



Methuselah's Children

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After the fall of the American Ayatollahs as foretold in *Stranger in a Strange Land* and chronicled in *Revolt in 2100*, the United States of America at last fulfills the promise inherent in its first Revolution: for the first time in human history there is a nation with Liberty and Justice for All.

No one may seize or harm the person or property of another, or invade his privacy, or force him to do his bidding. Americans are fiercely proud of their re-won liberties and the blood it cost them: *nothing* could make them forswear those truths they hold self-evident. Nothing except the promise of immortality...

Methuselah's Children Details

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Author : Robert A. Heinlein

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From Reader Review Methuselah's Children for online ebook

Craig says

I read the Signet paperback (with the inappropriate Gene Szafran cover) of this one many years ago and have just revisited it via my excellent local library's audio selection. I was surprised to have remembered it quite well; Lazarus and Andy and Mary were all quite well and waiting for me, just as fresh and thought-provoking as I remembered and not at all as distressing as I'd feared from my last memories of Time Enough For Love. If there is such a thing as an overlooked classic by Heinlein, I suspect that this is it. It's also a cornerstone of his future history series.

Gary says

Been slowly revisiting Heinlein lately, for the first time since I was a teen. This one confirms how I generally feel about his early period "adult" writings - that they are actually more like juvenile fantasies, while his "juvenile" works are often better at communicating adult themes. Full RTC, or perhaps I will just write a blog piece on early Heinlein at some point.

F.R. says

Utopias in fiction are always supposed to fail. They're either illusionary or they collapse on their own contradictions. Indeed the only successful utopia in fiction I can think of is the one Willy Wonka had going, and we have to face the unpalatable fact there that it was based on slave labour. No, the entire purpose of drama is conflict and so everyone living perfectly in a perfect world wouldn't do much good. Just as Othello becomes a very dull play if the central character doesn't exhibit any signs of jealousy, so utopias have to fail to make the drama work.

The opening of Methuselah's Children finds a utopia in action on Earth. After some devastating wars in the past, peace now prevails and racism is a thing of history and everyone lives a happy existence. But of course strife isn't far away. There's a group amongst society called The Howard Families who as far back as the Victorian times were embarking on experiments to prolong life and now they routinely live hundreds of years. The fact of their existence causes those of us condemned to a normal lifespan violent resentment, and The Howard Families are forced to flee to the stars to find a new perfect home.

I actually thought the second less cluttered half was better than the first, but it's the opening of the book which is the more thought provoking. Contemporary audiences (this was originally written in 1941) would no doubt have seen echoes of fascism in the persecution of those who were different, But I think modern readers may get more from it – both when it comes to eugenics and the subject of how we actually deal with an ageing population. Robert Heinlein is a writer I've never picked up before, but this is smart and compulsive science fiction, that demands the reader pays attention right from the start but rewards with a gripping read.

Mel says

What happens when the world of "mortals" discovers that there is a minority of individuals who easily live 2-3 times as long as the rest of us? They aren't going to believe it's heredity. They're going to want the SECRET, and a milk toast population where civilized behavior and altruism are the core of everything will throw away all of their pretenses to get it. (Or kill or sterilize their targets so no one can.) Cue a 200+ year-old space pilot and a clever conspiracy. I have pretty much read these books in reverse order, so Lazarus Long's first appearance was in the book I read last (this one), and I was almost in tears when I realized I was done.

I recommend reading *Revolt in 2100* before this, to get a feel for the world and meet one of the characters. It's not essential, but it adds flavor. It's the only thing I did "right" in all of my Robert A. Heinlein reading. Actually, if you haven't started reading Heinlein yet, or haven't gotten to the *World as Myth* books, I highly recommend checking out some suggested reading orders*. If you have read *Time Enough for Love*, *The Cat Who Walks Through Walls* or *The Number of the Beast*, but not this one, it's a great introduction.

*I'm in no way an expert. I'd recommend: (*Stranger in a Strange Land*), *Revolt in 2100*, *Methuselah's Children*, *Time Enough for Love*, *The Number of the Beast*, (*The Moon is a Harsh Mistress*), *The Cat Who Walks through Walls*, (*To Sail Beyond the Sunset***). Books in parenthesis are peripheral but related. *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress* is a favorite of mine and I definitely recommend reading it before *The Cat Who Walks through Walls*. YMMV. There may be more I haven't read.

**Not for the faint of heart. Told conversationally, so it bounces around, and squicky subjects are addressed, but you find out what happens to the trio from the end of *The Cat Who Walks through Walls*.

Jeff Yoak says

I just loved this book silly. It's early Heinlein packed with adventure and excitement. Two of my favorite characters, Lazarus and Libby are front and foremost in this story, and it provides a lot of color and background for the Howard families. I read this story after others that are chronologically prior in the Future History, and it works either way. This would be a great starter book for new Heinlein exploration.

2015: I finally got around to reading this one with the kids. It really hooked them... enough that I'm going to try *Time Enough for Love* with them even though I had previously planned to wait until they were much older.

Tony says

55. METHUSELAH'S CHILDREN. (1958). Robert A. Heinlein. ***.

Back in the 1950s and 1960s I was a rabid reader of science fiction. I think part of the reason was that we were on the cusp a huge number of discoveries in the world of science that was addressed by SciFi writers. Heinlein, as I remember, was among the best of the lot, along with Asimov. They were able to introduce concepts soon to be stirred up by scientists into their plots and make them sound plausible. Going back today, however, points out that their margin of error was fairly high – but then, it carried the story along. In this novel, Heinlein addresses the nature of greed in mankind, and what the consequences might be. The

greed in this case was for a longer life. Set in the year 2125, the population of the Earth had exploded; couples had to get a permit from the government to have a child. Although the natural advances of science had provided for a longer life for the average person, there existed within the population a relatively small group of people – mostly from one family tree – who lived exceptionally long lives. Two hundred years or so was not unreasonable. As soon as the major portion of the population discovered this, they wanted to be let in on the secret too. It turns out that there really wasn't a secret. The people of this group simply lived longer. They did not engage in breeding programs or take obscure drugs or follow a rigorous diet; again, they simply lived longer. They developed ruses to hide themselves among the regular population; taking on new identities and moving to new locations, altering their birth documents, and undergoing plastic surgery to look older. It didn't work. The average Joe could ultimately spot them. Mr. Average Joe soon lost his patience, and planned to round up all of these people and put them in prison – using torture or drugs to make them talk – in order to find out their secret. The leader of these folks immediately saw the danger inherent in that plan. Although there were only 100,000 people in this group, that was still a significant number to protect. They made the decision to leave Earth and venture to a new world that would support life as they were accustomed to it. Stealing a huge cargo space ship, they took off. There was a problem: they didn't know where to go. Also, they didn't know how long it would take. Make sense? Along the way, they developed new techniques that allowed them to travel at speeds greater than the speed of light, and they must have had some sort of divine oversight because they soon found a suitable planet out of our solar system. The problem was that the current population of that planet were not hospitable to the new potential inhabitants, and they had to leave rather quickly. Off again. The next planet was even better, but was full of small creatures who looked like small pink bunnies. The bunnies were very welcoming, but their level of civilization was far beyond that of our earthmen. Soon, the bunnies decided that they could improve on the earthmen; they modified organs and added a few where they saw a need. When this new, improved human version was presented, the earthmen knew that they had to get away before they were all mutated. What choice did they have? None. They had to return to Earth. The story of the final encounter with the remaining earthmen finishes up the story, and it is quite a finish. It will take you by surprise. This work is obviously dated, but it is still a good read, and is a good example of Heinlein's talent.

Dawn Livingston says

I tried to read this one because I heard it was good. I think I'm just not a Heinlein fan so it's not fair for me to rate it.

The writing was okay, the story was okay though it didn't really grab me. The characters were okay. The concept was good but the overall story seemed very dated.

If you're a Heinlein fan, read it. If you're not, don't. If you're not familiar with Heinlein, give it a try, you might like it or you might not.

Jim says

This is an important book if you're in to the Heinlein universe. It is the first good introduction to Lazarus Long who is the central character in many of Heinlein's later books. Unlike his later books, this one is a short, fun read. The basic premise is an oppressed minority fleeing before the public & government can get

their greedy hands on them. There are some interesting looks at aliens & human nature along the way.

This book has been included in a couple of his collections as it is really a novella, although it has also been issued as a stand alone novel. I'm not sure if the novella versions are edited down as I've never read any.

Adam says

Methuselah's Children is an early sci-fi novel by Robert A. Heinlein. It originally appeared in three parts in the magazine *Astounding Science Fiction*, in the July, August, and September issues of 1941.

In 1958 it was published as a full-length novel, expanded somewhat by Heinlein. I don't know what was added or changed, but it can't have been that much, because it's still a very short novel, despite there being enough plot to fill a 1,000-page epic.

The story involves a group of "families" who enjoy incredibly long life thanks to selective breeding. When news of their longevity is revealed, the rest of the world goes mad wanting to know their "secret formula," which doesn't exist. So they hijack an interstellar cruiser called *New Frontiers* and go in search of more hospitable planets. The fact that they find more than one habitable planet and make contact with more than one alien race is why I said there's enough plot to fill a book much, much longer than this one.

As it is, it's an enjoyable read, but the descriptions feel sketchy at times, and Heinlein employs more than one *deus ex machina* to move his characters around.

Your enjoyment of this book will probably depend on your enjoyment of Heinlein's wacky ideas. I'm not totally sold on his worldview, but I enjoy reading about it.

Paul Weiss says

A must read for any true sci-fi fan! Simply outstanding!

Selective breeding and carefully planned marriages with subtle financial encouragement from a secretive group called the Howard Foundation carried out over the last 150 years have resulted in a group of humans that have the extraordinary trait of extreme longevity - Lazarus Long, the patriarch of the Family, born Woodrow Wilson Smith, carries his two hundred plus years quite well! When pressed for his true age, he's either not telling or he won't admit that he truly doesn't know himself! In 2125, a series of events result in the global administration and the remainder of earth's population discovering the Family's existence. A frenzy of enraged jealousy erupts as a maddened, frustrated world seeks to discover the secret fountain of youth they are convinced the Family is guarding for their own use. Hounded by the threat of murder, torture, brainwashing and ultimate extinction by their shorter lived neighbours, the Family flees earth on an untested starship. The discovery of two planets and alien races that pose threats and challenges even more imposing than those from which they fled plus an overwhelming loneliness for the way of life they left so far behind lead them back to earth for a second try.

In **Methuselah's Children**, Heinlein has crafted an exciting novel, a message, a screenplay and the movie script all at once. Descriptive passages, while compelling and very cleverly written are sparse and infrequent and the plot is almost exclusively driven by razor-sharp dialogue. Heinlein's method of conveying the story through his characters' mouths has got wit; it's got dialect; it's got humour and intelligence; it's got sensible

science; it's got humanity and it's got credibility. Their expressions and manner of speaking firmly place the origins of the story in the 1940s USA but somehow Heinlein has managed to inject enough charm to leave it timeless.

For those like me that frequently read for the thrill, the entertainment and the pure joy of a story without looking for any subliminal message or morality tale, *Methuselah's Children* succeeds in spades. Hard sci-fi runs rampant through every page and fleshes out a superb story line - "refreshers" (think *Star Trek's* sonic showers), private space yachts, hydroponics used for mass food production, psychometrics (no doubt, first cousin to Asimov's famous "psycho-history"), extreme enhancement of longevity through selective breeding, elimination of national boundaries and the implementation of a global administration, inter-stellar travel at relativistic speeds, super-luminal warp travel "in the dark" reached with instantaneous acceleration, cryogenics and suspended animation for long-term space faring, lunar and Venerean colonies, orbital construction of spaceships, blasters, aliens, communication in an alien language, telepathy, high speed bio-engineering, and lots more. Although Heinlein didn't use the word "replicator", he may well have been sitting on the script team for a *Star Trek* episode when he had Lazarus order up a customized kilt:

"He sat down in a sales booth and dialed the code for kilts. He let cloth designs flicker past in the screen while he ignored the persuasive voice of the catalogue until a pattern showed up which was distinctly unmilitary and not blue, whereupon he stopped the display and punched an order for his size. Ten minutes later he stuffed the proctor's kilt into the refuse hopper of the sales booth and left, nattily and loudly attired."

For those that wish to dig a little more deeply - don't despair - Heinlein has got much to say that will keep many a party conversation going on a variety of topics: the psychology and, oftentimes, fear of aging and death; mob psychology; prejudice and the abnormal fear of something that is different than we are; the importance of work, activity and a feeling of contributing as a part of the human condition.

This book was more than exciting - it was fun and entertaining in the bargain!

Paul Weiss

Felix Dance says

Yes, I do love Heinlein. I know, I know, super-right wing nutcase that he is. But this book seemed a bit of a mess – lurching between a hyper-intelligent and immortal sub-group of seemingly normal humans (almost all Heinlein's books involve a secret group of super-men destined to become a new species of human, gradually finding each other and then scoffing together at the inferiority of the rest of humanity – it appeals to one's sense of superiority, but is just soooo elitist), global persecution of said race, sudden interstellar travel whose methods are not satisfactorily explained, meetings with new worlds and cultures, then a just as sudden return home. It was quite inexplicable, and some of the characters, like Lazarus Long, seemed to be exiles from other books (some are featured in spin-off novels I hope to read to clear things up a bit). Some good concepts (especially one where they meet a race of domestic animal aliens thinking they are the master-race – and are in for a shock) but I can't escape the conclusion that Heinlein can be hit and miss, with this being a miss. It was good fodder for my Bukit Tinggi hotel in central Sumatra, though, having bought the book in a bonanza science fiction section in a Pangandaran bookshop back in Java.

Deborah Ideiosepius says

Just re-read this one after a long time and was amazed at how well the writing, world building, plot and characters stood up to the test of time. While many things have dated quite badly based on the the time in which they were written, Heinlains vision of humanity is still as cynical and interesting as when I first read it.

Also never quite realised how many of the early Heinlein books were meant to be part of a continual storyline, though of course I got the connection of Lazarus Long here and in future books.

Red Siegfried says

Heinlein details the exodus from Earth of the Howard Families, long-lived individuals who suddenly find themselves persecuted for not revealing their non-existent secret of longevity. Lazarus Long gets a lot of action here as the Howard Families hijack the the starship New Frontiers and look for a place to live out there ... they find that the galaxy is going to be a more challenging and ultimately, more rewarding place to live for this new breed of human. Much more will be revealed in Heinlein's other Future History novels.

Lyn says

This is classic, well written science fiction.

Scaled down, lean and aggressive, bereft of the heavy, introspective reticence that weighed down Time Enough for Love, this is simply a good SF adventure with Heinlein's signature technical attention to detail.

The origin of Lazarus Long and the adventure referenced in Time Enough For Love, including Andy Libby and the beginning of interstellar exploration.

A must read for Heinlein fans.

Darth says

Finally a "CLASSIC" that live up to the billing.

I had grown weary of the same old trite - "You HAVE to read"s - that just didnt live up to the billing.

Having read a lot of Larry Niven, and now starting on the Heinlein series', I think it is safe to guess Niven grew up on Heinlein, as I see some pretty serious similarities between Lazarus and Louis Wu, but since I have loved the Niven, it follows I loved the Heinlein.

I may have been aided in this by expecting to be let down after slogging thru the endlessly repetitive Fantasy

of David Eddings that folks seem to eat up like crazy - dont get me wrong, I enjoyed the Belgariad, but everything after that just seemed to be a remake of the same story.

But Methuselah's Children was what I expect good old fashioned hard Sci-FI to be. Men of Earth head out to the stars - without all the mind-numbing complications and needless enumeration of every potentially adverse event taking place over the course of the story (Sorry Ben Bova - but you are the worst at this)

The almost scary part of this is that he wrote it in the 1940's (www.fantasticfiction.co.uk credits this at 1941) making it so ridiculously ahead of its time as to be either laughable or scary.

At any rate - if you like hard sci-fi that doesnt get all bogged down in its own clever attempts to beat you to death with boring science, but still rings true enough to buy into, AND still maintains a level of human involvement - give this one a spin. It isnt perfect, but it is just what I was looking for.

Kat Hooper says

Originally posted at FanLit.

Methuselah's Children introduces us to Lazarus Long, a popular character in several of Robert A. Heinlein's books. Lazarus, who wears a kilt (but there's guns strapped to his thighs!) and can't remember how old he is, is descended from one of several families who, long ago, were bred for their health and longevity. Lazarus and his extended clan live very long lives — so long that they must eventually fake their own deaths and take new identities so that others don't get suspicious about their supernatural abilities. This has become a problem, however, as technology in the United States has reached the point where people are identified by their DNA and it will soon be impossible to hide. So some of the family members are experimenting with a new plan; they're outing themselves — telling their friends and neighbors about their longevity and hoping for a good response.

Unfortunately, this has backfired. The government doesn't believe that genetics is the cause of their longevity; they think the families are hiding information and techniques that anyone could use to delay death, and they see this as treason. The families are now on the run. They plan to hijack a spaceship and escape the planet before they're all rounded up for examination. Then they'll cruise the universe, looking for some other world where they can live happily ever after.

Methuselah's Children is short (7 hours on audio) and mildly entertaining. The book, originally published in 1941, has aged fairly well and deals with the topics of class warfare, civil liberties, personal property, privacy, freedom, and the need for meaningful work. Further features include some dull meetings, some aliens who remind us that humans are pretty weird, and a trite resolution to the whole affair. At the end I was left wanting to see more of Lazarus Long, and wondering if Heinlein has written any books for adults that don't include incest.

Brilliance Audio's version was narrated by MacLeod Andrews. He has a really nice voice and, judging by his photo on the back of the audiobook (which I enjoyed looking at much more than I liked looking at the cheesy cover art for Methuselah's Children) I thought he looked too young to pull off a convincing 200 year old Lazarus Long. Wrong! He was really good.

W. Lawrence says

Going way back here, Methuselah's Children is a short novel by the dean of scifi and introduces one of the coolest cats in science fiction: Lazarus Long. The Howard family becomes infamous for "hiding" the secret of longevity, and thus begins their trek.

Worth a read.

spikeINflorida says

Robert A. Heinlein's Future History is a collection of short stories, novellas and novels. Quoted as "One of the Greatest Achievements in The History of Science Fiction"...uh, NOT! I found the short stories to be wooden, clunky, and anticlimactic. However, this novel Methuselah's Children was just simple fun...and I enjoyed the hard boiled, get-er-done, kilt cladden main character of Lazarus Long. However, I won't be reading the other Future Hstory stories as my life is getting shorter and my TR pile higher. My favourite Heinlein master works are still The Moon Is a Harsh Mistress and Starship Troopers.

Nuno Magalhães says

Neste livro, Robert A. Heinlein apresenta-nos uma reflexão fascinante sobre a longevidade humana. Partindo da hipótese que existiria uma "família" de seres humanos que possuem características genéticas que lhes permitem atingir idades invulgarmente avançadas, mantendo no entanto a frescura da juventude ao longo de vários séculos de existência, o autor constrói uma história que nos permite vislumbrar o futuro da raça humana, incluindo a sua expansão para outros mundos, o encontro com outras espécies de vida inteligente e as implicações e conhecimentos que daí poderiam advir. Em paralelo, o autor explora as características mais determinantes dos seres humanos, da sua natureza individualista e as vantagens e problemas de tal natureza que é intrínseca à nossa espécie. Narrando a história da perspectiva de Lazarus Long, o ser humano mais velho do universo, este é um dos livros incontornáveis da Ficção Científica.

Tim says

Yet another of my collection of "S-F from long ago." This one is from the mid-50's, and tells the story of a clan (the Howard Families) who tend to live a LOOOOONNNNNG time), and who garner a LOT of negative attention from those who DON'T live a long time. The main character, Lazarus Long, is the oldest of them all, having lived some 375 or so years. Well, these people are given a choice: Be tortured until they give up their secret(there is none, it's just in the genes) or go off onto another planet.They choose the latter,and half of the book entails their journey to find a home. I found some of the "how do we do this here interstellar drive" stuff somewhat boring and irrelevant to the main story, but the rest is pretty interesting, and I'd recommend it (No,I WON'T give the ending away!)

NOW! What is MORE interesting is that this book is only a part of a much larger oeuvre by Heinlen dubbed "future history," which documents not only the longevity mentioned here, but also a long downfall of society's morals. This collection, from the first story (1939) through "Methuselah's Children," is in a gargantuan tome titled "The Past through Tomorrow." I just read the first story in it, and I'm hooked! The

time line for the stories is given in a chart towards the front of "Methuselah's Children," and goes from about 1940 through the 3000's. I actually wish I had discovered "The Past Through Tomorrow" first, would make my enjoyment deeper. Anyway, will give you a review of that one in a few months.

(oops, forgot this part) The preceding is concluded in his 1973 magnum opus, "Time Enough for Love" (interestingly, one that is in my "old S-F books" collection referred to ad nauseam. Chronicles the further adventures of Lazarus (living) Long. Gonna dig that one out of the musty books after I finish "The Past Through Tomorrow." Cool.
