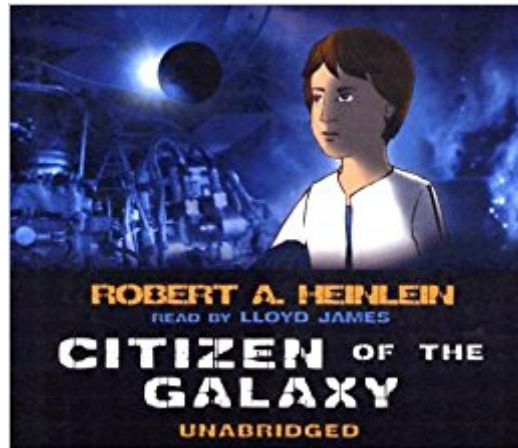




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Citizen Of The Galaxy



Synopsis

The ragged, starving boy, Thorby, stood on the slave auction block. Surprisingly, he is purchased by the crippled beggar Baslim. Thorby soon discovers that Baslim is no ordinary beggar but a superb teacher who leads him to adventures on the starship Sisu.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Science, mystery, and strong ethical concepts give the book sure appeal to devotees of science fiction." --Saturday Review "Sometimes satirical, probingly provocative, this is a characteristic Heinlein off-the-ground mirage, with the protagonist encountering the values of a free society, weighing the worth of the individual." --Kirkus Reviews "Absorbing, convincing, and well written combination of science fiction and mystery." --School Library Journal --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Like many people, I go way, way back with Heinlein. My very favorite book (and one that stands out in my mind--and with much affection--to this day) is Tunnel in the Sky. I really, really wanted to go off to explore new worlds with a covered wagon and horses, like the hero does at the very end of the book. But one of the nice things about Robert Heinlein is that he's got something for everyone. One of my best friends has a different favorite: Podkayne of Mars. Go figure. --Shelly Shapiro, Executive Editor --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Read this fifty years ago. Reread several times. Still special. I did not know why I was touched then, now I (maybe) understand. The characters, like many of Heinlein's, have stayed with me. This work focuses on personal free will (as do most of Heinlein's books) and the contrast of group submission. Heinlein, like Dick Francis, writes from a moral, ethical base. Book can be divided into three sections; Thorby as a slave beggar, then adopted into a merchant family traveling in space, then found as heir of riches. Each situation reveals the challenge of combining individual freedom with group submission. Where does one stop and the other begin? Baslim the cripple, buys Thorby in a slave market, on the first page. We learn this is to save him. Thorby feels free as a beggar and then a slave when he is a free trader on ship. Thereafter, as overwhelmingly wealthy, feels totally controlled. Fascinating! As he is released, Thorby is told. - "There . . . congratulations and welcome to the ranks of free men. I've been free a parcel of years now and I predict that you will find it looser but not always more comfortable. • Precious. This is so skillfully done the reader does not notice the message, just enjoys the story. Great!

It is tough because I have so many favorites authors. It is easy because for a variety of reasons Mr Heinlein is as good as any of the very best. Better than an easy 99% of all authors. Hard to flat say very best because there are so many different kinds of best. Some of his stuff is hard to recommend because some people decide to be offended by just about anything but Heinlein's writing is almost always good for anyone who reads with an open mind. I wish his wife wrote also because she has to be an impressive person (just from Wikipedia). Heinlein is often mentioned as one of the big three of science fiction but the other two usually mentioned do not rise up to his level. Asimov's science fiction was at least two steps lower, but Asimov's factual writing is on such a high level that his factual stuff (that most people do not know about) IS as good any Heinlein's stuff. Heinlein is the very best Democrat writer that I have ever read. Period dot. Anything he wrote after "The Moon is a Harsh Mistress" I do not recommend. His "juvenile" books are not juvenile but they are his very best. Read Citizen of the Galaxy, and then give it to your sixth or seventh grade children.

This book is a novel, yes, but it is also a study in anthropology and relativism. That makes it slow and heavy. If it wasn't slow and heavy, the anthropology would be wrong. It's that simple. I'm fairly certain the anthropologist Margaret Mead is in there. As an exploration of multiculturalism, it's excellent. And so badly needed today. It is also moderately hard science fiction. An exploration of higher dimensional Euclidian spaces? An exploration of acceleration forces? Great for a sci-fi novel,

these are usually sidestepped with magic boxes. But it takes time and space to explain such things. It's not BSc-level, but it's more than adequate for a young adult novel. It's not a textbook, after all. Within this framework, the story is exactly what you'd expect. It is well-written, well-structured and absolutely solid. Unlike many conversions, OCR errors are rare, making this a good conversion.

I've never been a huge Heinlein fan. "Stranger in a Strange Land" is, in my opinion, wildly overrated, a cheesy novel absolutely stuck in its own time, while virtually everything he wrote after "The Moon is a Harsh Mistress" (a very good book) is just self-indulgent, hectoring and consequently dull. The Future History stories are pretty interesting, as are "Starship Troopers," "Double Star," and other earlier works, despite whiffs of sexism and racism that go deeper than the expected prejudices of the time ("Orphans of the Sky" treats women like disposable livestock). But there is absolutely no question that Heinlein brought a snappy, writerly sensibility to the field, and his writing and characters (pre-"Mistress," for the most part, at any rate) are lively, richly textured and clever. Like Hemingway and The Beatles, one may not like Heinlein, but one has to acknowledge that he utterly revolutionized his chosen field of artistic endeavor. In that, he was brilliant. I'd never sampled the juveniles as a kid, instead weaning on Clarke, Bradbury and Le Guin. But I've read a handful of them as an adult and honestly, they may constitute the best work Heinlein ever did. I've just finished "Citizen of the Galaxy" and I place it at the head of the class of the juveniles. Where in his latter career Heinlein lectured and badgered the reader with his insistence on the correctness of his ideas, "Citizen" is a deeply moral, adventurous, fast-paced and appealing exploration of the broad idea of freedom, seen through various lenses. We see the protagonist, Thorby, as a downtrodden slave; then slave to a more-than-benevolent, if hard-driving, master, Baslim the Cripple; then member of a family of interstellar Free Traders, who live within strictures of their own imposing; a member of the military (a life Heinlein, a Navy veteran, clearly sees as something of an ideal); and finally, living a "dream" life as an impossibly wealthy "but not powerful" heir who is willing to put his comfort and privilege on the line to fight for the freedom of people he does not know. It seems clear today that faster-than-light travel lies beyond the realm of possibility, but Heinlein offers a shorthand "rational" and "irrational" space that, while never explained, just has the feel of plausibility. He is, nearly two decades on from "Orphans," willing to present strong, smart female characters, such as Thorby's cousin Leda and the matriarch of the Free Trader ship, with only the occasional, and slight, resort to sexism. And while there is a pretty convincing case to be made that some of Heinlein's works, notably "The Sixth Column" and "Farnham's Freehold," are noxiously racist, "Citizen of the Galaxy" is a full-throated, unreserved condemnation of slavery of all kinds.

Where "Starship Troopers" begins to verge on late-Heinlein-style lecturing about the military and the duties of citizens, "Citizen" presents an argument against pacifism and a case for ethics and sacrifice with much less bluster, making them far less dyspeptic " " and consequently, more thought-provoking. This is a great book. Although it's considered a "juvenile," perhaps by virtue of its young protagonist, it's a smart, mature book " " it even hints at sex! " " that is far less "young adult" than many alleged SF classics (think "Ender's Game"). It's too bad Heinlein went down the road he did. Had he progressed, instead, along the lines of "Citizen of the Galaxy," there's no telling what classics he might have penned.

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