoveries About an Interplanetary Poet

Here is a different sort of tribute to Heinlein--an interesting biography of one of his most famous characters: Rhysling.

...Oh to look once more,
On the land that gave me birth.
The wide blue seas,
The clear blue skies,
And the cool green hills of Earth.

All of you are familiar with those lines, in one form or another, and many of you have read earlier biographies of the author, Rhysling. The earlier biographers based their work on the answers Rhysling gave to the questions people asked; information supplied by a blind man who had become bigger than life by his skill with words and music. A man who hated the darkness he lived in, and was doubtful of those who described the wonders he would never see again.

Although he behavior on and off the space lanes made people believe that he had no family or friends other than those in space, a recent donation to Skyhaven University from Althea Smithers, (nee Rhysling) the grand-daughter of the poet/songster/hero, has cast a new light on Rhysling the man, and Rhysling the poet.

The donation is a collection of letters and papers. The letters were to the son he never saw, and to the wife who dies giving birth to that son. The papers he sent described the accident which robbed him of his sight, and all of his records and contracts for all the flights which preceded and followed it. (1) This invaluable source of information about the early days of interplanetary flight came to light during the cataloging of the papers donated on the death of Arthur Rhysling, Althea's father, to the university from which he graduated.

Only now, after all these years, are we aware of the fact that the majority of the royalties paid Rhysling for his songs and poems went to raise the son who was born while Rhysling was on that trip that resulted in his blindness. It has always been assumed that the taverns got the money he earned, and Rhysling did his best to keep that impression alive. Even his publishers, who mailed his checks to the address specified by him, and who had done a huge job of sanitizing his image, never knew about the son and the dead wife. Rhysling wanted it that way.

His son, Arthur, was raised by his maternal grandparents, and wasn't told about his father until he was old enough to understand not just the stories about his father, but the truth. As a result, he was never pestered by the other children, or by those parasites on others' sorrows, the "newscasters." It was probably just as well, because the truth was both harsher and kinder to his father than the tales that lived after him.

True, Rhysling went to Mars, but it was after he was blinded, not before. His beautiful description of the lost race of Mars, and the cities they built and deserted were dreams, dreams based on earlier tales he had read about John Carter and others, mixed with the description of Mars

(1) For details on this accident, and event leading up to his death, see Robert A. Heinlein's The Green Hills of Earth, among others.

Rob Levy

from the crews who went looking for the same dreams he had. The Grand Canal was a song of beauty which hid the bitter disappointment of those early explorers, seeking and not finding the beauty they had hoped to find there.

Rhysling did indeed ride the spaceways, to Titan and beyond. At each place he visited he mailed a letter to his in-laws, with an enclosure for his son. In the earlier years they had gone directly to Arthur, but as his reputation grew, and his publishers hectored him for family details, he realized that being reticent wasn't enough; he'd have to hide the fact that he had a son or there would be no end to the publicity.

Those letters describe the actual conditions in which all of those spacefarers lived, and sometimes died. The odor of recirculated air; cleaned, sterilized, with oxygen added, but always the taste of metal and plastic, sweat and human fear remaining in the nose and the back of the mouth. The cramped quarters, in which there were always fewer sleeping spots than crew, because someone was always on duty, and the companies engaged in space flight felt it would be silly to waste power moving unneeded facilities. Especially when it was hard enough to show a profit on the cargos brought back from space. The packaged foods which were their staple diet in space, because cooking and serving anything more was almost impossible in free fall. The all-pervading edge of fear on which they lived.

The fear was the worst. The knowledge that there was nothing on the other side of the hull was akin to the feeling submariners have. (2) Some spacemen lived their lives out working on Mars, or Venus, or Callisto; not because they liked the life there, but because they were unable to get into a space ship for the trip back to Earth. To them, living in a dome seemed less threatening than traveling through the great nothing which is space. Rhysling was not one of them.

(2) See A Study in the Weapons of War, a monograph describing the political-sociological environment during the early years of space-flight, and tools which were devised by the militaristic portions of society to attempt to modify others'beliefs. Included therein is a description of the submarine experience during wartime.

He had confidence that nothing "accidental" would kill him; that accidents result from carelessness, and he would always be careful. It was a similar confidence that led him to woo and win Althea Johnson, the valedictorian of their high school class, and marry her while he was studying nuclear engineering. She worked as a secretary to put him through college, thinking of the life they'd have after graduation, little knowing of his inherited desire to always see beyond the next hill.

Despite the romance that surrounds those early days of space flight, NASA had learned from events such as Three Mile Island and Chernobyl (3) that giving a marginally trained employee the responsibility for a nuclear power plant was an invitation to disaster. When they installed nuclear power in space craft, they attempted to find skilled Nuclear Physicists or Engineers to run them. It wasn't always possible, but when rhysling applied for a transfer from chemical rockets on which he had been working to the new nuclear powered space craft, his application was enthusiastically accepted. This first trip led to his blindness, and to his life-long separation from Earth.

His son was conceived during an earlier visit home, and he had planned to be there for the birth, but the schedule on the first nuclear flight slipped, and slipped again, so that he missed the event. It wasn't until the telegram was read to him by one of his friends that he learned of his son's birth after a long and difficult labor, and how his wife, Althea, hadn't survived the birth. He vowed then that until he could see his son, he wouldn't visit him. That vow was to last through his life.

As hope died for his sight, he sought more and more for comfort , and new vision, in the bottom of a bottle. No matter where man is, or goes, alcohol goes also. On each place where man created an Earth-like environment, some descendant of the hill-billy bootleggers would scrounge the material to build a still, and something to ferment in it. Rhysling was always there to taste the first run, and to lose

(3) See N. Borman, Early Disasters in Nuclear Power, for details on these early cases of power plant failure which led to disaster or near-disaster.

his memories in the oblivion brought by it. As the years went by, he tended to forget the Earth that he had seen, and sang about the Earth of his dreams. The letters back to Earth became few and far between, as he spent more and more time drinking, and trying to forget. He never did.

Writing was a problem for him. The words tended to run into one another, or off the edges of the paper. As a result, all of his work was recorded, rather than written by him. But it was all there: the lost love, the lost sight, the lost life. On the other hand, so was the joy and wonder of striding across space, and words about the men who did it.

His son grew up believing that he was an orphan. When he was eighteen his grandparents spent an evening telling him what they believed the story to be, and left him with a file of unopened letters addressed to him, and the letters his mother had saved. It took him three years before he had the courage to read past the first letter, and to conquer the feelings he had when he was told that his father had abandoned him and his mother. After reading the letters, Arthur found that they hadn't been abandoned, at least not willingly. His father had set himself an impossible goal: find his sight and he might find his wife and son. At that time the more advanced medical centers were off planet. The necessarily sterile environment in space made it possible to perform work that would have been difficult in an Earth hospital, so it was reasonable for him to go from place to place, trying to find some cure.

Arthur read about the arrangements Rhysling had made to ensure that he would always have money, and not have the attendant publicity. He read of the loneliness of space, and the even lonelier life of a blind wanderer through space. He came to understand and love his father, but with no way to tell him. He understood his father's concern for his privacy. He made one abortive attempt to locate his father. The attitude of the people he asked, that there were sensational aspects in the fact that someone named Rhysling was trying to reach "the troubadour of space, Rhysling," caused him to give it up. He only hoped that he'd see his father some day, somewhere.

Arthur went through Skyhaven University, as his father had before him. Arthur majored in accounting, worked as a CPA, got married and had a daughter. When she was through college, again a Skyhaven University graduate, Arthur's wife divorced him. She said she couldn't live any longer with a man who was a successful accountant, but always talked about traveling to the stars. A man who contributed money to any "...hair-brained scheme to develop a faster-than-light engine; when everyone knows it's impossible...."

So Rhysling's grand-daughter graduated, got married, watched her parents' marriage break up, and had the problem of settling her father's estate, all within two years. Arthur had been working late at an account one Friday night, and was killed by a hit-and-run driver as he crossed the street to the parking garage. It wasn't until she went through her father's boxes of papers that she discovered her relationship to Rhysling, who was still out among the planets, bumming through space.

She put the papers into storage until, years later, Rhysling died a hero's death, saving a spaceship full of passengers, during which he recorded his last epic song. It was after reading it that she decided that the world should know who Rhysling really was, and that Skyhaven was the place from which that information should come.

At this time, a new biography of Rhysling is being written, based on his papers and letters. But what better epitaph can the man have than his own words:

> We pray for one last landing
> On the globe that gave us birth;
> Let us rest our eyes on fleecy skies
> And the cool, green hills of Earth.

July, 1989 |*|

The Way of Heinlein: A Testimonial

As a hard-bitten reader of science fiction, I could easily give you a rundown of the works of Robert Heinlein. Literary analyses? No problem! Deep psychological insights? Easy.

Instead, I'd like to tell you about how Heinlein has kept appearing in my life, and perhaps give you some idea of just how much effect a mere writer of "pulp" and "juvenile" literature can have.

One of the very first pieces of science fiction I read was Stranger in a Strange Land, with a painting of the "Caryatid" sculpture on the dust-jacket.

That was about 1974. My parents were very young, and my mother is a renegade intellectual; they taught me that it is always allowable to ask a sincere "why?".

In other words, I was primed for Heinlein.

Stranger, for all the emotion and action and sadness and philosophy, was and is a romp, right up to the ending in a bureaucratic "Heaven". As a shy, intellectual introvert, I identified easily with Valentine Michael Smith, a civilised man lost among the savages. (The identification was aided by coincidence, since, by age 15, I had taught myself enough yoga to control my heartbeat, physical endurance, and pain response.) Yet, at the same time, I empathised with Jubal Harshaw, the tired, cranky old man who was walking the thin edge of a deathwish, just wanting to finally abandon the society around them, a position I understood all too readily... and neither was about to resign their core beliefs, to sell out their self-worth in order to fit in. Want to talk role-models?

Kids find their goals for the future in the weirdest ways. Pre-Heinlein, I had no plans for the future; I was never one of those biys who wanted to be a fireman, spaceman, policeman, etc. All I knew was that I wanted to be independent at my option, so I learned to cook, clean house, and wash dishes, but other than that was adrift and at the whims of Fate.

Heinlein changed that.

In Stranger, I found my first avocation: I wanted to be a Fair Witness. Observing fairly, coolly, dispassionately, completely.

Well, I was hooked. Through 1976, I rifled the county library for everything Heinleinesque. Some blessed, anonymous soul had seen fit to acquire a dozen or so of the Doubleday juvenile hardcovers, and a few of the later works (Farnham's Freehold was the first I found) were in the "adult fiction" section, rather than with the children's books or with the genre collections.

My second avocation came from that spate of reading, specifically in Have Space Suit--Will Travel: generalist. I'm sure I found a Heinleinian reference to the term in a previous reading, but in Suit I actually witnessed a generalist in action (albeit near the end, and only briefly), and had a chance to sort of get a feel for the job. At that point, I had a mandate to learn a little bit of everything, to see the interrelationships of the knowledge as no specialist ever likely would. I am still on that track: I am about to receive a B.Sci (a technical/engineering degree) in sociology, and hope to enter graduate school in biometry (medical statistics and computing).

But, to return to previous years: As a child, I had loathed the usual "playground politics" that govern the lives of most children, and at age 8 decided that given a choice I'd rather enjoy a day alone. This carried over into high school and dating and that whole milieu. So, when I left home for college, I was an 18-yearold virgin, and happily so. Despite this, and that I was a great deal more greasy and less coifed in my frosh days, I within six months of my arrival on campus was attached to a beautiful sophomore.

Anthony D. Blokzyl

What does that have to do with Uncle Bob's influence? Listen up: Cindy is 5'6", slim, fluent in German, an art and art history major, reddish-blonde hair, icy blue-grey eyes, fiery personality, judo student (with a talent for nerve holds), gymnast and dancer. My first steady girlfriend was, yes, right out of a Heinlein story. And, true to stereotypes, she overhauled my hair, beard, wardrobe, jewelry, glasses, posture, and so forth. Luckily, she did not have surgical knowledge, or I'm sure she would have wanted to take in a few tucks here and there; as it is, she offered to sponsor some minor cosmetic surgery, but I stalled for a few years.

Before our engagement, Cindy and I began to give serious consideration to some kind of non-monogamous relationship. Oh, not just the normal fooling-around stuff with anything you take a fancy to, but in some kind of a dedicated larger group, probably us and another couple for starters. We knew that, if we tried to limit ourselves to each other, we'd either drive each other crazy, or compromise our goals in order to avoid that end; ironically, the former is what eventually happened, despite our foresight. Well, Heinlein never said it was gonna be easy....

Heinlein's characters have one facet that fascinates me: they are unremittingly playful about sex. Too many authors of the "brave new genre" are shy about sex, or as frank (and also as dry) as any textbook, or rather stuffy and self-important about it. Meanwhile, Heinlein had the nerve to suggest that (gasp!) sex is normal and natural, and it has both spiritual and entertainment value, in varying amounts. I think I was very well-prepared to be a sexually-active adult by obsorbing this attitude.

The other side of these relationships was the structures themselves. Heinlein practically defined the term "serial monogamy", and gave some wonderful glimpses of non-monogamous family life in books like The Moon is a Harsh Mistress. This stands out from the usual assumption in science fiction that, no matter what the human races goes through, the choice is between till-death-do-us-part monogamy and "I didn't catch your name" promiscuity. He not only steered a middle course, but showed just how huge the range of possiblilities actually is.

When was the last time any of you broke into laughter while reading IRS information on corporate taxes? I may be alone on this. Well, recall Friday. She joined a family for a while, buying her way into the socioeconomic structure as a partner. In that future Earth, such quasi-families were fairly common, and called "S-groups". As a rather typical uncritical reader, I had only a fleeting bit of curiosity as to the term's origin.

So, there it is, in Publication 334, Chapter 30:

> Some corporations may elect not to be subject to the income taxe. If a corporation qualifies, its income usually will be taxed to the shareholders. These corporations, formerly known as Subchapter S corporations, are [now] called S corporations."

It makes perfect sense: if a bunch of people pool their time and money in order to support themselves, and nobody else, the structure is ready-made, as are the tax advantages. (This reminds me a lot of the old "Slan Shack" days of fandom....)

Someone once pointed out that the legalisms of marriage make much more sense when studied as corporate law; apparently, Heinlein saw that, too. Friday was first accepted as a new stockholder in the corporation, then had to begin paying off the minimun block of stock. Since this discovery, I've actually done some work to help someone set up an IRS-approved S-group, and I know of a group of about 25 people that uses a similar structure, and how grosses about $1 million a year. Life imitates science fiction, one more time.

To top it all off, as far as overall effects are concerned, I can hold Heinlein responsible for a deep and abiding curiosity about mathematics. While I can barely scratch the surface of phasor and tensor calculi and three-body problems, his constant references to the problems of practical astrogation (especially things like the seat-of-the-pants landing in The Cat Who Walked Through Walls) have led eventually to many bemused hours at my computers, dabbling.

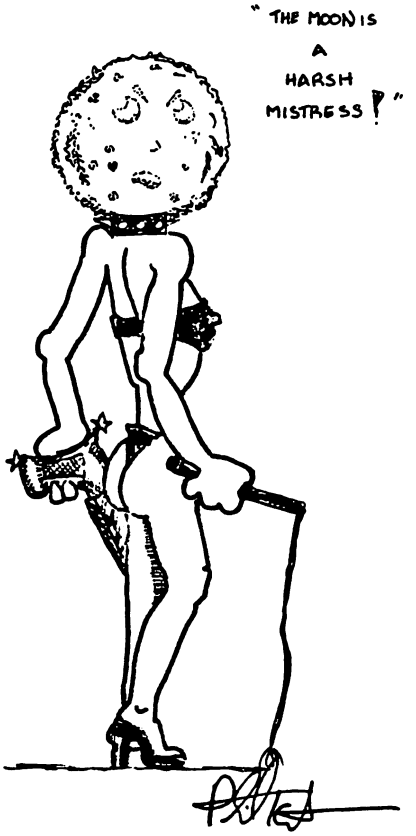
(Speaking of math: am I the only one who's figured out the ending on Cat? HINT: think "quantum indeterminacy" and "Schrodinger's cat". The ending is thus not only reasonable, but fitting.

(And speaking of cats: Heinlein deserves praise for accurate depiction of felines, especially in Cat and The Door into Summer; my cats look for that door, too.)

Without a shred of proof to back me, I'm sure that one of Heinlein's greater disappointments is the ass-backward "conquest" of space that he was forced to witness. If the U.S. had taken the same approach to "taming the West", there'd be more buffalo than humans between Appalachia and the Rockies. Heinlein wanted space; he was sick, old D.D. Harriman who wanted to die peacefully on the Moon.

So, what do I possess? Thanks largely to Robert Heinlein, I have drive, dedication, a sense of honor, and a hell of a practical and theoretic background. Red tape and technology are hobbies, while they scare the crap out of most of the people in this country. I enjoy my lot in life, even as I push for something better. I live with my little self-made, amoebic family. And if offered a trip to the Moon strapped to a Titan II booster, I'd probably ponder for ten seconds before signing on.

If all this sounds like a religious rave-up, then so be it. However, Heinlein was opinionated and arrogant at times, and occasionally given to Commie-baiting of a degree that would embarass William Buckley or Joe McCarthy. In other words, gods love him, Heinlein was a human being, not a demigod.



I'm still amazed he lived as long, and as well, as he did. And I will regret never having met him. But he, removed in time and space, gave me goals that I have pursued for over half of my life, and will no doubt continue to chase for the remainder.

Long live the spirit of Robert Anson Heinlein.

10 May 1989 |*|

Tributes to Robert A. Heinlein

My first novel, House of Zeor (Doubleday: 1974, plus numerous paberback editions), was dedicated to Robert A. Heinlein because he was one of the reasons I decided to become a science fiction writer. I admired him tremendously when I was young.

Later, I visited his home--bringing my two children, Gail and Debbie, and he gave them autographed copies of his books suitable for their (then) ages. They became fans, too. That has to be one of the warmest and most treasured memories of my whole life.

As a man, Robert A. Heinlein reminded me of my own father, an elegant gentleman of the old school, a born aristocrat who was totally oblivious of that aura he carried. He also reminded me a little of DeForest Kelly (Dr. McCoy on Star Trek) who, in person, carries that Southern Gentleman Charm like a mantle of office.

As a writer, Robert A. Heinlein is still inspiring me. My latest novel, Dreamspy (which will be out from St. Martin's Press in hardcover during the winter of 89/90) is dedicated to him, and not

just because (as with so many of my dedications) I got the news of his demise at the same moment when I finished the book--but because of all my most recent work, Dreamspy most strongly harks back to Robert A. Heinlein's influence on me.

I still can't bring myself to read his last book because after that--there will be no more. Like a magnificent wine, I'm saving it for a special occasion.

--Jacqueline Lichtenberg
May, 1989|*|

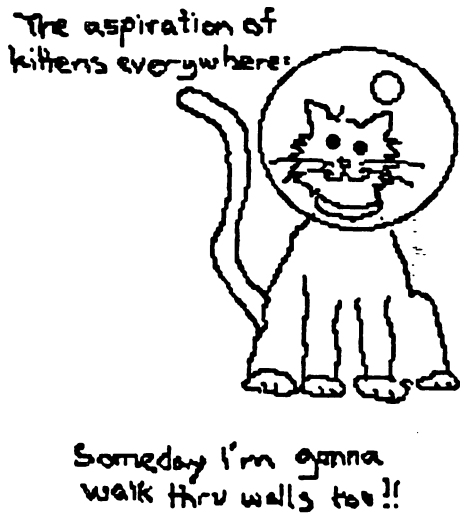
Although Robert A. Heinlein is often perceived as a political extremist, I think that he is actually, like John W. Campbell, someone who likes to present radical concepts mainly to get people stirred up and thinking. Still, there is no telling what Heinlein would have done if he actually were elected President of the United States. I'd like to have found out!

--David Palter
May, 1988|*|

With Heinlein's death, I find myself remembering fondly the time at SEACON when Mrs. Heinlein loaned me her bathing suit so that I could go swimming with Karen Anderson, who was suddenly afflicted with the need to go swimming (after the pool was officially closed). Poul Anderson waited with the Heinleins until a hotel official politely chased us out of the pool, and then the Heinleins loaned us bathrobes to dry off in, and we all sat around for what must have been a good portion of the night talking about Oz, and Hans Christian Anderson, and fantasy and science fiction generally. I was startled to realize that Poul, long-established pro though he was, was as much agape with wonder at the idea of finding himself sitting around chatting with Heinlein as I was.

--Ruth Berman
May, 1988|*|

The second red check mark on the front page of my Lantern marked off the section that read: "I would like you to contribute to the next special issues (1988: on William F. Temple, Lester del Rey and Arthur C. Clarke; 1989: Isaac Asimov, Robert A. Heinlein, Fritz Leiber, Ted Sturgeon and



A.E. Van Vogt)." Now, I had promised Lan that I would contribute to his publication (several times I promised), but as I read the list of esteemed writers, I realized with some embarrassment that the closest I had come to reading any of them was to watch Stanley Kubrick's 2001: A Space Odyssey. I am fairly new to science fiction fandom, and in fact read primarily fantasy works, and so had not considered their work for reading seriously. I panicked; how could I possibly write an article about a writer I hadn't even seen at a con panel, let alone read? What aspect of that writer could I expound upon?

In my panic, I hit the bookstore in search of a promising sample. I chose Robert A Heinlein's The Cat Who Walks Through Walls, because I'd had my eye on it for a while, and because I own a cat who does not walk through walls, for which I am eternally grateful. It was an excellent choice; his conversation and settings are rich and delightful to read, the time warps were interesting in theory, and the cat really did walk through walls. I had discovered another author to add to my long list of those I intend to explore in the future.

And so I came to the idea that I could use for my comments. That is, that the wonderful thing about all these writers is that they, in their familiar names and longevity on the bookstore shelves, as as available to new readers to discover as to their long-standing fans. A new fan can listen in fascination to descriptions of an author's varied works made by older fen and be fairly certain not only to be able

to find it on the shelves, but to enjoy the experienced writer's style, wit and history. I don't have to feel as if I missed out on early science fiction and fandom, just because I was born so late. Furthermore, because these writers are considered such institutions of the genre, they will be preserved for future generations of readers; whether through continual publication or the basement collection of a fan, it does not matter. To say that about any writer is an honor and a mark of their greatness.

Now back to that list in the Lantern: I think I'll try Lester del Rey next....

--Lynn Margosian
November, 1987 [*]

Growing Up with Robert A. Heinlein

From his first published story in 1939 until his absorption in WW II work, Robert Heinlein wrote 28 stories for the SF pulps. Between the war's end and 1950, he published three. To someone looking only at the SF magazines, Heinlein would have appeared to stop writing.

But that wasn't my perspective at the beginning of the 1950s. For me, Heinlein was SF. I'd begun reading science fiction about as soon as I learned to read; in fact, one of the first stories I remember, in one of my mother's The Saturday Evening Posts, was Heinlein's "The Black Pits of Luna." The SF magazines, though, were literally and figuratively beyond my reach. The town drugstore stocked pulps in a rack that stretched higher than a little kid's arms. Besides, the magazines I did get a look at seemed too esoteric. For several years, then, I sifted through the local library, reading and re-reading the few SF novels that somehow had slipped in past the librarian. Then, in the juvenile section, I discovered Heinlein's Red Planet, third of his novels for younger readers that Scribners published beginning in 1947 and continuing annually until 1959. Those novels fed my craving for SF for the next few years until I was old enough to appreciate genre science fiction. I'd even guess they created SF hunger in a lot of young readers. Re-examining several of Heinlein's "juveniles," I see how deft they are at storytelling and how fully they satisfy the tastes of adolescent readers. It even strikes me that the accomplishments may be related.

Of all people, adolescents are the most aware of change. Their own lives are changing, as they move out of physical and emotional dependence into new roles beyond their families. They are bitterly frustrated that their parents don't notice this and still order them about like infants. And while resentment separates them from family advice, adolescents must make decisions about what they want to be. As they look around for adult models, they see that a lot of "adults" are actually childish, in a sense that they act impulsively and selfishly. In fact, it's obvious that many things grownups so are really self-destructive. And so adolescence is both joyous and awful. The prospect of breaking loose from parents' control is wonderful; the thought of "growing up" by fitting into a deadly role is terrifying.

Fiction for adolescents assures them that young people can find satisfying places in the adult world. This is difficult to do without lying, saying that the world will transform itself to suit the young. So honest writing for adolescents is rare, because it demands appreciation of what readers want and need along with recognition of genuine limits.

Writing good SF demands the same sympathy and honesty. In fact, since SF is concerned with testing alternatives and considering the nature and/or results of change, it may be uniquely suited to addressing the concerns of adolescents. Several science fiction writers have learned how to write successfully for young people, including Andre Norton and Joan D.

Joe Sanders

Vinge. But Heinlein did it first and best.

While he was doing it, he made his audience better readers by developing our attention to detail. The first thing he had to do was convince us that the future world he was describing was physically real. To do that, a typical Heinlein juvenile begins with vivid presentations of familiar objects and places--with glimpses of something incongruous. The a huge incongruity appears, described in matter-of-fact detail and accepted as routine by the young people present. To see how Heinlein uses the familiar to lead on to the unfamiliar, while encouraging readers to share his young central character's feelings, consider the opening of Starman Jones:

> Max liked this time of day, this time of year. With the crops in, he could finish his evening chores early and be lazy. When he had slopped the hogs and fed the chickens, instead of getting supper he followed a path to a rise west of the barn and lay down in the grass, unmindful of the chiggers. He had a book with him..., Bonforte's Sky Beasts: A Guide to Exotic Zoology, but he tucked it under his head as a pillow. ...
>
> Max kept his eyes to the northwest. He favored this spot because from it he could see the steel stilts and guide rings of the Chicago, Springfield, and Earthport Ring Road emerge from a slash in the ridge to his right. (p.3)

To Max, the ring road is just part of the familiar landscape, solid as the trees, animals, and hills. As I sensed their reality because of the details Max notices, I believed in the ring road. I was also convinced because of the character's attitude. I could imagine walking off into the woods to wait for a ring train to flash by. I already knew what it was like to lie awake at night and listen to train whistles in the distance, so I could share Max's yearning for a glimpse of whatever could take him to new worlds:

> Seven minutes after the passing of [the ring train] he should be able to see...the launching orbit of the daily Moonship. Although much farther away and much less dramatic than the nearby jump of the ring train it was this that he had come to see. Ring trains were all right, but spaceships were his love--even a dinky like the moon shuttle. (p.5)

Or if this seems too personal or rural an example, consider the hot-rod-hungry urban kids who are surveying a dealer's lot as The Rolling Stone begins:

> The two brothers stood looking the old wreck over. "Junk," decided Castor.
>
> "Not junk," objected Pollux. "A jalopy--granted. A heap any way you look at it. A clunker possibly. But not junk."
>
> "You're an optimist, Junior." Both boys were fifteen; Castor was twenty minutes older than his brother.
>
> "I'm a believer, Grandpa--and you had better be, too. Let me point out that we don't have enough money for anything better. Scared to gun it?"
>
> Castor stared up the side of the ship. "Not at all--because that thing will never take us out to the Asteroids--right? This superannuated pogo stick wouldn't even take us to Earth." (p.7)

Appreciating the deftness of Heinlein's scene-setting shouldn't disguise the fact that readers had to become adept to respond to it. We had to appreciate the realistic details and tone, then slide into the new world as we followed the story. Learning to do that made us sharper readers, more sensitive to nuance. We needed that sharpness to read Heinlein. He rewarded attention, but her certainly demanded it. Sometimes, he would use a single word to show the nature of a future world. When the hero of Between Planets mentions a forbidden political doctrine to the headmaster of his school, he is immediately interrogated: "'Don, have you been dealing with a booklegger?" (p.5); an alert reader will visualize Earth's repressive society from this image of a worldwide intellectual Prohibition.

Of course, Heinlein kept our attention not just because he showed us interesting settings but because he understood our emotional needs. Young readers may be especially responsive not just to the idea of getting away from familiar places in general but of escaping from a repressive society. They feel that they've been ordered around all their lives. Now, strik-

ing out on their own, they must try to figure out what kind of control is justifiable under particular circumstances and what isn't, ever. Heinlein helps readers consider that question, especially by showing that horrible things are done in the name of law and order by likable folks who are just doing what they've been told. The authority figures who demand it, as in Red Planet and Starman Jones, actually are small, frightened people hiding inside their official positions. Instead, Heinlein stresses that we all are responsible for our actions, even in societies that at best don't help people make informed decisions. And he includes out present society in that category by consistently showing aspects of the future that reflect present shortcomings: news media that trivializes events while misinforming their audience, schools that encourage students to be mediocre, and government bureaucracies that on all levels are more concerned with perpetuating themselves than with aiding people. This criticism of social institutions --especially institutions that adolescents have been trained to respect--is very attractive to adolescents because it confirms that the world created by older people isn't already perfect.

Instead of obeying orders or doing what's expected of them, Heinlein's heroes learn to use their own minds. In Space Cadet, for example, future officers of the Interplanetary Patrol must pass a seminar in "Doubt":

> A military hierarchy atomatically places a premium on conservative behavior and dull conformance with precedent; it tends to penalize original and imaginative thinking. Commodore Arkwright realized that these tendencies are inherent and inescapable; he hopes to offset them a bit by setting up a course that could not be passed without original thinking. (p.101)

But it isn't enough to escape our present, narrow outlook. Moral relativism is an unsatisfactory way to live. Recognizing that customs and laws sometimes protect hypocrisy, even outright antisocial behavior, Heinlein's young characters sometimes are tempted to exploit this situation. Later in their development, though, they don't realize that counterfeiting values for personal gain is actually self-destructive. It prevents one from developing a steady sense of self, and morality depends on being self-consistent. As an adult trusted by Max Jones comments, "'Is it wrong to lie and fake and bribe to get what you want? It's worse than wrong, it's undignified!'" (p.140). Eventually, another trustworthy adult advises Max that tricking his way aboard the starship "'could have turned you into a moralistic prig.... Or it could have made you a permanent infant who thinks rules are for everyone but him. It doesn't seem to have had either effect. I this it has matured you'" (p.295). Acquiring the dignity of self-confidence, Max also earns trust.

The more they understand their situation and learn to think for themselves, the more Heinlein's young heroes are willing to join a military organization. They understand that their personal freedom will be limited by the system, but they make this choice to serve a cause bigger than themselves. Outsiders can't understand such devotion. Even--especially--their blood families can't understand that the young people have grown past familiar ties. in Space Cadet, Matt Dodson's father and mother listen to him explain that the Patrol would drop nuclear bombs on America if it had to for the sake of humanity as a whole, but they simply cannot believe their son would ever do it to them. They cannot imagine absolute commitment to duty.

Seeing the people they've grown up with deny reality, Heinlein's young heroes are forced to find others to depend on. Depicting this redefinition of "family," Heinlein always takes pains to go beyond native religion or race. In Space Cadet, for example, the names of Patrol members clearly indicate some are non-WASP. Again, when several cadets are debating the limits of human-Venerian understanding, one remarks, "'Matt hasn't any race prejudice and neither have I. Take Lieutenant Peters --did it make any difference to us that he's as black as the ace of spades?'" (p.171). That's a surprise to the readers, for dialogue and action haven't suggested Lt. Peters' race until now; evidently Heinlein wanted to show that it simply didn't matter. Even in encounters between humans and aliens, Heinlein is careful not to assume that humans are superior. The humanoids of Starman Jones are mere livestock (p.242), while the Venerian dragons of Between Planets are models of delicate consideration. Basically, Heinlein's young

people learn to give others the individual attention they need themselves. "Authority" isn't so much a matter of being obeyed as of being taken seriously.

As we absorbed Heinlein's idea of what maturity meant, we also were becoming capable of reading more mature SF. Heinlein's young-adult novels certainly are compatible with his other science fiction in more than their sophisticated writing. Sometimes there's a direct connection, as when events in the "grownup" short story "The Long Watch" show up as part of the background of Space Cadet, but the concerns are consistent too. They aren't just the concerns of adolescents only. Actually, though it was rejected in the late 1950's by Scribners, who'd published Heinlein's young adult novels, Starship Troopers is not an extreme departure from the earlier novels' formula. Space Cadet also shows the way civilians refuse to comprehend what a military organization is about. Between Planets also emphasizes that the hero matures only when he is separated from his parents and committed to military service. The setting of Starship Troopers is different than that of the juveniles in two major ways: a) the past society (ours) disappeared not because of war but because of spiritual decay as revealed in standardless, permissive government, and b) all humanity now is fighting for its survival against the alien Bugs.

Otherwise, Starship Troopers closely resembles a typical Heinlein juvenile. The hero begins as a typically confused adolescent. Joining the military is his first genuine choice (p.21). In the military, he is supported and protected by a new "family" (pp.112, 115, 129), but in return he accepts its demand for absolute obedience. As he does so, he matures. Soldiers don't decide what they will do. Nevertheless, making that initial total choice, sticking to the commitment through training and combat, cooperating with others to the end --in short, showing the ability to decide, to think, and to act--does develop one's ability to see things as they are and recognize what can be done. Thus, in Starship Troopers, only military veterans (including, during peacetime, "veterans...from non-combatant auxiliary services" (p.143) can be voting citizens, resulting in a "stable and benevolent government" (p144).

To connect military service and maturity, Heinlein works hard to reconcile the absolute obedience required of troopers with his belief in individuality. It is the Bugs who obey orders unthinkingly, since they have no individual intelligence. Human beings are cantankerous individuals, and the only workable morality recognizes that "Man is what he is, a wild animal with the will to survive, and (so far) the ability, against all competition" (p.147). By recognizing the truth about human nature, using that will and challenging that ability, the military liberates its members. As Heinlein's hero says, the soldier "is a free man; all that drives him comes from inside--that selfrespect and need for the respect of his mates and his pride in being one of them" (p.164).

In all, Starship Troopers is not so much a new thing as an extreme expression of Heinlein's own concerns. That Scribners rejected this powerful, disturbing argument probably has to do with several failings. One is the extreme way Heinlein manipulates circumstances. For example, the hero's family is grotesquely obtuse and oppressive, as shown when his mother writes to him during basic training with the reassurance that "Wherever you are, whatever you choose to do, you are always my little boy who bangs his knee and comes running to my lap for comfort" (p.71). Later, however, the hero's father joins the military himself, endorsing his son's choice and actually becoming his son's subordinate so that family discipline is reconstructed in a fashion that would please many adolescents.

Along with the unrealistic manipulation of events, there's the fact that Heinlein doesn't merely demonstrate ideas in action but develops them in passionate lectures that go on much longer than anything in the earlier novels. These usually are presented as class discussions, but they actually consist of the veteran-teacher demolishing the hero's attitude, and the teacher is being exceptionally patient (considering the desperate situation set up in the novel) in giving the louts in his classroom any leeway in acquiring understanding.

The clumsy storytelling in Starship Troopers results from the overwhelming passion with which Heinlein argues its unpalatable message. He knows the book will collide head-on with unthinkingly accepted slogans. He relishes the opportunity to shake his readers, old or young, loose from their dangerous misconceptions. He is convinced that they need to be grabbed and

shaken. Consequently, although it finally saw print as an adult novel, Starship Troopers is in some ways the most juvenile of Heinlein's novels, for it preaches at an audience that the author doesn't trust to make up its own mind.

The reaction to Starship Troopers certainly helped dispel the notion that SF was mere escape literature. Heinlein clearly was grappling with serious public issues, about which people felt strongly. Unfortunately, much of the response to the novel was just foaming-at-the-mouth hostility. Among the readers who reacted more thoughtfully, James Blish, Gordon R. Dickson, and Harry Harrison wrote novels to give opposing viewpoints; whether directly inspired by it or not, Joe Haldeman's The Forever War continued the debate. And some of us who couldn't accept Heinlein's message or the standard platitudes realized that we'd have to live our response.

I sometimes wonder how Heinlein felt, watching readers like me grow away from him, so that he was just one of the SF writers we read and listened to. Admiring him as I still do, I'd like to think he might have actually been satisfied as having provoked thoughtful disagreement. In Between Planets, the colonists' rebellion against Earth is rooted in "a belief in the dignity and natural worth of free intelligence" (p178). In The Rolling Stones, the twins' father secretly is pleased that they don't passively accept his wishes: "Good boys! Thank heavens he hadn't been saddled with a couple of obedient, well-behaved little nincompoops!" (p.62). So I'd like to think that going beyond Heinlein's brand of storytelling and thinking was part of natural growth. I hope that my own growth has incorporated the best of what Heinlein taught by words and example. And that includes what he did in writing his juvenile novels. By taking the challenge of going outside the SF magazines, Heinlein recruited new readers, counseled adolescents, and extended the emotional and ideological range of science fiction. As a witness who was both new SF reader and adolescent, I can testify to what Heinlein accomplished. He made us pay attention to the world around us, and he helped us imagine building better worlds. He pulled and pushed us; he led us and prodded us; he entertained, stretched, encouraged, and challenged us. He helped us all grow up.

Texts

References to Red Planet Mars, Between Planets, and Starman Jones use the original Scribners editions, 1949, 1951, and 1953 respectively. For Space Cadet (1948) and The Rolling Stones (1952) I've used the Ballantine paperback reprints, 1978 and 1977 respectively. Text of Starship Troopers (1959) is the 1968 Berkley paperback.

In some ways, this piece is a companion to an earlier essay: "Huck, Cat, and/or Civilization: Joan D. Vinge's Psion as 'Juvenile' Fiction" in the Spring 1986 issue of Extrapolation.

--Joe Sanders
September 19, 1988 |*|

The Man Who Sold the Future

Robert A. Heinlein came to me down a dusty backwoods Arkansas road, that warm summer's day in 1950, in the back of a Pulaski County bookmobile. My older cousin, Bobby Brown, handed me Heinlein's Red Planet, saying, "You read a lot of books; you might like this one, about rockets and planets."

Hours later, that same night, I asked Bobby, "Er...are there any more books like this one?"

And so began yet another life-line skewed by its close encounter with the true master of modern science fiction. Imagine a boy growing up in '50s Arkansas, home of rednecks and Klansmen, football and good ol' boys, pick-up trucks and overalls--imagine that boy with a head full of Heinlein, believing in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, not understanding the racial injustices, the hypocrisies of everyday life, total disinterest by adults and children alike in the future or in Space or in technology. Imagine disenchantment and isolation, a desperate searching for like minds, a sad and lonely time to be a fan.

Not until nearly thirty years later did I consciously realized the debt--or at least the influence--I owed to Mr. Heinlein. While reading The Number of the Beast, it came to me at least that Heinlein was parodying himself and, in that company, those of us who had been dedicated fans of his. Like me! I had unconsciously striven to be like those characters of his--a Renaissance Man, all-around best at everything (at least things intellectual), always Speaking-Profound-Truths-In-Capital-Letters, deeply patriotic, a Jeffersonian hostile-toward-leftists, and morally superior to all those who though otherwise.

After that revelation, I was very thankful to Mr. Heinlein for his pleasurable preparation for an interesting life. It might have taken me years to arrive at the same state of affairs, and I like to think I'd have made it on my own. But who knows?

Like many thousands of others now in their 40s or older, I worked to help bring about Heinlein's American future--school in New Mexico, working with rockets at White Sands, then Bell Labs, and finally in the best and biggest Weapons Shop of all: Sandia National Laboratory. But at all these places I was searching for that group of Heinleinian idealists, and found that they only existed in fandom. Not at Bell Labs, not at White Sands, not in Mensa, (somewhat in the old 1970s Libertarian Party; too early to tell at Sandia ...). But mostly, just in fandom, only in fandom. Not in the real world of economics and politics and power--the world of mundanes. For a few dark decades it even seemed that the non-Heinleinian leftist fascists might somehow extend their control over the whole world, as their brethern had nearly done in the world of SF....

But then came the Reagan/Thatcher Revolutions, culminating in a scene that might have been written by Heinlein himself, a Czech worker standing up in a crowd in the latter part of 1989 and quoting for all the world to hear: "We hold these truths to be self-evedent...."

Now that collectivism is grasping its last painful breaths in the few Communist dictatorships remaining in this world, and the so-called Soviet Union disunities, those of us who kept Heinlein's and Jefferson's vision have a right to cheer--it is our worldview that has won, not the sterile fantasies of the dying Left. It is our optimism that the future promises, not the bleak and dismal blatherings of the new-wave literati of the 60s, a breed that still skulks about the dark corners of SF....

Mr. Heinlein, surely, is smiling somewhere. I sure as hell am!

Thank you, Mr. Heinlein sir, for your stories and your philosophies--for my life.

--Arlan Andrews, Sr.
March 12, 1990 |*|

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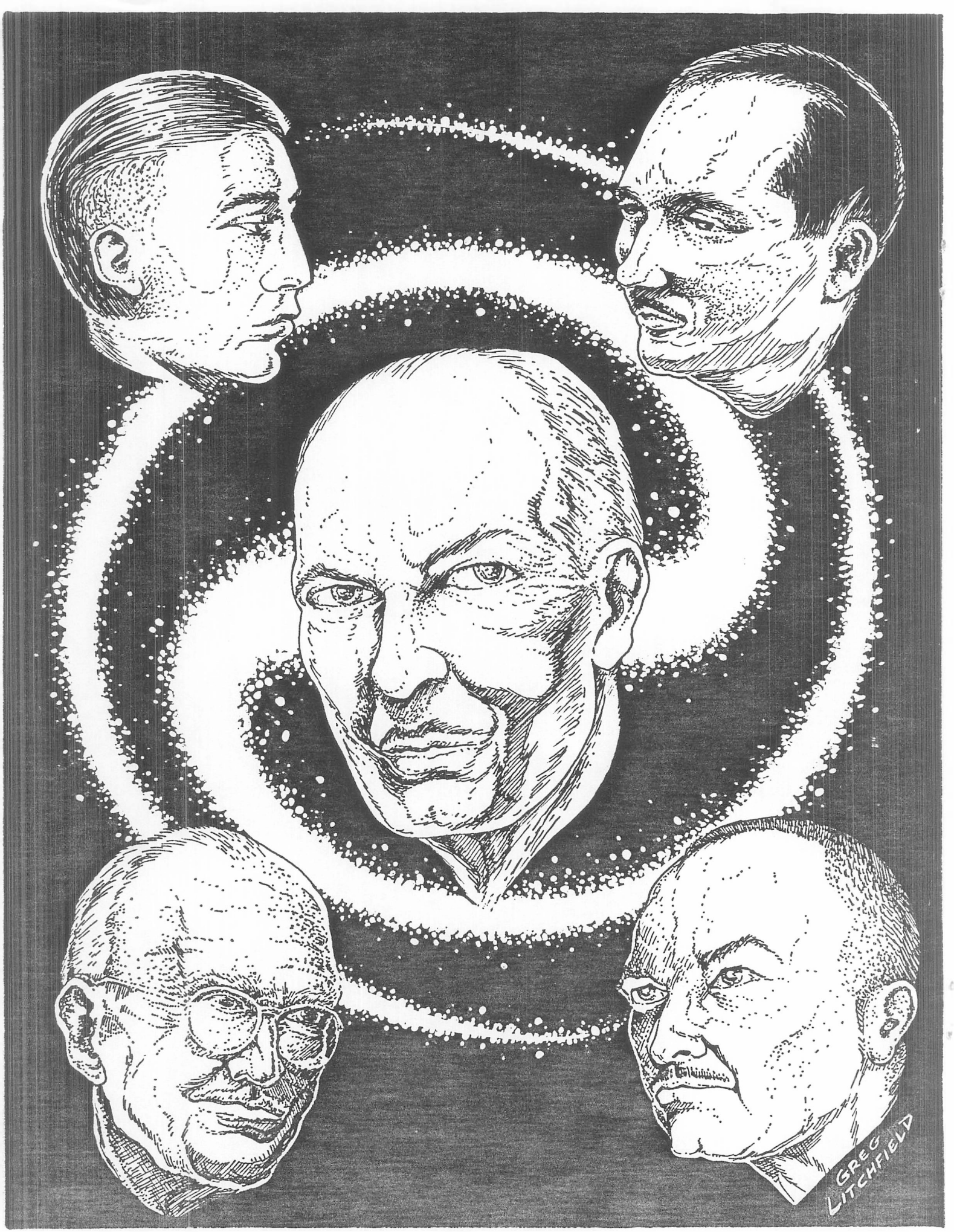
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