



For Us, The Living: A Comedy of Customs

Robert A. Heinlein, Robert James Ph.D., Spider Robinson

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From Grandmaster Robert A. Heinlein comes a long-lost first novel, written in 1939 and never before published, introducing ideas and themes that would shape his career and define the genre that is synonymous with his name.

July 12, 1939 Perry Nelson is driving along the palisades when suddenly another vehicle swerves into his lane, a tire blows out, and his car careens off the road and over a bluff. The last thing he sees before his head connects with the boulders below is a girl in a green bathing suit, prancing along the shore....

When he wakes, the girl in green is a woman dressed in furs and the sun-drenched shore has transformed into snowcapped mountains. The woman, Diana, rescues Perry from the bitter cold and takes him inside her home to rest and recuperate.

Later they debate the cause of the accident, for Diana is unfamiliar with the concept of a tire blowout and Perry cannot comprehend snowfall in mid-July. Then Diana shares with him a vital piece of information: The date is now January 7. The year...2086.

When his shock subsides, Perry begins an exhaustive study of global evolution over the past 150 years. He learns, among other things, that a United Europe was formed and led by Edward, Duke of Windsor; former New York City mayor LaGuardia served two terms as president of the United States; the military draft was completely reconceived; banks became publicly owned and operated; and in the year 2003, two helicopters destroyed the island of Manhattan in a galvanizing act of war. This education in the ways of the modern world emboldens Perry to assimilate to life in the twenty-first century.

But education brings with it inescapable truths -- the economic and legal systems, the government, and even the dynamic between men and women remain alien to Perry, the customs of the new day continually testing his mental and emotional resolve. Yet it is precisely his knowledge of a bygone era that will serve Perry best, as the man from 1939 seems destined to lead his newfound peers even further into the future than they could have imagined.

A classic example of the future history that Robert Heinlein popularized during his career, *For Us, The Living* marks both the beginning and the end of an extraordinary arc of political, social, and literary crusading that comprises his legacy. Heinlein could not have known in 1939 how the world would change over the course of one and a half centuries, but we have our own true world history to compare with his brilliant imaginings, rendering *For Us, The Living* not merely a novel, but a time capsule view into our past, our present, and perhaps our future.

The novel is presented here with an introduction by acclaimed science fiction writer Spider Robinson and an afterword by Professor Robert James of the Heinlein Society.

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