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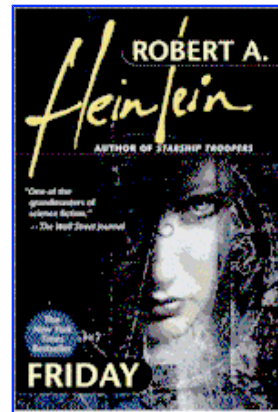
Covering Heinlein

by [Thomas Myer](#)

"Oh wow, that cover changes everything, the whole story," my wife said. We were at our local Borders Bookstore, and she was looking at the 1997 Del Rey edition of Robert Heinlein's **Friday**.

The cover is somber, deep, black, and a woman, half-shadowed, glares at the reader with an icy grey eye. A zodiac frames a part of her face, its esoteric symbols hinting at the theme of identity-seeking that nestles within Heinlein's tale of an adventurous superhuman courier, a literal girl Friday.

In the lower left hand corner, white lettering on a blue star declare that this book is "The **New York Times** Bestseller". There is a pullquote from **The Wall Street Journal** declaring Heinlein as "One of the grandmasters of science fiction."



In short, this cover bespeaks a novel that is serious, tough, deep, kick-ass, and worthy of attention from two august journalistic institutions. The quote from the **Journal** is overkill, because most science fiction readers know that Heinlein was awarded a Grand Master award, but this is a case of a marketing engine covering its behind. The cover is not just good art, it's an attempt to capture new readers.



My wife had read the 1982 Del Rey edition, with cover art by **Michael Whelan**. The Friday depicted on the cover is a sensual woman making bedroom eyes at the reader, lips provocatively split, and her blue jumpsuit open to partially reveal her right breast. The bright star seen through the porthole behind her immediately draws attention to her face and breasts. Although the book is declared a "Triumphant National Bestseller," one gets a feeling that the story within is not quite as deep and dark as the one between the covers of the 1997 edition.

I could see right away my wife's point of view. It's as though the 1982 edition of **Friday** is marketed at male science fiction fans only, whereas the 1997 edition is trying to generate attention from science fiction fans regardless of gender, as well as the occasional non-SF browser who will look at the cover and say, "Neato!"

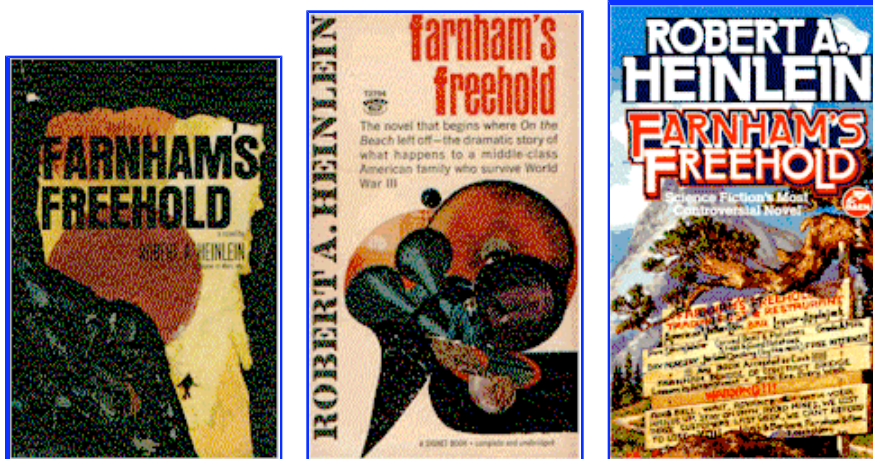
These covers for **Friday** present at least one facet of their story's subject matter. How have book publishers handled **Farnham's Freehold**, which focuses on apocalypse, time travel, white

slavery, eugenics, and the occasional cannibalistic act, bringing new meaning to the term "the other white meat"?

Well, what do you think? None of the covers I've seen (the 1964 Putnam edition, the 1965 Signet edition, and the 1994 Baen edition, pictured below) even come close to graphically depicting what the novel is about.

The 1964 edition emphasizes rugged individualism, the small figure walking alone among the giant monoliths and under a blazing sun. The title dominates the cover at the expense of Heinlein's name. By the time the 1965 Signet paperback came out, a number of changes had been instituted: Heinlein's name is bigger than the title, and the cover depicts more trappings of a technological tale. The man in the suit is surrounded by a collage of machine parts, and there is a baleful eye looking down at him, vaguely reminiscent of Big Brother watching. According to this cover, this is the novel that starts off where "**On the Beach** left off -- the dramatic story of what happens to a middle-class American family who survive World War III." A little more contextual candy, but a hapless reader will still be shocked by the plot.

The cover of the 1994 edition focuses on the last two-page chapter of the book. Specifically, the cover depicts the sign that the Farnham family erects outside their freehold after all the tribulations and struggles of the plot are complete, and before the rest of their lives beckon. The cover is like a gateway, an iconic reminder that troubles lay in the past, and more are coming down the road, but that surviving is always a top priority. I like this cover for its color and style, but I've always been partial to [Stephen Hickman's](#) work.



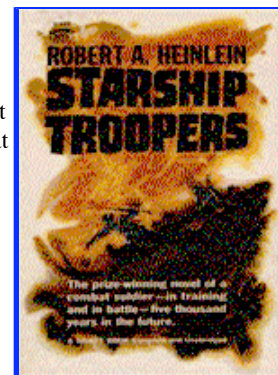
I'm not surprised that **Farnham's** covers are so aloof -- it's a miracle that Heinlein's story was published at all. Can you imagine its reception in this country had any of these covers used an illustration of a towering African prince whipping a cowering white woman? Yikes. Mr. and Mrs. Middle Class 1964 would have **hated** that. Also, Mr. and Mrs. Middle Class 1994.

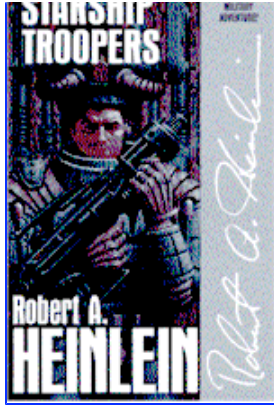
Covers for **Starship Troopers**, however, depict warfare or soldiery with integrity. The 1961 Signet **Starship Troopers**, although a little monochromatic in expression, is clearly a cover of a war story. Even if a reader didn't know what a "starship" was, there is no doubt that the silhouette man on the cover is carrying a rifle of some kind, and that something or someone is about to get massacred in a heroic manner.

We as humans are really good at war. We've had 8,000 years of practice. No wonder then, that book publishers know how to slap covers on books about warfare.



The 1991 Berkley **Starship Troopers**





shifts the emphasis from war to hardware. In this day and age of smart bombs and megadeath weapons, military SF has become more hardware-oriented. I suspect, though, that even a million years from now, warfare will still come down to some poor schmendrick trying to beat some other poor schmendrick's brains out with a rock.

The 1991 cover also gives Rico, Heinlein's protagonist, a face. At least, I would hope it's Rico on the cover. Although he's a little beefier and scarier-looking than I imagined, I think this cover does a better job of visualizing the character than the [movie](#), which from all indications is looking like an all-out [gore-sfx-gulf-war-in-space-fest](#) that ignores the issues Heinlein raises about social responsibility, citizenship, and discipline. They've even ignored the fact that Rico is a tagalog-speaking Filipino-American -- he looks pretty Anglo in the film. But hey, they've added tankers, hoppers, and plasma bugs to the ranks of the bad guys, and ignored the harmless workers -- why miss the chance to market extra action figures?

But cinematic SF is the subject of my next guest editorial, so I'll thank everyone for tuning in, and say good night.

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I would like to acknowledge all those who helped me with this piece: my wife, Hope Doty, for sparking the idea in the first place; John O'Neill and Rodger Turner at the SF Site, for coughing up a bunch of covers; and Ed Dawson, for helping me make color copies of other covers -- without your help, this piece would not have happened. Thanks to everyone.

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