



Farnham's Freehold

Robert A. Heinlein

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Hugh Farnham was a practical, self-made man, and when he saw the clouds of nuclear war gathering, he built a bomb shelter under his house, hoping for peace and preparing for war. What he hadn't expected was that when the apocalypse came, a thermonuclear blast would tear apart the fabric of time and hurl his shelter across two thousand years into a future both strange and appallingly familiar. In the new world order, Farnham and his family, being members of the race that had nearly destroyed the world, were fit only to be slaves. After surviving a global nuclear war, Farnham had no intention of being anybody's slave, but the tyrannical power of the Chosen Race reached throughout the world. Even if he managed to escape, where could he run to?

Farnham's Freehold Details

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Author : Robert A. Heinlein

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From Reader Review Farnham's Freehold for online ebook

Harv Griffin says

Farnham's Freehold is #6 on my list of All Time Favorite Science Fiction Novels. Number six. I probably reread this novel about every three years. Heinlein was clearly having a lot of fun while he wrote it, and that shows. Copyright 1964. Structurally, it's cleaner than Stranger in a Strange Land; although it lacks the brilliance of the first half of Stranger.

My favorite part is the love story between the old guy and his son's date. I probably like that too much.

Nuclear War. Time Travel. Fascinating family dynamics. A future where the power hierarchy is completely restructured.

There is some "racial stuff" going on that will probably piss off people obsessed with political correctness. But I like the way Heinlein handled it.

Do you like to play Bridge?

@hg47

(And yes, I am guilty of stealing from Heinlein's Farnham's Freehold and sticking background bits into one of my own novels. Can I call it "tribute"?)

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Update
June 8, 2013
8:37 PM

I seem to be temporarily fixated on FARNHAM'S FREEHOLD reviews. My favorite review, so far, is this one by Adrienne Martini:

http://www.bookslut.com/specfic_flooz...

She won me over completely when she wrote: "**Almost every writer has taken a swing at the sneakiness of time and how it pads about on little kitten feet.**"

Michael says

One of the things about being a book geek is that, sometimes, you enjoy getting together with other book geeks and, well, geeking out about books. Part of this is that you it makes you feel better to know others enjoy reading a particular type of novel or genre as much as you do and that while most of your friends and family find your zealousness for said books frightening, there are others out there who understand. And another big part is that you get recommendations for new books you might not normally read.

Last night, I ventured out to my first meeting of the science-fiction/fantasy discussion group at the Linebaugh library in downtown Murfreesboro. I've known about the existence of the group for a while now, but hadn't been able to make a meeting. I'd read a few of the books they'd selected but somehow life always seemed to interfere with my good intentions of actually getting there.

This month's selection was the Robert A. Heinlein novel, *Farnham's Freehold*. Let me preface this by saying that as a science-fiction reader, I find Heinlein vastly overrated. He may have been great in his day, but I've found the large majority of his work to be vastly inferior to other contemporaries of his day such as Issac Asimov or Arthur C. Clark. I've read a fair number of his bigger works such as *Stranger in a Strange Land*, just because it seems you can't be a sci-fi geek without having plowed through the book. But apart from *Starship Troopers* and *The Puppet Masters*, there's not been a lot of Heinlein I've come away really enjoying or thinking I'd actually want to re-read it again someday.

Alas, *Farnham's Freehold* feel in the category of how I feel about the majority of Heinlein's work--vastly overrated.

The front cover states this is "science-fiction's most controversial novel." Maybe in 1964, it was but the story is really showing signs of age. The story centers on Hugh Farnham and his family. Hugh has built a nuclear bunker under his house, which comes in handy when the U.S. is nuked by the Russians. Hugh, his family, a friend and their servant all hide out in the bunker, emerging to find that the bombs have somehow shifted them forward in time. The book then becomes a survivalist type of story about forging their way in a new world, until it takes an abrupt left turn about 150 pages into the book. The group is discovered by the new rulers of this world, all of whom are African-American. In a role-reversal of the time it was written, all the white people are treated as slaves, with the men neutered.

Now, all of this may have seemed edgy, contemporary and brilliant social satire in the mid-60s, but today it all seems dated. The story lacks focus and abruptly shifts in tone and focus too much as the story unfolds. Even though the book barely hits the 300 page mark, it feels too padded and long, with Heinlein spending a lot of time on the initial days in the new world and only hinting at the better novel that could have been in the last two pages. This is a novel that could have been a better novella.

But the biggest thing is that in a story about the survival of humanity, there should be at least one person you want to survive. That's not the case here. It's hard to identify with any of them or really care if they make it or not.

That said, as much as I didn't enjoy the book, it was interesting to be part of a discussion with people who had different views. One person shared my view on the lack of enjoyment in the book but others did like it and were able to share why. It didn't change my overall feeling on the book, but it was interesting to think about.

Nathaniel says

I read Farnham's Freehold because Wikipedia described it as a racist anti-racist book, and I wanted to know what all the fuss was about. Here are the relevant quotes from Wikipedia so we start out on the same page:

The SF Site described Freehold as "a difficult book", and stated that "(a)t best, (it) is an uncomfortable book with some good points mixed in with the bad, like an elderly relative (who) can give good advice and in the next breath go off on some racist or sexist rant. At worst, Farnham's Freehold is an anti-minority, anti-woman survivalist rant. It is oftentimes frustrating. It is sometimes shocking. It is never boring."

Charles Stross has rhetorically asked whether "anyone (has) a kind word to say for (...) Farnham's Freehold", and then described it as the result of "a privileged white male from California, a notoriously exclusionary state, trying to understand American racism in the pre-Martin Luther King era. And getting it wrong for facepalm values of wrong, so wrong he wasn't even on the right map ... but at least he wasn't ignoring it."

The New Republic, while conceding Heinlein's desire to "show the evils of ethnic oppression", states that in the process, Heinlein "resurrected some of the most horrific racial stereotypes imaginable", ultimately producing "an anti-racist novel only a Klansman could love."
[footnotes removed]

My own take? The biggest problem for me was not anti-racist racism. It was that the protagonist was one of those insufferable Omni Competent Man characters that really irritate me to no end. (See my reviews of Sundiver and Ringworld.) It often seemed as though every other character in the book was there simply to show that Hugh Farnham was the manliest manly man that ever manned. I mean Barbara, the one female character not related to Hugh, has sex with him and gets pregnant within hours of meeting him for the first time in her life. In fact, every female character in the book has either already slept with Hugh, does sleep with Hugh, or offers to sleep with Hugh, and that includes his *daughter*. (Thankfully, that doesn't actually happen.)

Even by Heinlein's fairly weird standards, this book was pushing envelopes, and it seemed to push most of them for the sake of stroking Hugh's (therefore: Heinlein's) ego. This made the book rather difficult to get through, and I was about to quit about 1/2 way through, but I checked Wikipedia and found out that there was an interesting plot twist about to happen. So I stuck with it, and the book got marginally better (2 stars instead of 1.)

As for race: I think in this case Heinlein deserves more credit. First, it's abundantly clear that the book is intended to be anti-racist in that Hugh (remember: the one who is right about everything) castigates anyone who disparages Joe (the book's only African American character, and Hugh's house servant.) Joe consistently comes off as the most decent and most likable character in the book. He's also chosen by Hugh--over his own son, Duke--as the second-in-command for their atomic survival bunker. Not only does Heinlein mean well, but his central thesis is that the apparent differences between black and white culture are purely the result of blacks being subjugated by whites. At one point, Hugh talks about an island he'd come across in the Pacific (during his time in the US Navy) where there were a bunch of plantations with black owners and white slaves, and that under those conditions the black/white stereotypes (e.g. who is servile, who seems educated)

were reversed. This isn't just an *attempt* at anti-racism, it's a pretty clear statement of racial equality and a condemnation of white supremacy.

So where do the problems come from? Well, one point Hugh and his group end up time-traveling about 2,000 years into the future where--thanks to the atomic war that started the book--most of the white folk in N. America, Europe, and Asia had all exterminated each other. So now there was a reversal of the world order, with blacks (including folks from Africa, S. America, Australia, and the Pacific islands -- so not the same as African Americans) dominated a slave society populated by white slaves. Heinlein's point was obvious: who ends up on top is just a matter of historical luck. Whoever is on the bottom will become servile and seem less-civilized, and in the future that meant a bunch of white people who were illiterate, superstitious, and whose highest ambition was to be castrated so that they could serve as household servants. And whoever is on the top will be corrupted by the power, which is why the black overlords end up not only domineering the white folks in a slave state reminiscent of 1984 (e.g. the black overlords even control the white underground railway and have co-opted it as an integral part of their breeding program), but they also end up literally slaughtering and eating white slaves as part of their diet. The depictions of the overlords also tend towards excessive wealth, which hearkens to Orientalist stereotypes of Middle Eastern and Asian despots as sensuous, decadent, and morally bankrupt. The future society is also depicted as entirely stagnant, perhaps feeding into stereotypes of Africans as lazy. So I can see where the criticisms come from, but they are all misreading the book. Heinlein's point, and this is about as subtle as a brick (the characters have a dialogue about it at the end), is that *anybody* who lived in a society like the future society with slaves and overlords would become decadent, morally bankrupt, and lazy. The same criticisms you could make of the black overlords in the 4000s are intentionally supposed to parallel the white overlords of the 1900s (Hugh's time), and that's the whole point. Furthermore, the terms "black" and "white" don't even have the same meaning in the 4000s as they do in the 1900s, another point Heinlein makes clear. In the 4000s, northern Asian populations (China, Japan, etc.) are grouped in with European-descended whites and south eastern Asian and Pacific Islanders are grouped in with blacks. Again: I can see how some would see echoes of the kind of racial hierarchy where whites < Asians < blacks, but clearly that wasn't Heinlein's intent and contradicts the details of the story.

Long story short: the book is definitely tone deaf (relative to 21st century sensibilities) on race, but come on: it was published in 1964.

I don't want to defend the book entirely. The wish-fulfillment, Omni Competent Man style of writing is nauseating, and then the self-righteous obsession with taboo-violation (i.e. the incest plotlines) are even worse. But I think Heinlein deserves credit for not only talking about race so bluntly, but for making essentially the right point that apparent racial superiority is really just an offshoot of political supremacy and that it should be rejected as a reprehensible social evil. He deserves that credit even if his 1960s sci-fi approach throws up all kinds of red flags for a 21st century, politically correct audience.

EDIT - Also, the book was critiqued as being anti-woman. That critique has a lot more validity to it than the racism critique, and sort of goes hand-in-hand with the Omni Competent Man stereotype, for whom women inevitably exist merely as tools to sate his lust or demonstrate his superiority of other males. Again, look at my reviews of Sundiver or Ringworld to see commentary on that particular issue. This review is already long enough, so I won't go into the details as they relate to this book. But yeah: it's a problem.

notgettingenough says

There aren't many better recommendations for a book than 'Sick as a dog but couldn't put it down'. This is one of those.

It works for survivalists, bridge players, parallel worldists, philosophers, post-catastrophists, cannibals looking for new recipes and anybody with Woody Allen's tastes.

It's gotta be a fav of his. Those naked young things in the bunker with the middle-aged unattractive but pizazzy leader, one his daughter. Although his daughter confesses of the three breeding partners available, he's the only one that does it for her,

rest here:

<https://alittleteaallittlechat.wordpress.com/2014/07/10/sick-as-a-dog-but-couldnt-put-it-down/>

Amber says

My Heinlein phase is continuing.

If you are easily offended by your views (or societies givens) being challenged or called into question Heinlein is not an author for you.

Heinlein is probably the best author that I have found in the Science Fiction category. His futuristic worlds provide an excellent commentary of our current social life as well as remarkable insight into the human psyche. His characters are multi-dimensional and some of his best characters are very strong women. He writes women remarkably well in my opinion.

Most of the best novels that I have read are his later works. He had some bubble gum novels during the beginning of his writing career and they are entertaining (but not nearly so memorable).

This particular book has elements of a survivalist novel. It has many sociological discussions about race, government, and religion. I read it two days. Couldn't put it down.

Michael says

Lieber würde ich nach einem atomaren Schlag völlig einsam in der Strahlungswüste verenden, als Zuflucht in FARNHAMS FREEHOLD zu finden!

Hugh Farnhams ist ein Teufelskerl, und obwohl er wie einst Noah veracht worden ist, hat er für den Fall der Fälle einen Bunker auf seinem Grundstück gebaut, in dem sich ein Nuklearschlag der bösen Russen überleben lässt. Und genau in diesem Bunker finden er und seine Familie sowie der farbige (!) Hausdiener Joe und Barbara, die Freundin der Tochter Karen, Schutz, nachdem es zum großen Knall kommt.

Nun sind überlegtes Handeln und Nervenstärke gefragt. Zwecks Herstellung der erforderlichen klaren Hierarchie droht Old Farnham seinem Sohn, ihn kaltblütig zu exekutieren, so ein netter Kerl ist Hugh. Alle, vor allem natürlich die Frauen, haben sich auf sein Geheiß nackig zu machen, damit man im Bunker nicht unnötig schwitze, Scham wird per Hughschem Dekret verboten; Genüßlich berichtet Heinlein, wie Barbara später auf Hughs Weisung ihre nasse Unterwäsche anziehen muss, weil der Kittel angeblich zu warm ist. Da

wird Herr Heinlein Schweißperlen auf seiner Stirn gehabt haben.

Während Hughs alkoholkranke Frau den Rausch in der Koje ausschläft, treibt der es mit Barbara, ein Spaß, den ihm seine Tochter von Herzen gönnt. Das ist eine der peinlichsten, weil unvorstellbar schlecht geschriebenen Sex-Passagen, die ich je gelesen habe. Später gesteht Tochter Karen ihrem Vater unmissverständlich, sie wolle lieber Kinder von ihm, als von den anderen potenziellen Vätern, die den Weltuntergang in Farnhams Bunker überlebt haben. Schwängern muss Hugh seine Tochter dann aber zum Glück doch nicht, da diese schon in anderen Umständen ist, genauso übrigens wie Barbara und die Katze. Mitsamt dem Bunker durch die Zeit katapultiert, müssen sich die Farnhams und ihre Begleiter neu einrichten und der Roman wird zur Bridge-Robinsonade (denn das Bridge-Spiel hat es Heinlein angetan, er schreibt mehr über das Spiel, als irgend ein Leser wissen will).

Als schließlich ein gewisser Status Quo hergestellt ist und wieder gewohnt wird (Ikea würde fragen: Wohnst du noch oder lebst du schon), stellen sich Autor und Leser die Frage, wie es nun weitergehen soll, schließlich ist die Handlung noch nicht maßgeblich in Gang gekommen und der Roman schon über 200 Seiten alt.

Heinlein hat an dieser Stelle offenbar die Nase genauso voll von der Story wie ich. Kurzerhand lässt er Karen bei der Geburt ihres Kindes sterben und das unschuldige Kind folgt wenig später nach. Nun ist die Bühne frei für einen neuen Handlungsstrang, der vom vorausgegangenen komplett losgelöst ist. Unsere tapferen Zeitreisenden werden von einer Gruppe Menschen entführt und mitgenommen, die jetzt, 2000 Jahre später, über die Erde herrschen. Ein wenig mutet das Szenario wie aus "Planet der Affen" an, und man zuckt zusammen, es zu sagen: Die Macht liegt nun nicht mehr beim Weißen Mann, sondern beim Schwarzen.

Hugh ist ein rechtes Stehaufmännchen und wird bald vom Sklaven zum Leitenden Wissenschaftler befördert, bekommt einen Bettwärmer (eine 14-jährige Hübsche, namenlos, die er Kätzchen tauft und der er das Schreiben beibringen will, Pymalion lässt grüßen) und macht sich unverzichtbar. Und als auch diese Handlung sich und den Leser erschöpft hat, kommt das Ende des Romans, das nicht vorherzusehen fast unmöglich ist...

Rassistisch, sexistisch, inzestuös, albern ist FARNHAMS FREEHOLD, und ich kann keine Anhaltspunkte dafür erkennen, dass Heinlein das Buch als Satire gedacht hat – auch wenn es absolut unvorstellbar ist, dass er ernst meinte, was er hier vorgelegt hat.

Mich erstaunt, dass er überhaupt ein solches Buch schreiben konnte und dass kein Lektor die Notbremse gezogen hat; nicht minder erstaunt mich, dass es bis heute neu aufgelegt wird. Vielleicht könnten biografische Informationen zu Heinlein oder Äußerungen von ihm in Briefen noch etwas Licht ins Dunkel bringen, entschuldbar und lesenswert würde dieser Supergau von Roman, eines der schlechtesten Bücher, die ich gelesen habe, aber selbst dann nicht.

Nur die Faszination des Grauens erklärt, wie ich mich durch diesen Schund durchkämpfen konnte, immer wieder mit geweiteten Augen gebannt auf die Seiten starrend wie das Kaninchen auf die Schlange.

Grauenhaft!!!

Jim says

Like Glory Road, this is almost 2 books. The first one focuses on the Cold War, an atomic attack, & then a survival story. I liked it a lot. RAH actually managed some subtlety with his characters at times. They

weren't all perfect & some of the imperfections were well used later in the book. For instance, Karen's perfection was marred by her aping black slave speech that was common to older movies of the time & it's brought up later to great advantage.

It's at least partially autobiographical since RAH was in the Navy & he had a bomb shelter. So does Hugh Farnham. A lot of the ideas on religion & politics seem the same, too. IOW, the same older Heinlein lead character like Lazarus & Jubal. Barbara is a younger, female version - Hazel in her prime. Still, Joe & Duke were both far better & more complex than normal.

I doubt younger folks will understand how well the whole bomb shelter & imminent nuclear war setup was done. I heard conversations similar to those early on in the book debating the worth of bomb shelters, how preparedness talk worried people, & a lot of people had radios tuned for emergency broadcasts. The way Hugh commanded things was high-handed & completely believable for the time & characters. While he wasn't perfect, at least he kept it from becoming a mess like *The Shelter*, a fantastic *Twilight Zone* episode. Reading this was a real blast from the past that I'm glad is gone. Sure, we have terrorism today, but that seems less likely to roast the entire planet in a few minutes. It was a nervous time.

While RAH was quite progressive in his ideas on race & sex, he's pretty heavy-handed with them for the most part. Very good for the times, not so hot 50 years later to a younger crowd that doesn't realize how much things have changed. For its time, I think this did a wonderful job pointing out some issues. Joe's extreme shyness of the girls was well done. It becomes obvious that it's both because of the mores of the time as well as his race. For all that 3 of them show no racial prejudice, it's still there.

Then they're found & it's a whole other book. The tone & themes change. He went too far with the cannibalism & the creation of the society isn't believable, but otherwise did a pretty good job with showing how power corrupts with Joe & the dangers of temporary security with Grace & Duke. The end is kind of fun, but would fit better in a comic book.

The biggest thread I had an issue with was the damn cats, but I've never cared for them much & the way he treated them has caused far too many issues. Feral cats are a huge issue, so his no spay or neuter policy is awful.

This is the wrong edition. Mine is a 1992 (I think) cassette I got from my library & ripped into a file many years ago, but I don't recall listening to it before. It's a Baen edition for the Blind. Well narrated.

David says

This book has some notoriety among Heinlein's legions of critics for being a "reverse racism" story in which a group of white people (and their one black house-servant) are blasted thousands of years forward in time by a nuclear war, and find themselves in a future ruled by black overlords, served by an underclass of subservient whites.

Farnham's Freehold is actually not that bad, nor is the narrative message as ham-fisted as I expected; Heinlein was a progressive for his time, and notwithstanding all those people who claim he was a libertarian, less plausibly, a "right-winger," or absurdly, a fascist, he was clearly trying to make a positive statement about freedom, self-determination, and racial coexistence. The story is more complex than some of the more inflammatory reviews give it credit for — most of the characters, white and black, are decent by their own

standards but flawed in various ways, and no one is made out to be inherently better or villainous by virtue of their race.

That said, it's understandable that a novel written in 1964 about blacks imposing chattel slavery and racial supremacy over whites — and literally ranching them for food — might be seen as a somewhat less than elevating contribution to the genre today.

As a story, this was okay, but not one of Heinlein's best (though certainly not his worst either). Hugh Farnham is a typical Heinleinian omni-capable Everyman, aided and assisted by a typical Heinleinian woman (hot, willing, smart and capable but knows her place and likes it) as they try to escape from the dystopian nightmare they have found themselves in. Actually, as dystopias go, none of the characters in the book are treated particularly badly, a point made repeatedly by their "Charity"/master, and refuted effectively by Farnham when he points out what the "King's Charity" really means. Like most Heinlein novels, there is food for thought here, and a decent amount of adventure, and a lot of nubile fourteen-year-old sex slaves (who the main character of course is too noble to take advantage of).

Interesting but dated, and not what I would recommend to someone new to Heinlein, but if you like his other, better works, *Farnham's Freehold* will probably entertain you.

David Joseph Mikels says

The author is a GENIUS, every bit as good as Stranger in a Strange Land.

I have plans on rereading this book in a few months after the mega trip of knowledge sinks in a little for a deeper insight-the man was years ahead of his time

Plan on rereading this agin

Lyn says

I read an overly simplified summary of this book that went something like this: libertarian veteran saves family in fallout shelter, gets moved forward in time 2,000 years, goes into survivalist mode and then runs into an advanced civilization where black people are the chosen race and who rule over a racially determined slave system.

Succinct.

This could have been shortened, reducing the first half with all the survivalist development, moving faster to the more interesting second half when the protagonists run into the chosen. Heinlein took a lot of heat for this obvious allegory, but critics should remember that this was written in 1964 and he did take on some controversial issues; not just racism, but also sexism, alcoholism, drug addiction, and traditional family mores.

Like Lazarus Long and Jubal Harshaw, in Hugh Farnham Heinlein has created a character who is an alter ego for himself and a vehicle by which he can espouse his libertarian and, in some respects, contrarian

philosophies.

This book was very influential, but Heinlein's influence by H.G. Wells is also obvious as he borrowed heavily from *The Time Machine*. Not one of his best, but still pretty good.

Manny says

Bridge-playing libertarian type gets hit by nuclear weapon and ends up in future world where whites are enslaved by blacks.

Well, you can see why I gave up playing bridge.

Dominick says

I'm giving this two stars because I can't give 1.5 and because even worse books like *Glory Road* deserve the one--or an explicit zero, which unfortunately is not an option. This, however, is pretty bad. Hugh Farnham, right-thinking patriot, is ready for the bombs when they fall, what with his amazingly well-equipped bomb shelter, so even though for no logical reason whatsoever the bombs throw his shelter (along with his family and a couple more hangers-on) forward in time, he's ready to survive, if only he can get everyone else to follow along after his lead, enforced by a gun yet laughably still called democracy. About the first half of the book tracks their survivalist phase alone in this future world, replete with unbelievable caricatures of Farnham's alcoholic wife, weak-minded commie pinko liberal son, and a daughter who not only accepts that the continuation of the species depends on incest but also eagerly calls dibs on dad, which takes the ick factor to about 11. First of all, that there would be no debate or discussion whatsoever on whether even trying to propagate the species with a gene pool of fewer than ten people is wise seems unlikely. The complete dismissal of the incest taboo is simply beyond unlikely and laughable, except insofar as it serves Heinlein's apparent intent to shock (and apparent thing about incest, since it comes up a lot in his work). And THIS is the good part of the book, relatively speaking!

Then, halfway through, the book takes an abrupt turn into social satire (one wishes the first part could be seen as a satire of fascist lunatics, but I doubt that's the case), as we find that there is in fact a future society, governed by blacks who enslave whites, neuter white males, take the women as concubines, and practice cannibalism. Hey, why not? We've already ruled out incest as worth any debate. Farnham manages to get into the ruler's good graces, keep his testicles and ultimately escape, leaving his son and wife to their fates among the cannibals (but taking a hot young tomato with him, natch), managing to return to the "past," albeit now an alternate-world past where the fallout shelter doesn't get thrown into the future but instead stays in a post-apocalyptic America, bravely flying Old Glory over Farnham's Freehold. In short, the book can't make up its mind whether it's a survivalist story, a time travel story, an alternate world story, a post-holocaust story, and/or a social satire. Furthermore, Hugh Farnham is the most loathsome Heinlein protagonist I've encountered, which admittedly isn't saying much, since I don't like most of what I've read by him so have kept my intake down. But, since most of his protagonists (in the ebooks I've read, anyway) are dicks, this is still saying something. This book's hectoring tone is hard to take even by Heinleinian standards, though;

Hugh fairly clearly is Heinlein's mouthpiece in the book, and he never frickin' shuts up. I *wish* I could believe it's supposed to be a deadpan satire, but even if it were, the joke would wear more than thin by the end. Painful.

Jeff Yoak says

Even having read this book before several times, it still blew my socks off. Heinlein's deep look at racism, his typically brilliant characters and one of the cases where he didn't lose interest in his plot all dovetail in a great book.

2016: Probably this is one of the books that stimulated the best conversations with kids when we read it. They really latched on to the ideas of racism and slavery as seen in the book. It was so brilliant of Heinlein not only to have blacks lording over whites in his alternate world, but to have them be kind, gentle and generous. It is easy to hate whip-cracking, evil overlords, but the message is so much more profound watching the distinction between our protagonists who accept and come to like their new benevolent masters, and our heroes who struggle against it, despite their special treatment, fighting to be free at any cost.

Read this one with your kids!

Richard Knight says

Wow. I've read a lot of books in my day--probably over a 1000--but I've never read a book that dovertailed into being utter garbage like Farnham's Freehold did. It starts off so well until the big twist (Which I'm not really spoiling since it's the only real attraction of this book at this point--blacks are in control of whites). Given that this book was published in the 60s, this would have been huge and inflammatory. Today, it's all hampered by crummy sci-fi elements that are utterly laughable and embarrassing. And here's the thing. The book is so promising until this element occurs. The story regarding the family trying to survive in the future after a bomb sent them hurtling into the future is magnificently done. But when the "Chosen" people arrive, it all goes downhill.

Now, I'm black myself, and I just couldn't take this book. Not because I felt like it was racist (Or sexist, as many people say), but just because it's too out there for its own good. It was going so well and then, it just dives straight down into the crapper. Don't read this book. I know what you might have heard about it, but don't. Just don't. It's not worth it. You'll be better off for it.

Jim says

This isn't my favorite book by Heinlein, but it certainly isn't my least favorite (that honor is held by "The Number of the Beast" or "The Cat Who Walks Through Walls"). I give it 4 stars - should be 3.5 - because it has a lot of good ideas running through it, although it isn't as well written as many of his novels. Still, I really liked it as a teen back in the 70's. Like "Stranger in a Strange Land", it hasn't aged as well, though.

Written at the height of the cold war, back before the civil rights movement, he shocks us too much & is as subtle as a brick to the head. The typical American family isn't perfect, uses legal drugs, lusts after women

they shouldn't. Worse, he-man Hugh has screwed up his parenting & family responsibilities so badly that his son likes being a mama's boy, (view spoiler) better than a hot-blooded, man-of-freedom like his dad.

Whites are so unprepared & pampered that after the big war, blacks control the world with high tech, but they aren't doing much better than anyone else ever had for all their technology. Their society is a back-biting as ours. (view spoiler) The table turned severely on the complacent Americans of the 1950s!

It was a lot of fun reading about his bomb shelter & the plans he made for survival. Bomb shelters were a big thing at one time & I believe Heinlein had one himself. The survival thing has recently come back into vogue, but for different reasons & people handle it differently, so that makes for interesting comparisons & contrasts.
