

## About This Volume

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*Critical Insights: Robert A. Heinlein* explores the work of perhaps the most famous and influential name in modern science fiction. Writers such as Jules Verne and H.G. Wells did much, in very different ways, to shape a genre born of nineteenth-century industrialism, invention, and rapidly accelerating technological change, but for the evolution of science fiction from the mid-twentieth century onward, we must look to Robert Anson Heinlein. His career may have begun a lifetime ago—and his own lifetime ended a generation ago, in 1988, before many of his current readers were born—but still the man’s works are read, pondered, hotly debated.

Heinlein’s writing ranges from now-retro futures, in which hat and tie are always worn in public and cigarettes are offered at the beginning of every business meeting, to future cultures embracing unusual religions and polyamorous group marriages, and he employs settings from pulp-fiction swamp-and-jungle produced pulp-fiction settings that depict swamp-and-jungle Venus and canal-girded Mars to the twistily nested dimensions of the multiverse and the literally author-created World as Myth. This author may not have been the first to envision, say, the generation starship, the closed time-loop, or the powered military exoskeleton, but his early treatments have become the classic standards. In addition, his fiction explores not only “hard” science but also, at times, magic, spirituality, sociological systems, and methods of government. Heinlein published short stories, novellas, “juvenile” novels—which are not juvenile at all—and novels definitely, sometimes *most* definitely, for adults; he wrote essays on topics from World War III to blood donation, and his “Rhysling” poems in “The Green Hills of Earth” are very fine, too.

Heinlein has been by turns the darling of either Right or Left, and he has been both praised and criticized for almost every notion he has ever espoused, or even seemed to espouse. His so-called juveniles turned many youngsters on to space travel and even led

some to careers in science, while his sometimes-shocking 1961 *Stranger in a Strange Land* became a counterculture favorite, and fans looked forward to the release of new books right up to the year of his death. The works and the man himself have been debated since the 1950s, strenuously, continuously; even his harshest critics cannot deny his stature, and still more readers, sometimes grandchildren and great-grandchildren of earlier generations of Heinlein readers, keep discovering his prodigious artistic output.

With this text, then, we examine the writings of Robert A. Heinlein and their growing legacy. This volume is divided into four main sections. In the introductory section, I will discuss Heinlein's career and certain themes of his writings in fairly broad terms, while Gary Westfahl gives a biography of the man behind the literature. The book's concluding section contains helpful resources such as a brief chronology of Heinlein's life for quick reference, a list of his works, a bibliography of critical essays and books for further study, and an index of key terms used within this text. Bracketed between the opening and closing apparatus is the "meat" of this project: a four-chapter section of critical context to help inform and set up readers' understanding of Heinlein and his art, and a ten-chapter section of critical readings exploring many various facets of the stories, novels, and occasional pieces of non-fiction.

Zahra Jannessari Ladani begins our critical context by discussing the cultural and historical milieu into which Heinlein was born and in which the writer developed. As she notes, the youthful Heinlein was a prodigious reader of pulp science fiction and fantasy—among more "serious" works as well. Ladani situates Heinlein not only in the trends of fiction but also in the scientific and philosophical notions of evolution, the nature of time, and sociology. She then examines the interplay of Heinlein's career with the Second World War, the Cold War, and the changing 1960s as well.

Donald M. Hassler helps us understand the various ways critics throughout the decades have treated the writings of Heinlein. While Heinlein remained popular with fans and also with many fellow writers, academic critics—including those particularly, well, *critical* of the author—were a consternation to the prickly Heinlein; he

usually refrained from complaining in public, but the posthumous publication of his private letters revealed an author who had, or at least who affected, disdain for such academicians. From early researchers such as Alexei Panshin, through the most recent work of the twenty-first century, and of course delineating and categorizing the stances of the major scholars whom the student of Heinlein is sure to encounter, this chapter provides a very useful overview.

Robin Anne Reid then explores Heinlein's famous *The Moon Is a Harsh Mistress* (1966) with an "intersectional" perspective. Whereas some scholarship examines literature from only one perspective—political, say, or feminist, or class-based—intersectional analysis focuses on interesting overlaps and gaps between multiple perspectives; Reid here looks at the intersections of nationality and gender, plus race and gender. As she points out, Heinlein may attempt a forward-looking stance, but still odd slippages occur. Reid's final suggestion on the desirability of examining other Heinlein works from similar intersectional perspectives thus should be very well taken.

I conclude our context section by examining two works from near the endpoints of Heinlein's career: "Magic, Inc." (1940) and *Job: A Comedy of Justice* (1984). Both of these pieces—with their sometimes-befuddled first-person narrators who are swept along by events beyond their control—delve into the supernatural, and both make sure to get in a few subtle but pointed digs against racism. Both, moreover, take us in different ways to the very throne of Satan and back, and yet their differences only highlight Heinlein's valorizing of the worth and strength of the individual.

Starting our section of critical readings is Garyn G. Roberts with a useful discussion of the first ten years of Heinlein's writing, 1939 to 1949. As Roberts notes, Heinlein did not start publishing until his early 30s, but although he thus had considerably more life experience than many younger science fiction and fantasy authors, he was just as creative, just as probing, and just as technically competent—in fact, more so, if his popularity is any indication. After explaining the nature and trends of pulp magazines of the era, this chapter discusses a number of Heinlein's important SF and

fantasy pieces, then concludes with a detailed list of his short fiction through 1949.

John J. Pierce follows up with an entertaining and enlightening look through perhaps my own favorite part of Heinlein's oeuvre: the so-called "juvenile" novels published with Scribner's between 1947 and 1958, which are anything but *juvenile*. Written for what we now would call the young-adult market, these books range from a four-man private first Moonshot to an interdimensional voyage to planetary judgment in the Magellanic Clouds, and nearly everything between. One constant, however—aside from the fact that they are generally rather fine stories—is their emphasis on growing up and taking one's place in the sometimes-difficult world of adult responsibilities. Never is it labored, but the attitude is unmistakable and unforgettable.

Yet what does an *author* think about the craft that entertains so many millions and which, incidentally, puts food on his table and clothes on his back? Gary Westfahl examines Heinlein's public writings on writing, along with his personal letters as well, to help us understand the attitudes of a writer who eventually needed to work only a few months each year to support himself. It is "dishonest work," Heinlein quips, for writing involves no pesky time clocks to punch, no frowning supervisors, and no calloused hands...and yet, as Westfahl notes, success indeed does require real skull-sweat and a great deal of native talent as well.

Next, Anna R. McHugh discusses proliferation of spacetimes in Heinlein's early short fiction: "Elsewhen" (1941), "They" (1941), and "The Unpleasant Profession of Jonathan Hoag" (1942). The earliest fantasists had explored other worlds in space, and the notion of other dimensions gained scientific currency from the 1870s onward, but of course it was Albert Einstein's theory of relativity that truly opened up the vistas of unified spacetime. Using the Bakhtinian lenses of *chronotope* as the literary representation of time and space and *focalizer* as the character viewpoint through which we make sense, McHugh follows Heinlein along an intriguing proliferation of realities through Einsteinian spacetime and beyond.

“By His Bootstraps” (1941), praised by editor John W. Campbell, Jr., as a novel and important treatment of time travel, is the focus of Kristine Larsen’s chapter. Heinlein himself saw the story as a neat trick, but one that had no real importance—the notion of meeting oneself in a time loop, after all, seems to have awfully little to do with day-to-day reality. Larsen, however, entertainingly examines the various potential paradoxes of time travel from a scientific perspective and even draws in Heinlein’s other classic tale of the twisted timeline, “—All You Zombies—” (1959).

Marleen S. Barr then explores *Podkayne of Mars* (1963) as a dizzying, sometimes-obfuscating, even prankish novel that plays with indeterminacies and gaps and that ultimately can point us toward our common humanity. Playful puzzles and seeming contractions abound in *Podkayne*: the narrator’s age given first in Martian years rather than Terran, the way the culture of Earth is defamiliarized almost as much as those of Mars and Venus, or the competing endings in which the narrator alternately lives or dies, to name only a few. Playful herself, Barr shows how we must read with Heinlein and against him and where those attitudes can take us.

I follow this with a look at Heinlein’s treatment of the emergency retreat, whether simple getaway cabin, hardened bomb shelter, or even more modern panic room, across over forty years of fiction and nonfiction. Some of it may seem a bit quaint now—the author’s lovingly detailed description of the elaborate blast-resistant bunker in *Farnham’s Freehold* (1964), for example—but the outlook is best understood in its historical context, a solid twenty or more years when nuclear conflict between the superpowers seemed very possible indeed. Even the most dated works, however, still entertain, and Heinlein’s underlying pragmatism probably should not be abandoned so easily either.

Wolf Forrest then discusses supply-side economics in Heinlein’s fiction, not just in the “usual suspect” of *The Moon Is a Harsh Mistress* (1966), but also in such disparate tales as “—We Also Walk Dogs” (1941), “Waldo” (1942), “Magic, Inc.” (1940), and *Podkayne of Mars*. This wide-ranging chapter thus covers over two and a half decades of Heinleinian philosophy, economics, and

ethics, as spelled out in different pieces of his disparate yet ever-popular entertainment. Clearly, the author's outlook shifted a fair bit since his then-unpublished *For Us, The Living* of 1938.

C. W. Sullivan III gives us a nuanced investigation of Heinlein and “empire”—with the term broadly rather than pejoratively defined. This chapter looks especially at Heinlein's Scribner-published juvenile novels, including the controversial *Starship Troopers* (1959), which originally was intended for the Scribner's young-adult series, but it also brings in the adult-oriented *The Puppet Masters* (1951) and the author's exhortatory nonfiction work, such as his 1958 campaign against a unilateral nuclear-testing freeze and his 1973 address to the US Naval Academy on “the pragmatics of patriotism.” Indeed, though, Heinlein's underlying pragmatism is idealistic, for it espouses not conquest per se but instead the survival of the human species.

Ira Halpern in our final chapter gives a fresh look at the iconoclastic and enduring classic, *Stranger in a Strange Land* (1961). Whereas Heinlein always described *Stranger* as a book that asks questions rather than gives answers, Halpern suggests that, lack of Martian mental powers notwithstanding, this is rather disingenuous, at least regarding the novel's sexual mores. Indeed, Halpern not only sees the book's Church of All Worlds as something of a utopian model, but he finds the glitzy Fosterite religion, with its sanctioning of gambling, alcohol, and sex for the sanctified, to be treated with far less irony than many readers see. Despite Heinlein's attempts at satire, suggests Halpern, true utopianism shines through. After all, utopian threads of one variety or another indeed do run through much of the author's work...as, perhaps, they also must in any project examining the complex, prolific, and towering Robert A. Heinlein.

# Early Genius: Robert A. Heinlein's Stories from 1939 to 1949

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Garyn G. Roberts

While Robert A. Heinlein published a range of fantasy works in addition to his wide-ranging science fiction and even wrote a number of nonfiction essays and editorials, it is of course for the SF that he is best remembered. By all indications, Heinlein wanted to be best known and remembered as a science fiction author, and indeed he is. In fact, he is considered one of the greatest science fiction authors of the twentieth century. While assigning the term “greatest” requires consideration of definition and parameters of historical and literary context and is, at least in part, subjective, this adjective—in regard to Robert A. Heinlein in context of the sweep of science fiction of the twentieth century—is very much appropriate. Through the years of his writing life and on through the years after his passing, the author has been assigned many superlatives as a science fiction craftsman. Among other accolades, Heinlein has been dubbed—correctly—the “Dean of Science Fiction.”

We know this with certainty: Robert A. Heinlein was one of the greatest science fiction writers not just of the previous century but of all time. He was one of the most adept “pure” science fiction practitioners in terms of “hard” science fiction and political science fiction, and he numbered among the most accomplished social science fiction scribes as well. He also was one of the most varied, wide-ranging, and best-revered authors of his time.

Heinlein is the archetypal “science fiction” writer; he set the standard for the genre as we now know it. Nineteenth-century founders like Jules Verne and H. G. Wells were more heavily invested in scientific romance. While these masters’ stories provided a degree of moral allegory, turn of phrase, and futuristic vision, along with clever premises, themes, and plotting, they did not provide the template, even boilerplate, for modern science fiction. Even with some fast and free applications and speculations about the uses and

extensions of existing “hard” sciences—as well as “social/soft” sciences, political sciences, and so on—Verne and Wells never achieved the level of hard science that Robert A. Heinlein tackled. Prior to Heinlein, even the previous masters of science fiction never approached the SF accomplishments of, say, “The Roads Must Roll” (1940). Edward Page Mitchell (1852–1927) may have come the closest.

Heinlein was extremely effective at portraying settings, both tangible and intangible, and developing characters and character types in his stories. In his work, he often provided an invention or scientific idea upon which each story is centered. These inventions could be of great world value, but they also could be flawed and the source of great catastrophe. They often provided the complication for the storyline. With tremendous dexterity, Heinlein wrote of labor law, political theory, the military, advances in science and technology, and the human condition. Since the tales we read even three decades following the author’s death were written across some fifty years of his lifetime, they went through periods of change—in terms of topic, style, and mood. Distinct phases, themes, and eras mark Heinlein’s career, and just as there are masterpieces, so, too, there exist works whose worth is debated and even the occasional author-declared “stinkeroo.” Yet no matter the phases and no matter the ups and downs, Heinlein stands at the forefront in his contribution to his art, a central pillar in the structure of science fiction, just as Picasso is a mainstay in the many equally important rooms in the house of popular art. To follow the career of Robert A. Heinlein is to follow not only the evolution of science fiction, but also the evolution of the twentieth century.

From 1939 to 1949, Heinlein was more than a competent pulp magazine writer. During these pre- and postwar years, he was an exquisite critic of government, the military, and big business, along with the two-dimensional, small-minded, and even paranoid people who often could be found in these organizations. What follows here is not an analysis and discussion of the detailed and complex fantastic Heinlein worldview called “Future History,” nor is it a definitive chronicle of revisions, or a listing of later stories’

appearances in book form. Instead, it is an introductory exploration of the science fiction and fantasy of Robert A. Heinlein from 1939 to 1949, a disparate group of tales that not only defines and serves as the basis for the author’s collective works, but also serves as a defining bedrock or archetype for the larger science fiction genre.

Two cornerstone volumes of any Robert A. Heinlein library are *The Past Through Tomorrow: Future History Stories* (1967) and *Expanded Universe* (1980). These two collections are relevant to our discussion here, since each reprints *some* of those first Heinlein tales from 1939 to 1949. *The Past Through Tomorrow* collects stories of “Future History”—stories of what could be in coming days. The works of science fiction found in this collection often are allegories—moral lessons and warnings—of what could happen should humanity make technological advances with which it is incapable of dealing appropriately. *Expanded Universe* dovetails nicely with *The Past Through Tomorrow*, though it is by no means a sequel to its predecessor. *Expanded Universe* features stand-alone fiction, non-fiction, and some Future History stories in an effort to update and diversify Heinlein’s paradigm of *The Past Through Tomorrow*. Just as detailed analyses of the Future History stories, or Heinlein’s philosophy and worldview in *Expanded Universe*, are not the focus here, neither will we discuss the twelve-year series of juvenile novels that begins with *Rocket Ship Galileo* (1947), *Space Cadet* (1948), and *Red Planet* (1949)—a corpus that, aside from having been read and reread by countless readers across several generations, has been studied by critics elsewhere. Here, after all, the early shorter works are our focus.

Under his real name or pseudonyms, Robert A. Heinlein provided an incredible array of high-quality science fiction and fantasy even between 1939 and 1941, leaving the fan so much to explore and unearth. Major works from this very early period include numerous short stories of wide variety and also longer works, such as ““If This Goes On—”” (*Astounding*, February and March 1940), “Sixth Column” (*Astounding*, January, February, and March 1941), “Universe” (*Astounding*, May 1941), and “Methuselah’s Children”

(*Astounding*, July, August, and September 1941). Some of these novellas later were expanded and then released as their own books.

Two major editors and markets account for much of Robert A. Heinlein's popular and critical reception. These were John W. Campbell, Jr., (1910–1971) and Frederik Pohl (1919–2013). John W. Campbell, Jr.'s biography is pretty common knowledge to the science fiction fan and scholar. Campbell had his early space operas published in *Amazing Stories* and similar pulp magazines in the very early 1930s. When he became editor of Street and Smith publisher's *Astounding Stories* in the mid-1930s, Campbell revolutionized the publishing of science fiction magazines. Hugo Gernsback created the first science fiction magazine in 1926 with *Amazing Stories*; Campbell, however, created the archetype for the genre when he took over editorship of *Astounding* in 1937. A "Who's Who" of science fiction authors got their professional careers jumpstarted, and some even began their careers, under the tutelage of Campbell. Isaac Asimov, Catherine L. Moore, Clifford Simak, E. E. "Doc" Smith, Theodore Sturgeon, and other legends numbered among the editor's literary stable. Robert A. Heinlein was John W. Campbell's most important author, and for more than a decade Heinlein carried *Astounding*.

Every major pulp magazine thrived especially because of certain prolific or well-loved authors. In 1920s detective fiction, for example, Joseph T. Shaw, the most important editor of (*The*) *Black Mask*, detective fiction's most important publication, relied on his own cadre of literary talent. Shaw had Carroll John Daly, Erle Stanley Gardner, Raymond Chandler, and others upon whom to draw for topflight private investigator stories. Shaw and *Black Mask*'s true pillar, however, was Dashiell Hammett. Robert A. Heinlein was to John W. Campbell, Jr., as Hammett was to Shaw.

Frederik Pohl was the other major science fiction magazine editor who embraced, supported, and bought Heinlein's early and later writing. There were other editors, of course, but Pohl was the editor of the pulp magazines *Super Science Stories* and *Astonishing Stories* from about 1939 to 1943—the war years—and then, in the late 1950s through the 1960s, Pohl edited science fiction digests,

most notably *World of IF* and *Galaxy Science Fiction*. Pohl often bought Heinlein's work for his publications; in the postwar digest era, these stories included novellas, serials, and novels, as well as short stories.

In addition to these "traditional" science fiction markets, Heinlein in the postwar period also broke into more broadly read markets. After an early burst of creativity—with twenty-nine stories published between 1939 and 1942, under his own name and pseudonyms—the rising star's fiction output plummeted during the Second World War, when he was a civilian engineer working for the Navy and his writing then consisting solely of technical reports and memoranda. In 1947, however, following numerous unsuccessful attempts to place several nonfiction yet snappily written essays on the dangers of the then-new nuclear age, Heinlein at last began publishing new SF in upscale periodicals such as the *Saturday Evening Post*, *Town and Country*, *Argosy*, and *Blue Book*. The year 1947 also saw the first of his young-adult novels published by Scribner's, the beginning of a series whose popularity with school libraries was to spread Heinlein's name ever more widely and bring him increasing royalties.

Yet this leads away from the stories that started it all. Let us look, therefore, at some of the more notable pieces of short fiction from the 1939–1949 period.

### **"Life-Line"**

Originally published in *Astounding Science-Fiction* (August 1939); later collected in *The Man Who Sold the Moon* (1950), *The Worlds of Robert A. Heinlein* (1966), *The Past Through Tomorrow* (1967), and *Expanded Universe* (1980).

"Life-Line" is science-based fantasy, both a political and economic tract and a morality play. In this, his *Astounding* debut, Heinlein goes big. He points out the fundamental flaw of the sociopolitical, economic model of capitalism—the doctrine, along with democracy, at the heart of United States self-definition. In the guise of story character Dr. Pinero, Heinlein writes,

## Chronology of Robert A. Heinlein's Life\_\_\_\_\_

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<b>1907</b>	Robert Anson Heinlein is born on July 7 in Butler, Missouri.
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<b>1908</b>	Heinlein family moves to Kansas City, Missouri.
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<b>1925</b>	Heinlein is accepted by the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis.
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<b>1929</b>	Heinlein graduates from Annapolis as an ensign.
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<b>1929-1930</b>	Heinlein's first marriage, with Elinor Curry.
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<b>1929-1933</b>	Active duty aboard aircraft carrier <i>USS Lexington</i> , then destroyer <i>USS Roper</i> .
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<b>1932-1947</b>	Heinlein's second marriage, with Leslyn MacDonald.
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<b>1934</b>	Heinlein is given medical discharge due to tuberculosis, retiring as lieutenant, junior grade.
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<b>1934-1938</b>	Heinlein invests in silver mining, attends classes at UCLA, and then works in Democratic politics in California.
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<b>1938</b>	<i>For Us, The Living</i> written—rejected several times, but published posthumously in 2003.
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<b>1939</b>	“Life-Line,” Heinlein's first story, is published in <i>Astounding Science-Fiction</i> in August.
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<b>1939-1942</b>	Twenty-eight more stories—including “Requiem,” “They,” “Solution Unsatisfactory,” and “By His Bootstraps”—are published in various pulp science

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## Works by Robert A. Heinlein\_\_\_\_\_

### Novels

*Rocket Ship Galileo* (1947)

*Beyond This Horizon* (serialized 1942; revised 1948)

*Space Cadet* (1948)

*Sixth Column / The Day After Tomorrow* (as Anson MacDonald,  
serialized 1941; book version 1949)

*Red Planet* (1949)

*Farmer in the Sky* (1950)

*Waldo & Magic, Inc.* (1950)

*Between Planets* (1951)

*The Puppet Masters* (1951)

*The Rolling Stones* (1952)

*Starman Jones* (1953)

*The Star Beast* (1954)

*Tunnel in the Sky* (1955)

*Double Star* (1956)

*Time for the Stars* (1956)

*The Door into Summer* (1957)

*Citizen of the Galaxy* (1957)

*Methuselah's Children* (serialized 1941; book version 1958)

*Have Space Suit—Will Travel* (1958)

*Starship Troopers* (1959)

*Stranger in a Strange Land* (1961)

*Orphans of the Sky* (in *Astounding* 1941; book version 1963)

*Podkayne of Mars* (1963)

*Glory Road* (1963)

*Farnham's Freehold* (1964)

*The Moon Is a Harsh Mistress* (1966)

*I Will Fear No Evil* (1970)