

For us, a ‘new’ Heinlein novel

By DEB HOUDEK RULE

As of this writing, August 31, 2003, there are only about half a dozen people in the entire known universe who can accurately claim that they have read every novel Heinlein has written.

For those of us who thought there would never again be another new Heinlein novel, the impossible has become reality. “For Us, the Living,” is a brand new, never-before-published novel by Robert A. Heinlein. It is going into print now for the first time and will be in bookstores by the end of November 2003.

“For Us, the Living” was written by Heinlein about 1938-39, before he wrote his first sf short, “Lifeline.” The novel, “For Us, the Living,” was deemed unpublishable, mainly for the racy content. So racy is/was the content that in the 1930s the book could not even have been legally shipped through the US mail! For this reason, after a few publisher rejections, the novel was tabled by Heinlein, but the content was mined for his later stories and novels. A fellow named Nehemiah Scudder even appears in “For Us, the Living.” It’s important to point out that according to those favored few who have thus far read this long lost Heinlein novel, it did not go unpublished because it was bad — they say it’s quite good, though clearly a first novel by the author (it has a two and a half

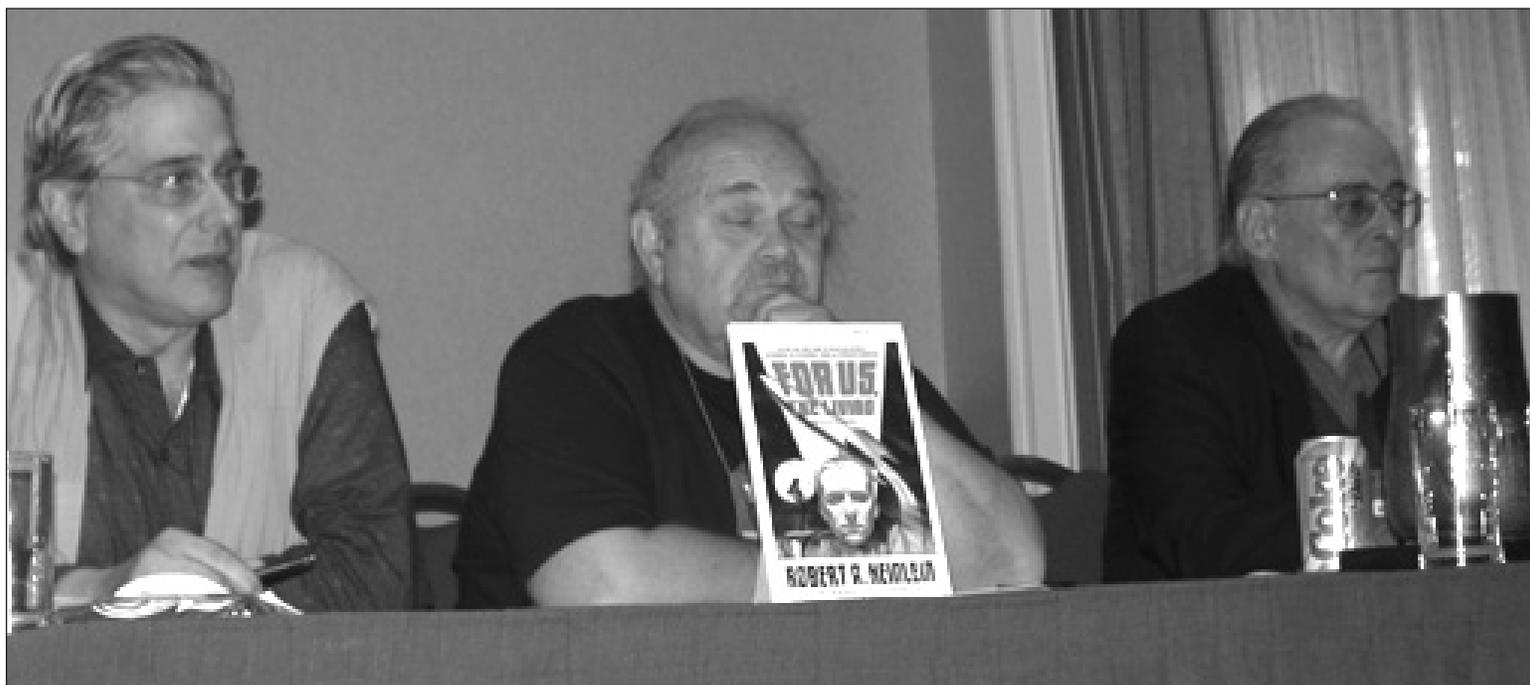
page footnote!). It was unpublished because the mores and culture of the time would not allow it.

“For Us, the Living,” was put aside, and eventually lost. The Heinleins apparently destroyed all copies they had. And, because at the time it was written Heinlein was not a member of the science fiction community, no other sf writers knew about it. He had let one or two friends read it, and it is by a long trail through one of them that this rarest of treasures was located.

Robert James, Ph.D., Heinlein Society member and Heinlein scholar, had been researching Heinlein and his life, focusing on Heinlein’s second wife Leslyn, when he came across a vague mention of an early novel, a copy of which one-time Heinlein biographer Leon Stover was supposed to have. Robert James went searching, and after serious hunting, finally located a forgotten copy in a box in a garage that had changed hands at least once since Heinlein himself had given it to a friend to be read. This copy had annotations written in the margin by Heinlein himself, with some in a second hand that was probably then-wife Leslyn’s.

Robert James presented the manuscript to the

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Annual meeting: Left to Right, board members Alan Milner, Charles N. Brown, and David Silver. An image of the cover “For Us, the Living” is in the foreground.