

DANGEROUS JADE #4

When I was eight I read a book about a girl from Mars who took an interplanetary "cruise" with her bratty brother and crusty old uncle. I didn't remember the name of the novel or the author, but I did remember the book. Almost a year later I ran across that tattered library copy of *Podkayne of Mars* again and immediately sought out every other juvenile Heinlein novel available in our community library. I lost myself in brave young heroes and daring adventures. As I got older, I sought out the "adult" Heinlein novels that at first seemed daring and risque, thought provoking and tantalizing. Too much sex? Well, at fourteen,

yes. Now, in 1995, they seem somewhat tame and certainly less explicit than most modern bestsellers.

While I was growing up I lived in a dream world where I was a Heinlein heroine, memorizing "a pint's a pound the world around" and "Mother Very Thoughtfully Made A Jelly Sandwich Under

No Protest," reading other classic novels like *Alice in Wonderland* so that I could understand the point that Heinlein was making in his own novels. I would be totally prepared if I were ever kidnapped by aliens

or if I had to figure out how long it would take to get from Venus to Pluto. As I grew older, I learned to never believe something just because it was in print and that remaining silent in a confrontation can often win you the edge. I did my best to learn that list of talents that Heinlein believed that everyone should know how to do *i.e* plan an invasion, design a building, take orders, give orders and die gallantly. I also did my best to become a woman that Robert Anson Heinlein would admire and find appealing. I already had a good

start - I was a redhead.

I sent a letter to Heinlein when I was about fourteen, telling him how much I enjoyed his writing and how wonderful I thought he was. I got a form letter back, with check marks in the appropriate places like "Thank you for your kind thoughts" and "Yes, I'm still writing." I



found the boxes that weren't checked far more fascinating and indicative of the type of letters he received often enough to need boxes, like "I don't discuss politics or religion in my private life" and "You are a closed-minded nincompoop" and "if I get another letter from you I will prosecute."

This was the beginning of a long-term correspondence. Heinlein's novels taught me to not fear my own sexuality, to be "a lady in the drawing room and a whore in bed" and to not be afraid to hold an opinion different from that of my mate. His letters, erratic and impersonal though they may be, showed me that he was real and that implied that although I hadn't met them, there must be other, more available men like him that I could be as happy with. My parents were very religious and reading Heinlein forced me to keep an open mind and to think for myself. My folks and Heinlein together taught me that I could do anything.

When Robert Heinlein died I grieved more than I did when any of my grandparents died. I grieved that I would never again walk into a bookstore and feel my heart leap when I saw a new Heinlein

novel, resplendent in its gleaming dust jacket and smelling of new hardbound book. I couldn't believe that all my plans to someday meet Heinlein would never come to fruition. He had been invited to my wedding, but he declined with wishes for a happy future and I never felt that the time was right to invite him to visit or try to get an invitation to come to his home. And now I'd never be able to look into his eye and say "The person I am is partially due to you and your books and I want to thank you." My early exposure to politics, and my parents' paranoia and cynicism had inoculated me against idolizing people, but nothing they or anyone else could say about Heinlein ever shook my admiration.

Heinlein wasn't perfect. So what. I don't agree with everything he ever wrote and I don't think that every story he ever wrote was golden. I'm not a member of that bizarre "church" based on the religion mentioned in *Stranger in a Strange Land*. But when I think of heroes, when I look back the person that I am, one name comes to my mind. He's the only person that I ever loved and never met. Yes, he's my hero.

Dangerous Jade is Aileen Forman's contribution to Apa-V.
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