

BOOKS

Heinlein Adventure

Friday.

By Robert Heinlein.

New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
1982. 368 pp. \$14.95.

Reviewed by Jerry Pournelle

The Old Master has done it again. Adventure, sense of wonder—whatever it is you're looking for in science fiction, you'll find it in this book. Sure there are flaws, but if you're like me, you won't see them until the second—or third!—reading. Let me put it this way: forget what you thought of *Number of the Beast*, or any of Heinlein's later works. If you liked *The Moon Is a Harsh Mistress*, you'll go ape over *Friday*.

They sent me the galleys of *Friday*. They sat on my desk all day while I got my work done. Finally, about midnight, I made a fatal mistake. I opened the book.

I was hooked at the first paragraph. Sometime about 8:00 the next morning I fell asleep, and I didn't get a lot done the next day, either. I forget what I wrote for the blurb the publishers asked for; everyone, from Harlan Ellison to Larry Niven, wrote enthusiastic puffs of that book.

Enough. I could rave all afternoon. The point is, *Friday* is the old stuff, the mixture as before, essence of gripping adventure by a master of the craft, complete with competent characters, exquisite attention to details, and an outrageous but believable future society. (Isn't the society we live in outrageous? Yet we have no choice but to believe in it. Well, Heinlein does that too: he depicts a society that you'd never have imagined but you simply can't question.)

If all that isn't enough, then consider this: *Friday* is a sequel to *Gulf*. It even has Kettlebelly Baldwin in it. And believe it or not, Dr. Hartley M. (Kettlebelly) Baldwin, one-time executive secretary to a society of superpeople (in *Gulf* he called it a society of supermen, but even Heinlein didn't anticipate how quickly things would change) makes a major mistake. In fact, that's one of the two parts of the book I had trouble with; I'd always thought Kettlebelly infallible. Baldwin's is a common mistake, for few are able to reach as far beyond the grave as they like; still, I'd have thought Kettlebelly would know better. He was such a

thoroughly competent executive secretary.

Alas, there's no real explanation of what happened to the supermen of *Gulf*. They've merely vanished. There's a hint: Marjorie Friday Baldwin, the book's hero (sex, female; but heroine has been spoiled as a legitimate word, I fear), is a genetic descendant of Joe and Gail Green from *Gulf* and thus one of Baldwin's heirs, and what Kettlebelly has chosen to leave her is a ticket to any place away from Earth. Baldwin has concluded that Earth is doomed to a new Dark Age, and he figures he owes Friday the means for avoiding that.

There are many places to go. Not only are there colonies on the moon, but interstellar travel is now possible (although expensive). There are lots of colonies out there: Botany Bay types for convicts; places that pay you a bonus to sign up; and places that charge you a hefty price for admission. Baldwin's will pays all, for any place Friday wants to go.



There's only one exception: if she chooses to go to Olympia, the Baldwin estate won't pay. According to Mrs. Tomosawa (and it's Mrs.; on Luna they're old-fashioned, they marry and have children in that order, unlike the rest of the Terra-Luna system), Olympia is the place "where those self-styled supermen went. No real point in warning you against it, however; the corporation doesn't run ships there."

There's no clue (at least none I could find) about whether or not the self-styled supermen on Olympia were the same ones that Kettlebelly Baldwin took care of. If you suppose they were, then fascinating questions arise. Certainly Baldwin was trying to encourage Friday to leave not only Terra but the whole

solar system. But was he trying to steer her away from Olympia—or toward it? After all, Friday is a strong-willed young lady and quite capable of defying her foster father's will and wishes, although she wouldn't do so lightly.

Or was he trying to protect her? One of the marks of the "supermen" in *Gulf* was that they spoke a new language, one modeled on Loglans. Because of *Gulf*, I have all the books on Loglans and have contributed to its study; alas, the language hasn't progressed as Heinlein predicted in *Gulf*, but that's as of 1982. *Gulf* took place in a time when there were Lunar colonies, obviously some years from now, and by then Loglans research might have made more progress. But in *Friday*, the logical language of the supermen has been forgotten; even Baldwin doesn't mention it. Could this be because our hero Friday isn't really part of the *homo superior* race despite being descended from Joe and Gail Green? There is, after all, the genetic phenomenon of regression; and Friday, although very high normal, is still *homo sapiens*; nor has she been given the extensive training through which Gail supervised Joe Green.

Unfortunately, you won't find out in this book. Heinlein never does reveal precisely what Kettlebelly Baldwin is after. The protagonist doesn't really care; she has a loyalty fixation, and whatever Baldwin wants, Friday will do. Even after it's proven that Baldwin is not infallible—despite the fact that he knows he hasn't long to live, his successors are bureaucratic losers—Friday continues to do what she thinks Kettlebelly would have wanted. But so would most of us.

I still wonder, though. As a youth I identified with the characters in *Gulf*. Identified with them, yearned to know them; for I was a pink monkey among browns, and the browns instinctively hated me. *Gulf* said that somewhere there were other pink monkeys.

Boyhood dreams die hard. And I do wonder: perhaps Olympia isn't on any normal spaceship schedule because the "supermen" prefer it that way. I'd like to think so, but Heinlein gives us no clues.

There are flaws in *Friday*. Some may not be flaws: that is, Heinlein paints a picture of a fairly ugly future, one bad enough that the most Baldwin can wish his adopted daughter is that she leave the solar system forever. The social order Heinlein shows us is believable. The United States and the rest of the world have been balkanized. There's a Califor-

nia Confederacy, led by a more or less democratically elected Big Chief who seems a cross between Pat Brown, Jerry Brown, Ronald Reagan, Timothy Leary, and Chevy Chase (the scenes with Chief Warwhoop of California are themselves worth more than the price of the book). There's the Imperium, centered on Chicago. And the Lone Star Republic, which includes Vicksburg.

Now I grew up in Memphis; and Vicksburg's low town was notorious in my day. In *Friday*, "Vicksburg low town is a lusty, evil place, as swarmingly alive as a dunghill. In daylight city police travel in pairs; at night they leave the place alone. It is a city of drifters, whores, smugglers, pushers, drug wholesalers, spivs, pimps, hire hatchets, military mercenaries, recruiters, fences, fagins, beggars, clandestine surgeons, blackbirders, glim-jacks, outstanders, short con, long con, sting riggers, girlboys, you name it, they sell it in Vicksburg low town. It's a wonderful place and be sure to get a blood test afterward." Apparently nothing changes...

There are also the corporate nations, multinationals that have no home base—and that, in the time of *Friday*, are at least as sovereign as, say, Sri Lanka or Prince Edward Island or the Seychelles.

The global picture is painted with all the detail we expect of Heinlein. Example: when Friday travels to New Zealand, she says, "Christchurch is the loveliest city on the globe.

"Make that 'anywhere,' as there is not yet a lovely city off Earth. Luna City is underground, Ell-Five looks like a junkyard from outside and has only one arc that looks good from inside. Martian cities are mere hives and most Earthside cities suffer from a misguided attempt to look like Los Angeles."

Yet within Christchurch, Friday's home and sanctuary, there lurk serpents; and throughout the society in which she lives there are—anomalies.

There is no hint that monogamy might be thought a virtue, and certainly Friday treats it as a vice. Whether this is a flaw in the book, or in the social order described by the book, I soon grew weary of the mindless affairs and one-night stands. Whenever Friday spends more than a few minutes in company with *anyone*, male, female, or uncertain, you can be certain that recreational sex will take place—and that it will leave no scars. Both herpes simplex and deep emotional attachments have been "cured" by the time of this book.

One need not approve of Heinlein's

societies to appreciate them, and I guarantee that the world of Friday is as real as the world of *Moon Is a Harsh Mistress* and studded with even more fascinating detail. Who knows: perhaps that's where we're headed, to a world of friendly sex, where marriage is more of a business arrangement than a religious or emotional contract. Perhaps, even, that's where we *should* be going.

Even so, I did grow weary of the casual sex. There are perhaps half a dozen dull paragraphs in this magnificent book, and all of them have to do with these rather sleazy affairs.

The other flaw is more serious. Miss Marjorie Friday Baldwin is the end product of an important genetic experiment; she is also the only descendant of Joe and Gail Green, who may or may not have been *homo superior* but were certainly at the high end of the human potential curve. Yet, as the book ends, Friday is sterile. This is not irreversible, but she has taken no steps to reverse it, and time is running out. She has been happy enough as surrogate mother and does not intend to change matters.

This seems a cruel trick to play on Dr. Baldwin and the Greens, who certainly thought heredity was important. And I, for one, prefer to imagine a different ending.

My sane friend was puzzled. "How could the author of *Number of the Beast* write something as good as *Friday*?"

"Strange question," I said. "Why do you ask?"

"Did you like *Number of the Beast*?"

"Not the first time," I said. "You have to read it twice. The book leads you to think it's one thing when in fact it's quite another. Besides, the best part of *Number of the Beast* is the big party at the end—at least it is for those of us who were invited. Alas, you weren't, so I can see your distress. But all that's unimportant."

"Why?"

"Because *Number of the Beast* and *Friday* are totally different books. They have different purposes, and go in opposite directions. It's possible to like both, but it's almost impossible not to like *Friday*, whatever your opinion of the other book."

So said I then, and so say I now. If you ever liked Heinlein's science fiction, you'll like *Friday*.

Jerry Pournelle writes science fiction, having recently coauthored the bestseller Oath of Fealty.

Irresponsible Warnings

The Fate of the Earth.

By Jonathan Schell.

New York: Knopf. 1982.

244 pp. \$11.95.

Reviewed by Samuel Cohen

In *The Fate of the Earth*, Jonathan Schell does essentially three things. First, he analyzes the effects of nuclear war on the earth, concluding that the human species is in dire danger of extinction. Next, he embarks on a philosophical discourse on the meaning of human extinction, which he regards as morally unacceptable. Finally, he demands that mankind choose between extinction and survival by eliminating nuclear weapons from the earth and constructing a world without war. Since his philosophy and his recommended solution stem from his fundamental conclusion that nuclear weapons and the possibility of nuclear war are placing mankind in mortal jeopardy, and since my professional expertise lies in the area of nuclear weapons and nuclear war, I shall restrict my review to his nuclear war analysis—an analysis that is grossly in error.

Schell simply hasn't addressed himself to the real world of nuclear weapons and how nuclear war might be fought. He shows a profound ignorance of actual nuclear stockpiles and of strategies developed by the United States and the Soviet Union that are not leading toward the global holocaust he predicts. This is not to say that the two nuclear superpowers may not blunder into a nuclear war, which would be insane. Rather, it is to say that neither side has been insane enough to develop nuclear arsenals and strategies that seriously threaten to exterminate mankind. In fact, at least on the Soviet side, there are no indications that Soviet nuclear doctrine envisages the extermination of the American population, which Schell assumes the Soviets will do, dwelling upon this horror at great length.

"It is fundamental to the nuclear strategy of both the Soviet Union and the United States that each preserve the capacity to devastate the population of the other," he states. Responsible strategic analysts, in making such a far-reaching premise, would refer to appropriate source material, including Soviet military doctrinal literature, which currently exists in abundance. Schell has not done this, nor is it apparent that he has