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Heinlein's "Future History" Epic: On the Moon, Mars and Space Station One, it's pure Heinlein all the way in a stunning vision of adventure and courage set against a masterfully realized future.

## The Green Hills of Earth Details

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## From Reader Review The Green Hills of Earth for online ebook

### Angela Blount says

Suggested Alternate Title: SPACE BARD--PORT TO PORT

*"I pray for one last landing  
On the globe that gave me birth;  
Let me rest my eyes in the fleecy skies  
And the cool, green hills of Earth."*

This "Future History" short story is essentially an account of the life and death of a renowned minstrel named Rhysling--a man who'd worked haphazardly on many a space mission until a radiation accident left him blind and he continued making his way by playing his accordion, writing songs, and hitch-hiking his way around the solar system. A sometimes vulgar wanderer with no offspring, Rhysling's legacy persists in the form of the songs that long outlived him. The story focuses on one in particular--which he happened to put the finishing touches on at the end of his life. His final hurrah is at once sad, fitting, and legendary.

I'll admit, I'm a sucker for rhyme and verse--particularly when it's used to enrich a literary work. I got choked up trying to relay the intricacy and symmetry of this tale to someone recently. (I don't know that that's ever happened to me before with a short story.) But beyond sentiment, Heinlein's vision for the beginnings to space expansion feels on-key. (Some have called it optimistic, but I think there's far too much low-budget grunge and high mortality rates for that.)

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### Lyn says

Dated. Campy. Corny. Sexist – and wonderfully, absolutely Heinlein.

His 1951 collection of "Future History" short stories, all written in the 1940s, represents some of his earlier works. Fans of his juveniles will especially like this publication.

Modern readers will point to stories like "Delilah and the Space Rigger" and "Space Jockey" and will scream that Heinlein was a male chauvinist pig; but progressive for his time Heinlein was carrying Rosie the Riveter into space and expanding her importance in a later, progressive culture.

"The Black Pits of Luna" and "It's Great to Be Back!" describe plucky Lunar dwellers with a pioneering soul. "The Long Watch" is an unapologetically homely ode to courage.

"—We Also Walk Dogs" is a pragmatic and sanguine exploration of future capitalism and libertarianism; and this story, to me at least, demonstrates what is best about Robert A. Heinlein. In a literary landscape flooded with dystopian and post-apocalyptic nightmares, Heinlein's unabashed optimism about the future is a warm reminder that literature, especially science fiction, can be bright.

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## Gendou says

This collection of short stories is classic Heinlein. That is to say, sexism, chauvinism, rocketry without computers, a bit of magic, and heaps of bravery. The later is the most fun.

I find the rockets without computers quaint; it reminds me, not surprisingly, of the Apollo Program. It's seldom boring, because Heinlein so often insists on teaching the reader something.

Sometimes, though, the bad guys go out of their way too much to be bad. Like the guy who wouldn't let girls on the space station, or the guy who planned to nuke Earth from Luna.

My favorite scene was in that later story, where the hero sacrifices himself. (Yes, I'm a sucker for bravery.) The narrator of the story is revealed to be telling a tale about the monument to the hero. It's a minor change in perspective, but very effective. I think that's part of what makes a story special, and memorable: its encapsulation. A story is just a story... unless its being told to you as history! That places it in a more credulous realm, for me, somehow.

The title story is about a folk singer in space. If you're a fan of limericks, you'll surely like it. I actually thought they were pretty silly, but I still liked it.

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## Jeff Yoak says

This is a fantastic short story. I came to love "Noisy" from his appearances as a minor character in other Heinlein stories, but this short piece describing his history and heroic end always gets me right here.

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## Mark says

The Green Hills of Earth is generally regarded as the second collection of Heinlein's Future History stories, which showed us, in the Golden Age of SF, how Heinlein saw humans expanding beyond Earth into space. It includes love, sibling rivalry, annoying parents and ancient Martians.

After the stories of the first collection (*The Man Who Sold the Moon*), we now see the result of Delos D. Harriman's efforts. Mankind has extended beyond Earth and is now not only building more space-stations but also establishing a permanent base on the Moon.

The stories included here (in order) are:

*It's Great to Be Back* (1947; Heinlein's thirtieth published story, originally published in *The Saturday Evening Post*, July 1947)

*The Green Hills of Earth* (1947; Heinlein's twenty-seventh published story, originally published in *The Saturday Evening Post*, February 1947)

*Logic of Empire* (1941; Heinlein's eleventh published story, originally published in *Astounding Science Fiction*, March 1941)

*We Also Walk Dogs* (1941; Heinlein's sixteenth published story, originally published in *Astounding Science Fiction*, July 1941)

*The Black Pits of Luna* (1948; Heinlein's thirty-third published story, originally published in *The Saturday Evening Post*, January 1948)

*Delilah and the Space-Rigger* (1949; Heinlein's thirty-ninth published story, originally published in *The Blue Book Magazine*, December 1949)

*Gentlemen Be Seated* (1948; Heinlein's thirty-fourth published story, originally published in *Argosy Magazine*, May 1948)

*The Long Watch* (1949; Heinlein's fortieth published story, originally published in *Beyond Time and Space*, a collection edited by *August Derleth*, May 1950)

*Ordeal in Space* (1948; Heinlein's thirty-fifth published story, originally published in *Town & Country Magazine*, May 1948) and

*Space-Jockey* (1947; Heinlein's twenty-eighth published story, originally published in *The Saturday Evening Post*, April 1947)

I'll look at each one in turn.

We begin with *It's Great to be Back!*, being the story of a couple who have spent years on the Moon and are desperate to return to Earth, but find that when they get there that things are not as rosy as they remember them. The ending is a little convenient, but this one portrays the differences between fact and fiction of living on the Moon well. By this stage, a Moonbase is an established feature of this Future History. The story was first published in 1947 in *The Saturday Evening Post*. Like much of the first Future History collection *The Man Who Sold the Moon*, it buys into that post-WW2 feeling that the future will be better, if we as a race continue to expand out into Space.

*The Green Hills of Earth* is the title story and one that is often lauded, telling of the legend of blind balladeer and space rogue, "Noisy" Rhysling. First published in *The Saturday Evening Post* in 1947, this was the first of Heinlein's stories to appear there and caused a furore when published. For Heinlein, it was a return to writing after his war effort work curtailed it. Although the germ of the story, about a 'Blind Singer of the Spaceways', originates from 1941, he used his experience of working with a blind machinist at the Philadelphia Ship Yards to type the story up in four hours.

However, I must admit that I've never really liked this story or really got why others like it so much. (There's even a Rhysling Award every year.) Perhaps it's because I'm not a fan of Heinlein's lyrics / poetry, or perhaps it is that the story, once you've got past the main character, is not that engaging.

I get that Rhysling is one in a line of folk singers who tell tales of stories past, to preserve those memories, and that the songs remind people now so long in space that they feel homesick for their original home planet, but otherwise the story leaves me strangely cold. At the time of its first publication, though, in 1947 in *The Saturday Evening Post*, it was hailed as a triumph. I still read it as an adventure story that could be told about travelling on the sea as much as it is here about travelling through space. Perhaps that is its attraction.

Next we have *Logic of Empire*, first published in *Astounding* in 1941, a story of slavery that echoes the history of the British Empire and the darker side of the cotton trade of the Southern USA. As this is science fiction, here the story is transferred to swampy Venus. The story itself is engaging, and I enjoyed it up to the point where the solution to our heroes' plight was the use of family money to bail him out. The slaves who helped him decide to return to slavery as they don't feel life would be better afterwards. It is a fair enough story, but seems limited in its purpose. The moral message is not given subtly.

It is the first time that I remember hearing of the prophet Nehemiah Scudder, who in the Future History is the self-proclaimed prophet who becomes President of the USA in 2012 and creates a theocracy leads the world into another Dark Age. (I refrain from further comment here, except to give space to ruminate on the law of

coincidences...). Nehemiah will be mentioned in other Future History stories, most notably “*If This Goes On*” and *To Sail Beyond the Sunset*.

*We Also Walk Dogs* is one of my favourites in this collection. First published in *Astounding* in 1941, it’s a story of future commercialism gone rampant – an intergalactic company who are paid to get things done, from walking dogs to interplanetary relations. Here the company is given a particularly unusual problem to solve, but in Heinlein-fashion, they do, buying the services of a grumpy scientist to do so. I must admit that the thought of leaving interplanetary relations to a business felt a little – unusual - and that the scientific solution is a little convenient – oh look, we have an anti-social scientist who can solve your problem just like that – there are some nice Heinlein touches that I recognise in later work, without them becoming too overbearing. Pleasingly, we have a competent female with a primary role (unusual for 1941 but not for RAH) and some, but not too much, of that snappy Heinlein-style dialogue. In the end, it made me think of what could happen in a solar system run by Amazon, or Elon Musk...

*The Black Pits of Luna* is a story style that we will see again from Heinlein in the future. It was originally written in one sitting of about four hours.

Originally titled “Little Boy Lost”, it is a story written from the viewpoint of a teenager and at first seems not that different from those juvenile novels he was writing at the time. (At the time this was written, Heinlein had just had *Space Cadet* published, and it is easy to see similarities here.) The teenager has travelled to the Moon with his family, but when his ‘brat’ of a brother goes missing on the Luna surface, we are subject to his hysterical mother and his ineffectual father.

First published in *The Saturday Evening Post* in 1948, I can see why readers unused to s-f might find this interesting – there’s some interesting description of what it would be like to be on the Moon’s surface – but personally I found the characterisation annoying. The weak mother is an unfortunate stereotype that Heinlein in other stories does well to distance himself from, but non-sf readers may enjoy. Heinlein has done sibling relationships much better elsewhere (see *The Menace from Earth* and *Podkayne of Mars*, for example).

*Delilah and the Space-Rigger* was first published in 1949. It’s a story of what happens when women enter an otherwise all-male working environment, in this case the building of a space-station in Earth orbit. It has dated, but shows its inspiration as the changing role of women in WW2. According to Heinlein scholar William H. Patterson, it was a story written for the *Saturday Evening Post* that fitted a common theme of how industries get things done, but from the perspective of someone in the support services. (I believe that this was also mentioned under the banner, “We Also Serve.”)

Critics have seen the story as sexist, but perhaps have to remember that the world of the 1940’s was very different from today, and what Heinlein was actually doing here was advocating women as equals in the workplace. It’s Heinlein’s version of WW2 icon ‘Rosie the Riveter’ ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rosie\\_the\\_Riveter](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rosie_the_Riveter)), but set in Space.

Patterson also states that Heinlein was criticised of dumbing down his science fiction for a more general public with this story. It basically takes soap-opera scenarios but puts them in a future setting. They were popular and generated an important response, which to some extent justified Heinlein’s answer that he was basically bringing science fiction to a wider audience.

Onto more typical Heinlein fare now. *Gentlemen Be Seated* is a story that tells us of how humans, through the Harriman Corporation, are expanding living space on the Moon, and the hazards of such living. First published in 1948 in *Argosy Magazine*, it’s another story that shows us hard-working men trying to do their best in dangerous circumstances - what Patterson refers to as showing “the fundamental decency of the

ordinary Joe“. A story with a lesson – human exploration is dangerous – but one with a certain degree of dark comedy, as the solution to the situation is rather ribald humour. I thought that it was OK, but not one of Heinlein’s best - some of those wise-cracking good-guys that become a Heinlein staple are on show here.

*The Long Watch* is an unabashed “hero story” that plays to Heinlein’s own beliefs from his naval days – a story of individual sacrifice, for the greater good, against an attempted coup. First published in December 1949 in the *American Legion Magazine*, a magazine for US military veterans, and it’s clearly a story that would be attractive to their readers.

Lastly, we have two stories I was less impressed with. *Ordeal in Space* is a lesser tale of a man who struggles on his return to Earth to come to terms with the effects of an accident in space. Think Alfred Hitchcock’s *Vertigo* and you get the idea. It is well written, but for me the story was ruined by the improbability of finding a kitten on a window ledge thirty-five stories up that had to be rescued. Here’s perhaps the first sign of the Heinlein’s love of cats – it will surface again later in many other works – but it all read as rather inconsequential to me. Strangely, this is one of the later stories in this collection (published 1948) sold to an unusual clientele (*Town and County* magazine). Perhaps that explains the importance of the cat...

*Space-Jockey* is another one of those type of “just-doing-my-job” type stories, was first published in 1947. It’s a story that takes a present-day setting - very much reminiscent of the lifestyle and journey of an airline pilot – but extrapolates it to the future, telling us how flying spaceships between Earth and the Moon may become increasingly routine in the future, with some important differences! I liked most of it, though letting an annoying child loose in the cockpit/control room was an obvious step too far.

In short, the collection *The Green Hills of Earth* continues to show progression - of Mankind into space and also Heinlein as a writer. The stories here show an author increasingly more confident and clearly beginning to think of his stories as part of a grand plan. I’m sure that this will continue with the next volume in this series.

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## Joan says

This had been one of the books that Heinlein was known for, in one version or another. Heinlein's strength I think was in novel length books, not short stories, which this is. The book is dated both scientifically (which likely Heinlein would be among the first to acknowledge) and sociology. The stories were written throughout the 1940s, for magazines. One example was how in the last story: "Logic of Empire", he uses the N word deliberately as a synonym for slave. I don't believe he meant it in the derogatory way we would immediately assume today. No, he used it deliberately for the overtones of tragedy and despair it gives. Nonetheless, it is unacceptable today. To be fair to him, he used it one time. I also strongly disagree with his theme that there always will be slavery in one form or another. This concept appears in several of his books and I completely disagree. Humanity is capable of better economic methods than slavery!

He also, as many have noted over the years, had a rather patronizing attitude towards women. "Space Jockey" is an example of this, as is the first story, "Delilah and the Space Rigger". He never really considered women the equal of men. He either puts them down as basically fools or entitled or makes them incomparably more capable than the men. And sex is usually involved somewhere off stage. Not mentioned but definitely present.

My choices of best stories are not likely the same as others. Many would pick the title story but my favorites are "The Long Watch", a straight heroic, tragic story which will appeal to many and "\_We Also Walk Dogs" which has some interesting science fiction in it, is somewhat humorous, and has some artistic appreciation of pottery as well.

Now to go toss this book. I desperately need the room!

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### **Mary JL says**

This is another of the very few Robert Heinlein short story collections. The ten stories are all quite good. Special favorites of mine among the ten stories are "The Green Hills of Earth" and "Ordeal in Space".

Heinlein's short stories are not as well known as his novels, but he is a good story teller whether writing novels or short stories.

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### **Jim says**

Despite the title, Earth is mostly in the background in this wonderful collection of short stories. It's mostly concerned with everyday life off the planet. Heinlein has taken a lot of mundane situations & put them a head a century or three. People are still people, although they've traded in their cars for spaceships.

Some of the stories are a bit dated, such as "Delilah & the Space Rigger" - what happens when a girl shows up to work on a space project with an all boy crew? Heinlein examines the sexual revolution before it actually happened. It's still a fun read.

Most of the stories are good, clean fun, with a large element of suspense, such as a boy lost on the moon & his brother the boy scout helps in the search. What does a confirmed spacer do when he gets acrophobia? If you've lived on the moon, is it *really* good to be home again? Where is home?

Others are sad & a bit scary. The title story is about Rhysling, a spacer who lost his eye sight to shoddy maintenance & finally bums a ride home. "Logic of the Empire" is chilling, especially if you know any colonial history. The same old ills of an expanding 'civilization' heaped on the indigenous population.

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### **Jim says**

This is one of the great short story books of my youth & it was wonderful to revisit them. The stories were some of my first introductions to space at a time when we were first landing on the moon which made them especially exciting. Each is a common issue on Earth in a space setting full of little bits & facts that make space real without lecturing. Very well done.

I knew some of the settings were unreal, but that didn't hurt them. Mars is peopled by a dying race & has canals. Venus is steamy & hot. Both were staples at the time even though RAH probably knew by then they weren't like that at all even if it wasn't until 1962 that Mariner 2 flew by Venus & 1965 that Mariner 9 flew by Mars, a couple of decades after most of these stories were written.

There were some old social references, too. RAH did pretty well by women, but everyone smoked a lot & cigarettes were handed out like bottles of water are now. In one story, a couple of kids were playing mumble peg on Luna. How cool! Never happen today, of course. One was 5 or 6. I had a pocket knife at that age & so did my kids, but I doubt any do today. I'll have to teach my grandson next year.  
:)

"**Delilah and the Space Rigger**" (1949; originally published in Blue Book) RAH was for women's rights before it was cool. Great setting, a construction crew in space.

"**Space Jockey**" (1947; originally published in The Saturday Evening Post) Some jobs are tough for a married couple to deal with. Police put their lives on the line every time they walk out the door. Truckers are gone for long periods of time. So what is it like for the pilots of spaceships?

"**The Long Watch**" (1949; originally published in The American Legion Magazine) This story gives me chills each time. Some people just do their job & follow orders. Others do what's right.

"**Gentlemen, Be Seated!**" (1948; originally published in Argosy Magazine) Even in the high tech area of space travel, sometimes repairs have to be jury-rigged. This is both hilarious & scary. It's some of the best characterization RAH has done.

"**The Black Pits of Luna**" (1948; originally published in The Saturday Evening Post) A spoiled child caused big problems once before in these stories & here's another.

"**It's Great to Be Back!**" (1947; originally published in The Saturday Evening Post) shows how much we adapt, change, & take for granted.

"**We Also Walk Dogs**" (1941; originally published in Astounding Science Fiction) is a fun story showing RAH's fondness for the free market. The addition of an art object was really good & needed.

"**Ordeal in Space**" (1948; originally published in Town & Country) I'm surprised it took so long to get to a story featuring a cat. A man has to face a very real & well deserved fear. The ending is magical, but it's still a good story.

"**The Green Hills of Earth**" (1947; originally published in The Saturday Evening Post) features poetry by RAH. Not terrible. Good story with a fun character.

"**Logic of Empire**" (1941; originally published in Astounding Science Fiction) is one I've never cared for. It's long & depressing. A lot more could have been done with it, especially since it is so true. That's what makes it so depressing.

All in all, a fine collection of short stories from the Golden Age of SF that was very well narrated.

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## **Buck says**

This is an early collection of stories by Heinlein. As a Heinlein fan, I found some of them corny and dated, but others were not bad. They seemed to improve as I progressed through the book.

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## **Danada says**

3.5

A collection of short stories in his Future History series. I quite enjoyed most of these, but couldn't get into The Green Hills of Earth. They seem quite dated in many ways, and of course sexist, but still fun.

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## Manny says

In Robert Heinlein's short story collection, we get to read about a future history that never happened, where the Solar System is colonized by a bunch of ambitious, optimistic, happy-go-lucky space entrepreneurs. They cut corners, break the rules, and quite often get themselves killed. But it works. The American dream reaches the stars, or at least the planets.

In the real world, manned space-flight reached its peak around 1970 with the Apollo landings and then stagnated. Reagan went into the blind alley of building the Space Station, ignoring all his science advisers. Under Dubya, the US had a goal to repeat Apollo (more or less) by 2020, but funding has been cut and it's almost certainly not going to happen. No one at NASA is surprised. I made a bet about four years ago with a senior manager there that someone would set foot on the Moon again by the end of the present decade. He said he hated to be so blunt, but he'd already decided how to spend my money.

So here's the odd thing. The only manned space program which ended up looking the least bit like Heinlein's vision was the Soviet one. They had totally inadequate money and took a lot of risks, but they are still keeping it going. The US program became mired in a vast, inefficient government bureaucracy, and is slowly thrashing itself to death. Things are so bad that the US will soon have to rely entirely on Russian spacecraft to provide transport to the Space Station, unless there's a last-minute change of plan and the Shuttle is not retired next year.

However could that have happened? I really don't blame Heinlein for getting it wrong, and if any SF writer managed to call it correctly I tip my space helmet to him.

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Do you know, I think I spoke too soon. There are suddenly intriguing rumours about "Hundred Year Starship", a one-way trip to Mars which may be partly or even wholly funded by super-rich entrepreneurs. For example, check out this recent article.

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## Brad says

Yep ... I love the stories of Robert A. Heinlein. Got a problem with that?

*The Green Hills of Earth*, the titular short, and *Logic of Empire* are particularly excellent.

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## Craig says

I first read this book about fifty years ago (my Dad had the Shasta 1951 first edition with the Hubert Rogers cover and the Future History timeline printed on the end pages), and I'm sure I've read all of the stories at least two or three times again in the intervening years. I've enjoyed listening to this audio version and seeing how well I remembered them. My favorite remains "- We Also Walk Dogs," along with the title story. I never did care overly much for "Logic of Empire" in comparison with the others and still don't, but there's really not a bad story in the book. "Delilah and the Space-Rigger" is one of the best and earliest pro-feminist stories in the genre, while "Space Jockey"... may not be. I love the way the stories have the shared

background and fit together, sometimes subtly and sometimes not so much.... Remember that RAH was the first in the field to do this successfully. His vision of the future was optimistic and hopeful overall, not so accurate because he was too hopeful, but he was never trying to be a prophet, just tell good stories and teach his readers something. His characters tend to be braver and more intelligent than normal people, and they're meant to inspire the reader to improve themselves, not just entertain, a most noble goal indeed.

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## **John says**

My first 2019 read; only 74 to go to achieve my 2019 reading challenge. Although this short story collection was published in the early 50s, it includes fourteen science fiction stories, part of his Future History series, written in the 40s. Most are set on space ships, space stations or in a moon colony. Most of these stories deal with the psychological and social impact of living in space rather than the technology itself. The physics appear accurate for what was known during the 40s, but the prediction of future technology for some items were way off the mark. Heinlein predicted the cellular phone, but he did not predict the calculator or PC. During the short story, “\_\_We also Walk Dogs”, one of the scientists pulls out his slide rule to solve a problem.

A couple of the short stories had me chuckling. because the stories read like “Ozzie and Harriet” go to the moon. For example, "Delilah and the Space Rigger" deals with introducing women employees into a space station. (Holy Rosie the Riveter, Batman!) The language between the spaceship pilot and his stay-at-home wife was dated and read like a 50s situation comedy episode. Another short story, “It’s Great to be Back!”, deals with the impact on a family that returns to Earth after years in space something astronauts in the International Space Station are too aware of. Again, like others in this collection, the social mores have not changed since the 1950s. For example, the wife asks her husband if she can crawl into his bed for warmth indicative that both were sleeping in separate beds.

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