

Citizen of the Galaxy Study Guide

Citizen of the Galaxy by Robert A. Heinlein

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Plot Summary

As the story opens, a starved, scared young boy is being sold on an auction block on a faraway planet. He is purchased by an old, one-eyed, one-legged man named Baslim. He appears to be a simple beggar, but is later revealed to be an anti-slavery agent (with a long history of heroism) who is working undercover.

Baslim raises the boy, Thorby, as his own son, nurturing and educating him. Through Baslim, Thorby receives an exceptional education atypical of the slave of a lowly beggar on an isolated planet. Baslim, aware that this education will not help him on a world where social mobility is very limited, begins arranging for Thorby's future, of which the boy is only partially aware.

When his espionage activities are eventually discovered by the harsh, autocratic government of the planet Sargon, Baslim winds up dead. Thorby, who knows very little of Baslim's covert activities, is wanted by the authorities for questioning, and goes into hiding. Fortunately for Thorby, this adoptive father had arranged before his death for Thorby to leave the planet Jubble on a Free Trader ship.

Thus, Thorby safely escapes the planet Jubble and embarks on an adventure that will carry him across the galaxy. He meets many people along the way and is exposed to a wide variety of ways of life, most notably the ways of the cult-like Free Trader community and those of the Hegemonic Guard of Earth and its surrounding planets.

When he is finally reunited with his birth family on Earth, he discovers that he is the principal heir to a huge fortune and a corporate empire. He soon finds, however, that personal liberty does not necessarily follow wealth and power. Thorby becomes overwhelmed by the responsibility and loss of privacy that result from the extremity of his newfound wealth, and quickly discovers that it will be impossible for him to return to his previous life as a common soldier in the hegemonic guard.

When he discovers that his family enterprise is involved in the slave trade, it becomes painfully clear to Thorby that he cannot morally justify avoiding his new power and responsibility. He begins the long, difficult legal process of taking control of the corporate entity (which is legally his) out of the hands of those who have been running the company during his long absence (and are hesitant to hand over their power).

After Thorby has finally obtained control of his familial estate, Rudbek, he embarks on a lifelong mission to eliminate slavery (as his foster father Baslim had done). Thorby enters this mission with the knowledge that it will likely cost him his life and that he cannot expect slavery to be eliminated in his lifetime.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

The novel opens with a slave auction. Our protagonist, Thorby, is a small boy for sale at this auction. Emaciated, scarred, and filthy, he clearly has endured many sufferings during his short life. Thorby evidently is not regarded by the buyers as a favorable piece of merchandise as none of them is willing to bid on him. He is finally purchased, for a very low price, by a mysterious beggar named Baslim.

Baslim takes Thorby to his home—a room hidden underground beneath the ruins of an abandoned amphitheater. The home is very modest, but it is much nicer than anything that Thorby remembers living in. The old man cleans the boy and puts medicine on his wounds, and prepares him a large meal. The little boy tries to escape. Baslim unlocks the door and explains to the boy that he can either leave or stay and eat his dinner. The child, who apparently hasn't had a sufficient meal in a long time, finally decides to take the food. Since he has never been in a position to turn down food when it is available, he crams down every morsel in front of him, which causes him to become very ill. Baslim realizes that he will have to limit Thorby's portions initially, and that it will take some time to build up the boy's general health.

Baslim tells Thorby to call him "Pop" and tries to comfort him, telling him that his days of violent abuse and neglect are over. Thorby, who is evidently unaccustomed to such kindness, becomes instantly attached to his new master. Thorby clings to Baslim (literally) as he cries himself to sleep.

Chapter 1 Analysis

Thorby begins our story on the lowest possible rung of society. Not only is he a slave, he appears to be the least desirable slave at the auction. He leaves the sale as the property of a one-legged beggar. There is nowhere for our hero to go but up.

Although the novel is set in the future, the slave auction conjures up images that we tend to associate with the past. The unfortunate slave is bound in chains and led to the auction block to be sold to the highest bidder in virtually the same way it was done in antebellum America, (or in ancient Rome) suggesting that this unfortunate practice may not be something that the human race has left in the past.

The slave auction takes place, ironically, in a place called the Plaza of Liberty. We will later learn that this planet, the planet Jubble, is governed by a military dictatorship lorded over by a man who is referred to as "Sargon". Perhaps the author is telling us that societies that claim to value liberty do not always honor personal freedoms in practice.



Baslim is first presented to us as a simple street beggar, but by the end of the first chapter, it is clear that there is much more to his story. For one thing, we know that Baslim speaks no fewer than thirteen languages. It is also clear that Baslim's motive, in purchasing Thorby, is different from those of other slave buyers. Baslim appears to want to help Thorby—to rescue him from slavery. Thorby's emotional scars, complete helplessness, unfamiliarity with normal, decent treatment, and inability even to digest substantial food make it very clear that "rescuing" Thorby from slavery will require much more of Baslim than simply purchasing him from slavers and legally securing his freedom.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

Baslim continues to raise Thorby as his son: nurturing him and training him in the trade of begging. Thorby's sleep is still often interrupted, however, by disturbing nightmares. Because Baslim is concerned that the child cannot move beyond his painful memories, and because he feels it would be helpful to learn more about his foster son's history, Baslim decides to hypnotize Thorby and probe his memories.

Through the trance, Baslim learns of the horrible abuses that Thorby has suffered. He learns that he was initially kidnapped by slavers as a child, and that his first language was system English. He is unable to identify the child's parents, because Thorby only remembers them as "Papa" and "Mama". After Baslim obtains the information he desires, he uses hypnotherapy to help free Thorby from his nightmares.

Thorby picks up the trade of begging quickly, but becomes less effective at soliciting sympathy, as he grows stronger and healthier. The criminals he makes contact with, as part of the Jubblepore underworld, teach him how to steal. When he steals an expensive scarf from a noblewoman without remorse, Baslim is concerned that it may be impossible to teach Thorby about morality with his background and current living environment. He explains to the child that the penalty for theft is severe: A first offense results in a hand being removed, and a second offense results in execution.

After the scarf theft, Baslim tells Thorby that he intends to free him, since the master is responsible for the actions of the slave, and Baslim (who is already missing a leg and an eye) cannot afford to lose a hand as well. Thorby begs Baslim not to free him, and the old man agrees to keep Thorby on the condition that Thorby never lies to him and never steals anything else.

Chapter 2 Analysis

Baslim uses hypnosis to probe Thorby's memories and treat his nightmares, even though he initially has moral hesitations. This may be an indication of the author's ambivalence toward hypnosis. Baslim evidently is able to remove Thorby's painful memories but chooses not to because he finds this idea to be invasive and morally wrong.

Perhaps the most surprising incident in this chapter is when Thorby begs his master not to free him from slavery. While Thorby is still a child and clearly is still in need of a parental figure, the author may be using this incident to make a comment about the psychology of one who has been taught, from an early age, that he is not to be treated as a human being. He may also be trying to tell us about the society of the planet Jubble. While slavery is indeed horrible, there may not be any better options for Thorby

outside of slavery in this world (particularly since Thorby has the good fortune of being owned by a man who treats him as a son rather than as a piece of property).



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

Baslim becomes more serious about Thorby's education. Baslim has high, sometimes unrealistic, expectations and is occasionally impatient with Thorby. Still, the boy makes good progress in his studies. Thorby becomes more and more suspicious that Baslim is more than a common beggar, but does not say anything about it, trusting that Baslim will confide in him as he feels is necessary. Thorby also has the discretion not to mention anything that their activities at home (or even the location of their home) to anybody they meet. Since Thorby is no longer the emaciated, sickly little boy, covered with scars and bruises, that he once was, he does not bring in much money as a beggar. Therefore, Baslim does most of the actual begging himself, sending Thorby on errands for him, or leaving him at home to study. Thorby frequently has to deliver messages (and deliver the reply back to Baslim) under very mysterious circumstances, but he never asks for clarification.

Baslim worries that Thorby's education may be for nothing, since his status as a slave and the foster son of a beggar severely limits his options on the planet Jubbul. He decides that he must eventually arrange for Thorby to leave this planet and seek a better life elsewhere. Baslim shares with Thorby a plan to have him sold to a ship that will take him to a planet where slavery is against the law. Thorby is opposed to the idea of being sold and runs away. When he returns four days later, Thorby discovers that Baslim has legally freed him. Baslim makes it clear to Thorby, however, that he is still welcome to stay with him, but as his son rather than as his slave.

Chapter 3 Analysis

Here the barriers Baslim inevitably meet in his attempt to rescue Thorby from slavery are revealed. Baslim has purchased Thorby, nursed him to health, legally granted him freedom, and provided him with a formidable education, but Thorby's prospects in life have improved very little. There is painfully little room for upward social mobility on the planet Jubbul. The stigmas associated with being a former slave are so limiting that most freed slaves continue to work for their former masters for lack of any other options. Most of the professions held by freeborn commoners are closed to freed slaves. Freeborn commoners, in turn, are strictly prohibited from any of the privileges granted to the nobility.

While Thorby's career prospects appear to be limited to begging, Thorby would be unable to support himself as a beggar without Baslim's assistance, since a healthy teenage boy doesn't bring in the alms that an elderly man with one leg and one eye does. Baslim begins to think about how he will arrange for Thorby to have a better chance in life on a different planet.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

Thorby's life with Baslim continues in much the same way as it did before his legal emancipation. One day, Baslim readdresses the topic of what Thorby will do after his foster father is dead. Thorby is told that, in the event of his former master's death, he is to deliver a message to the first of five different ship's captains who land at Jubbulpore. Thorby memorizes the message. It is in a language he doesn't understand, and Baslim tells him nothing about the message's meaning, but Thorby memorizes it word for word and dutifully agrees to deliver it.

A short time later, Baslim sends Thorby on an errand to deliver a message to a redheaded man working at a lunch counter in the shipyard. He is unable to find the redheaded man however, and he alerts the suspicions of the police, who try to arrest him. He is only able to escape them with the help of a friendly laundress.

Upon this unsuccessful attempt to deliver a message, Baslim gives Thorby yet another message, in an unfamiliar language, to be delivered at an unspecified later date. This one is even more mysterious than the one before. Thorby is merely told that, if he ever has the chance to deliver this message, he will know when that opportunity arises.

The next day Thorby is begging in the plaza when he notices that ship Sisu, one of the five that Thorby was told to contact in the event of Baslim's death, was in port in Jubbulpore. Thinking this may be of interest to Baslim, he returns home early, only to find police officers guiding every entrance to the underground barracks where Thorby and Baslim make their home. To avoid looking suspicious, he approaches the stand of Inga, the green grocer, who clearly knows something Thorby doesn't, and tries to warn him to run away. At this point, Thorby notices that something is burning.

Thorby finally notices an entrance that the police appear to be unaware of and is able to enter the underground labyrinth unnoticed. He finds that the tunnels are teeming with police, but his familiarity with them allows him to avoid being noticed by them. When he finally gets to his quarters he finds that the door has been broken off and that the room has been ransacked. Most distressing of all, he finds Baslim's mechanical leg, evidently smashed to pieces by patrolman boots.

Chapter 4 Analysis

It has long been clear that Baslim has been involved in some sort of business other than begging. While Thorby has clearly been assisting Baslim in this capacity, he has never been privy to any specifics. Whatever this mission of Baslim is, it apparently isn't going especially well. Thorby notices Baslim's schedule getting more and more erratic, and he is away from home more often (and for longer periods of time).



When Thorby fails to deliver the message to the red-haired man, we know that something must have gone wrong. First, the redheaded man wasn't there to collect the message, and the mere fact that Thorby was looking for him makes him very suspicious to the police. Thus, we are made to believe that whatever this redheaded man was up to, he was discovered and now has been either captured or killed.

We also know that Baslim is getting more and more worried about what might happen in the near future because of his increased concern over what is likely to happen to Thorby in the event of his death. The second, even more mysterious message that he puts in Thorby's brain through hypnosis is yet another indication that Baslim is more than usually uncertain about the future at this point.

When Thorby discovers that his house has been ransacked, and Baslim is nowhere to be found, he concludes that he must be held somewhere where he can be rescued. Baslim's death has been strongly foreshadowed to the reader, but Thorby is clearly unable or unwilling to consider this possibility.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Thorby spends many long hours hidden in the dark labyrinth, awaiting Baslim's return. When Baslim does not arrive, Thorby concludes that he must have been captured, and assumes that he is currently being interrogated and tortured. He ventures to Joy Street, the nightlife district in the spaceport vicinity, to gain information about his adoptive father. (He believes Baslim is being held somewhere and can theoretically be rescued).

There he runs into Auntie Singham, a fortuneteller who stays abreast of local gossip. She informs him that Baslim has been executed and that there is a large reward out for the capture of Thorby as well. Around this time, the police show up. They chase Thorby, who narrowly escapes.

When Thorby finally has time to slow down, think, and process what has happened, he remembers that the starship Sisu is in port, and realizes that, with Baslim dead, he needs to deliver a message to its captain.

He realizes that he's going to need to find help if he's going to get a message to the captain of the Sisu (since his current status of hunted fugitive presents problems). He isn't sure who to turn to, but decides to ask a taphouse hostess named Mother Shaum, who has assisted Baslim in the past. Mother Shaum reluctantly agrees to help Thorby. She hides him from the police and sends word to Captain Kraussa of the Sisu.

Chapter 5 Analysis

In this chapter, the reader's suspicions that Baslim is dead are confirmed. It also becomes very clear that Thorby is personally in very serious danger (which was also hinted at in Chapter 4).

Our protagonist spends the biggest part of this chapter actively evading police capture. This chapter employs a classic cinematic "chase scene" which contrasts to the slower, more exploratory tone of the chapters that follow.

Auntie Singham and Mother Shaum are the unlikely heroes of this chapter. One is a fortune-teller and the other a taphouse hostess (and possibly a prostitute). Thorby is skeptical about whether or not he can trust either of them (particularly Auntie Singham) due to the dangerous situation that helping him could put them in. They are both the type of individual who disguise where their loyalties lie, but neither betray Thorby, and without help from both of these women, Thorby would have been unable to evade arrest.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Captain Kraussa arrives at Mother Shaum's taphouse, and Thorby delivers him the message that he has memorized for Baslim. In the message, Baslim explains to Captain Kraussa, "When you receive this message, I am already dead." From there, Baslim explains that Thorby is his adoptive son and requests that the captain take Thorby aboard his ship, deliver him to a democratic planet within the Terran Hegemony, and treat him as a member of his own family in the meantime.

Captain Kraussa agrees to take Thorby with him on the Sisu, but this is easier said than done since this will involve getting Thorby past police surveillance. They come up with a scheme that involves Mother Shaum hiding Thorby in her Sedan chair, and carrying him to the shipyard that way.

Chapter 6 Analysis

The discovery that the message is from Baslim the cripple clearly makes a strong impression on the initially disinterested Captain Kraussa. He fully honors Baslim's request without the slightest hesitation, even when it becomes clear that getting Thorby aboard the Sisu could put him in considerable danger. Obviously, Baslim means something to this man. Whatever Baslim has been involved with, his connections extend far beyond the nine worlds.

Thorby leaves Jubbulpore at the end of this chapter, never to return. Neither Thorby nor the reader knows what lies ahead of him, but it is clear that we are entering an entirely new phase of the story, with a new setting and new characters.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

Thorby passes out in the cargo hold on Sisu and awakens to find himself alone in a one-bunk stateroom millions of miles away from Jubbul. As he climbs out of the bunk, it disappears into the wall. He wanders through the hallways only to find that no one else aboard the ship will speak to him or even acknowledge his existence. When he finally wanders into an area that he is not supposed to go (possibly a women's washroom) he is finally acknowledged, if only to be harshly reprimanded, by somebody on the ship who calls himself "First Assistant Power Boss". First Assistant Power Boss shows him where the washroom is (across the hall from his bunkroom) and commands him to stay in that vicinity.

Thorby is surprised by the unfriendly treatment he receives from the crew of the Sisu, since Captain Kraussa was cordial to him on Jubbul. He asks if he could speak to Captain Kraussa, but his request is laughed at.

His food is brought to him in his room, but he is unable to get the young boy delivering it to acknowledge him, except to call him a "fraki" (a word Thorby does not understand but correctly assumes to be derogatory). Thorby sleeps on the floor that night, since he cannot figure out how to make the bed come back out of the wall.

The next day he is visited by a friendly woman, an anthropologist named Dr. Susan Mader. Dr. Mader arrives at Thorby's bunk because she has a professional interest in learning about Jubbul beggar culture from him. She informs him that she is also a "fraki" or outsider. Dr. Mader informs Thorby of the Free Trader's clannish, xenophobic ways and assures him that their coldness to him is nothing personal, but merely the way they treat anybody who isn't of their community. (She also shows him how to retrieve his bunk from the wall as well as two chairs, a table, clothes closets, and many other conveniences). She explains to him what the free traders mean when they say "fraki".

The following day, Thorby is ordered to see the Chief Officer. The Chief Officer, Captain Kraussa's mother, is an expensively dressed woman who is clearly the authority of the ship. She asks to hear the message from Baslim, and Thorby happily complies. The Chief Officer determines that the message must be authentic, and that Baslim's requests must be granted, to repay the Free Traders' debt toward him.

The Chief Officer decides that, because Baslim requested that Captain Kraussa "succor him and admonish him as if you were I (Baslim)", that Captain Kraussa should adopt Thorby (since that is what Baslim did). It is therefore decided that Thorby will be adopted into the family.



Chapter 7 Analysis

Much of Citizen of the Galaxy involves our hero exploring different social structures. Here, for the first time, Thorby is exposed to a society that is structured very differently than the society he has lived among on Jubbul. The extreme insularity of this particular culture, makes them especially challenging for Thorby to figure out. Dr. Mader, as an informed outsider, is able to offer a necessary explanation of the situation to Thorby (and to the reader as well).

At the chapter's close, it is decided that Thorby will be adopted into the family. Thorby has made the transition from outsider (who is beneath contempt) to beloved son nearly instantaneously.

Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

Thorby is adopted into the Kraussa family and begins to be inculcated with the language and the rigidly prescribed customs of the Starship Sisu. He appears to have a remarkable talent for picking up the new culture but, as it is an enormous task, he is occasionally very frustrated. He still speaks with Dr. Mader who, as a detached academic, is able to explain to him the reasoning behind some of the more bizarre Free Trader customs.

Dr. Mader takes some time to explain free trader marriage customs to Thorby, a topic that the young boy seems to find uncomfortable. We learn that men stay on the ship on which they are born, while women are traded to other ships for the purpose of marriage. Free traders are expected to marry outside the moiety (or ship-based family unit) but marriages to fraki appear to be unheard of.

Chapter 8 Analysis

Analysis Thorby, who was among the lowest of the low to the Free Traders the previous day, now not only is accepted as one of them, but also outranks the vast majority of the others in clan status. Again, Dr. Mader serves the function that no other character can, that of objectively describing the Free Trader culture, and offering a running commentary on the reasoning behind social institutions in general. Thorby appears uncomfortable, and even frightened, at the idea of marriage as a Free Trader. This is the first indication we are given that Thorby may be feeling uncomfortably restrained by his new host culture.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

Thorby begins his time on Sisu in a lowly job on the ship's central dressing station, but is quickly promoted due to his math background. He is placed in the starboard fire-control room, where he is trained by the senior fire-controlman, his foster nephew and roommate, Jeri Kingsolver. The junior fire-controlman is Jeri's younger sister, Mata. Thorby struggles for a while to catch up with Jeri and Mata, who are far better at this than he is. However, he eventually gets the hang of it.

During this time, Thorby gets to know his adoptive niece, Mata, much better and begins to spend time with her socially—playing spatball, watching story films, and participating in other similar activities. They begin to call each other by their first names, which connotes a high level of familiarity in the Free Trader society.

Chapter 9 Analysis

In the previous chapter, Dr. Mader tells Thorby, "If you gain ships rank to match your family rank, you'll have to carry a club to beat them (women) off."

In this chapter, Thorby is successfully obtaining his ship's rank. He performs phenomenally at the Sisu school and is given a job in the fire-control room—an important and prestigious post that is usually reserved for very young people.

Dr. Mader's prediction is correct. Thorby is already coming into the attention of the opposite sex (although he is evidently oblivious to the special attention that Mata is paying him).



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

Jeri resigns his position as Senior Fire-controlman. Mata is promoted to that position and Thorby becomes Junior Fire-controlman.

Sisu arrives on the planet Losian, which is considered a "safe" planet, meaning that it is unnecessary to guard the ship against ground raids and that the men and women of the ship are free to explore the planet. Thorby is excited about this. He is curious about the planet because this is the first foreign planet he has visited since his delivery to Jubbul on a slave ship as a small child.

Losian is inhabited by odd creatures that resemble large insects and seem to have contempt for all things resembling commerce. While they trade out of necessity, they choose to not to acknowledge that trade is actually taking place. The procedure of negotiating trade with the Losians is long and complicated but it involves one party offering the other a generous "gift", and the other returning the favor by offering another generous gift.

Captain Kraussa is training Thorby in the art of making business negotiations, and the boy accompanies his new adoptive father in his dealings with the Losians. The captain also discusses other matters with Thorby, including Grandmother's marriage ambitions for him, and what Baslim means to the Free Trader people (We learn that Baslim is considered an honorary member of the people, due to some great heroic act—the specifics of which the Free Traders are ashamed to mention).

At the chapter's close, Jeri informs Thorby that Mata has been traded to another Free Trader ship, the El Lido.

Chapter 10 Analysis

Women, as well as men, are allowed to leave the ship on Losian. We learn that this is exceedingly rare, and that many of the women on board have not left Sisu since they came to live there. Women may be the final authority within the Free Trader society, but the individual freedoms they exercise are extremely limited.

Thorby is starting to understand more about Baslim's attitude toward slavery, and probably suspects by now that Baslim's life's work had something to do with the desire to eliminate slavery.

Through the Losians, Heinlein gives us yet another society whose customs appear very odd from the outside, to compare with those we have already seen (on Jubbul and on the Sisu).



Captain Kraussa, unlike the rest of the free traders, genuinely seems to enjoy dealing with Fraki. (Thorby earlier expressed surprise by the cold reception he initially received from the crew of the Sisu, after having been warmly received by her Captain.) He appears to have a great talent for extending friendly business relations over wide cultural divides, and even seems to find the peculiarities of the Losian culture generally interesting. His job evidently requires him to be infinitely familiar with the customs on an overwhelming number of planets, and he seems to have succeeded admirably—which is unexpected for a man who is lived his entire life within an extremely closed-off and xenophobic culture. He tells Thorby that, despite the general sentiments of the Free Traders, Fraki are necessary in the maintenance of their economy (otherwise who would they trade with) and can be admirable as well. This may explain why he occasionally appears uncomfortable with the behavior of his people or the demands of his mother (and later his wife).



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

Jeri explains to Thorby that Grandmother (Chief Officer) traded Mata to the El Lido (in spite of Mata's importance to the ship as a gifted fire-controlman) because Mata had expressed romantic interest in Thorby. Free Trader customs forbid people from marrying within their own moiety, or family unit.

Since Mata is of no blood relation to Thorby, she asks Grandmother if she can be adopted into another moiety. Grandmother, fearful of a scandal, immediately trades Mata to the only other Free Trader ship in port at Losian.

Thorby has never given thought to the idea of marriage to Mata, and has been completely oblivious to her interest in him. However, he isn't opposed to the idea of marrying her either, and he misses her presence.

Thorby decides to confide in Dr. Mader, only to discover that she is also preparing to depart on the El Lido as well, as she begins the journey to her home planet. Before she leaves, she explains why the practice of trading women to other ships of the people is vital to Free Trader culture. She also advises Thorby that, since he was not raised among the Free Traders and may find their ways restricting, he may want to escape as soon as the ship arrives on a democratic planet within the Hegemony. She warns him that this will not be possible after Grandmother has successfully married him to a Free Trader wife.

Chapter 11 Analysis

Mata's sudden departure is a sudden reminder of the intense social constraints placed upon the Free Traders (particularly the Free Trader women) and the, sometimes severe, consequences of these restraints. Even Jeri, who was reared to take the Free Trader ways for granted, finds it difficult to cope with his sister's exchange, although he has always known that it would inevitably happen sooner or later (even if she hadn't expressed a Romantic interest in Thorby).

Again, Thorby's ambivalent feelings toward the society of the free traders are exposed. Thorby generally feels happy, accepted, and productive in his new life on the Sisu, but occasionally fails to understand their customs. The sudden loss of Mata seems particularly harsh and unfair to him. Dr. Mader suggests to him that Sisu may not be the place for him after all.



Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

Life continues as usual, as the Sisu travels from planet to planet and trades with a wide variety of cultures.

When Thorby, now senior fire-controlman, heroically destroys a slaver ship that clearly could have taken them, he suddenly becomes the center of attention on Sisu. A banquet is thrown in his honor, and Grandmother seems to have heightened interest in Thorby's future and his marriage prospects.

Everyone is preparing for the great gathering, where all of the ships of the Free Trader people will meet in one place to socialize (and trade women between ships), and everyone seems to be preparing some sort of entertainment for the festivities. Thorby, who can neither sing nor dance, will be acting in a play about the history of the Kraussa family. His leading lady is Loeen Garcia, the young woman brought from El Lido in exchange for Mata. Thorby is nervous about having to kiss Loeen in front of a crowd of people.

Grandmother seems to have taken a significant interest in this play, and Thorby's role in it. Thorby hopes that it will make her proud when they perform it at the great gathering, but Grandmother dies before the gathering.

Chapter 12 Analysis

Thorby appears to be getting more and more assimilated into Sisu society. After he rescues Sisu from a slave ship, there can be little doubt that this "ex-fraki" is fully accepted as a member of the people (Baslim earned his status of honorary member of the people in the same way).

Grandmother seems to be taking a keen interest in Thorby's marriage prospects, and is likely trying to arrange a match between Thorby and Loeen. Grandmother may be pushing marriage for Thorby for the same reason that Dr. Mader warned him against it—a marriage would cement Thorby's ties to Sisu and her people (since he recently has proved himself to be a highly valuable addition to Sisu's crew).



Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

The Sisu trades on the planet Woolamurra, a planet just barely inside the Terran Hegemony. Woolamurra is primitive, but Thorby notes that it meets Dr. Mader's criteria: democratic, free, and human. Thorby thinks about staying here, as Dr. Mader has suggested, but he is feeling comfortable in his life on Sisu. He is looking forward to the great gathering and his performance there. He also is becoming attached to his costar, Loeen Garcia.

When the Captain and Thorby return to the ship after trading with the Woolamurrans, they learn that the Chief Officer (Grandmother) has died, and that Captain Kraussa's wife (Rhoda) has assumed the role of Chief Officer.

Chapter 13 Analysis

Woolamurra appeals to Thorby, and he considers remaining here as Dr. Mader suggested. However, by this time he is very attached to his life on Sisu, in spite of the restrictive way of life. We know that, sooner or later, Thorby will have to make a very difficult decision.

Captain Kraussa brings Thorby along to trade with the Woolamurrans because Thorby appears to be oddly familiar with their dialect of Standard English. This may be a clue to his origins. We will later find out however, that Thorby is not from Woolamurra, but rather from earth. We are given reason to believe that Woolamurran English is similar to Australian English, and we will learn in subsequent chapters that Thorby had an aunt from New Zealand who had contact with him as a small child (and Thorby very likely visited that area of the world himself). It seems likely that Thorby may have been exposed to Australian English at some point in his early childhood (although he was from North America).

Up to this point, Rhoda Kraussa has been serving as Deputy Chief Officer. In theory, she was second in command to her mother-in-law, but in practice, she appeared to be Grandmother's personal servant (with no real power). Now she is the topmost authority on the ship. Since we have previously seen her as subservient to Grandmother and kind and motherly to Thorby and Fritz, we expect her to be a softer, gentler ruler than her mother-in-law. We soon learn that this is not the case. When Rhoda assumes the position of Chief Officer, she appears to inherit much of the personality of her forebear as well—stern, cunning, and manipulative. Perhaps this behavior was just part of the job for Grandmother as well, and perhaps we were never allowed to see the "real" Grandmother because, as Dr. Mader said, the Chief Officer has even less freedom than everybody else on the Sisu.

Loeen Garcia, who was a math teacher on the El Lido, feigns ignorance to make herself more attractive to Thorby. This incident can be seen as sexist, and some modern readers may worry that it sends the wrong message to young female readers.



Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

The great gathering is even more spectacular and exciting than Thorby had imagined, with over eight hundred Free Trader ships joined to partake in the festivities on and around the planet Hekate.

Fritz tells Thorby about the reason the Free Traders considered themselves in Baslim's debt, and points out the Hansea (the ship of the family that Baslim rescued from slavers).

Rhoda, Sisu's new chief officer, clearly has very ambitious plans for the ship she has recently gained control of, and is formulating plans of spawning a second ship (the current ship is getting too small and "twinning" is the most prestigious way to remedy the situation. She is also formulating means to have her husband promoted to a more influential position within the Free Trader Community, and she believes that their ties to Thorby (and thus their role in repaying Baslim's debt) will provide the political advantage needed.

Captain Kraussa explains to her that he intends to carry out the rest of Baslim's instructions (to turn Thorby over to the Hegemonic guard so that he might be able to locate his birth family).

The Chief Officer is appalled by the idea, but Captain Kraussa is resolute. He discusses the issue with Thorby, explaining Baslim's instructions and the current presence of the Hegemonic vessel (an opportunity that may not arise for many more years). After giving Thorby all of the facts, he allows the boy to make his own decision concerning where he wants to go and what he wants to do with his life. Thorby decides that it would be best to abide by Baslim's wishes.

Chapter 14 Analysis

Thorby and Fritz encounter a pickpocket early in the chapter, and Thorby's familiarity with the situation makes them both uncomfortable with the lowliness of Thorby's roots. Even after all this time, there are occasions when Thorby is clearly out of place among "the people".

Again, Captain Kraussa appears somewhat divergent from the views of most of his people. The honest, straightforward manner in which he deals with his Thorby contrasts sharply with the manipulative machinations of his wife. The Captain also places extraordinary value on Thorby's personal choice in the matter, which is noteworthy when one considers that he has lived his entire life within a society that clearly does not place much importance on individual liberties. Thorby allows his faith in his late adoptive father's judgment to be the ultimate decider in his choice to leave Sisu.



Chapter 15

Chapter 15 Summary

Captain Kraussa delivers Thorby to Colonel Brisby on the Hegemonic ship Hydra, and we learn that Colonel Brisby is yet another person who would not dare go against the wishes of the late Baslim.

Upon learning that Baslim was also a Colonel who served with Brisby in the Guard, Thorby concludes that he should deliver Baslim's final message (the one that Baslim gave him under hypnosis the night before he died) to Colonel Brisby.

The code in which the message is written clearly indicates that the information within is top secret, and the message is extracted from Thorby in an extremely secure environment with only the Colonel, Vice-Colonel Stancke, and the ship's psychologist present. We never are told exactly what was encoded in the message, but are given reason to believe it details critical information on the slave trade that Baslim has uncovered.

Colonel Brisby is determined to search for Thorby's birth family, as requested by Baslim. In the meantime, Thorby is enlisted as a member of the Guard, in spite of the ship's psychologist's reservations.

Chapter 15 Analysis

Thorby leaves Sisu and once again starts over, establishing an entirely new life for himself in an entirely new culture.

In what seems to be an extraordinary coincidence, the Hegemonic vessel that Thorby is turned over to happens to be commanded by an officer who worked closely with Baslim. (If it weren't for this unlikely series of events, Thorby may have never had an opportunity to deliver Baslim's message, and the report, which the old man died researching, may have never been delivered). Thorby's connection to Baslim, which offered him little social advantage on Jubbul, appears to bring him special protection nearly everywhere else.

We never learn exactly what the report says, although it clearly involves crucial information that Baslim has found out about the slave trade. Later it will be implied that the report incriminates powerful people and institutions within the Terran Hegemony (such as the Rudbek corporate empire) as having connections to the slave trade of the nine worlds. Whatever the report says, it is so controversial that Stancke does not hesitate to suggest that Thorby, who carries the coded information within his brain, be poisoned to ensure confidentiality. However, Colonel Brisby would never consider such an action (due to his loyalty to Baslim).

At the end of this chapter, Thorby is once again among the lowest ranked individuals, as a grunt in the Hegemonic Guard. He seems happy with this situation, however, and much more comfortable than he will be in his later life as an aristocrat.



Chapter 16

Chapter 16 Summary

Before the Hydra leaves the planet of Hekate, a money transfer arrives delivering Thorby's share of the wealth Sisu acquired during Thorby's time with the family. Thorby feels uncomfortable to receive such a large sum. The money order is accompanied with a small note from Rhoda, and a slightly longer one from Fritz.

He adjusts to his new life as a lowly third class guardsman reasonably well. He has some difficulty with a Petty Officer named Peebie, but those problems are largely avoided when his skills in fire-control are revealed and he is transferred to that department.

Col. Brisby calls summons Thorby repeatedly in order to discuss Baslim's work on Jubbul, and these conversations reveal a wealth of background information to the reader. Missing pieces in Baslim's story are filled in. There's also background information concerning the history and nature of the hegemony, the resistance of the Nine Worlds to incorporation within the hegemony, and the role of the Free Traders as a vital link between the Terran Hegemony and the Nine Worlds (although they are as little involved in either as can be).

The results of the search for Thorby's identity arrive, and it is revealed that the search was fruitless. Thorby is disheartened, taking this to mean that he is "nobody". His state of mind upon hearing the news allows him to be easily provoked into a fight with Petty Officer Peebie, for which he is suspended from his position.

Then it dawns on Vice-Colonel Stancke that official identities are filed during infancy using footprints, and other means of identification, such as fingerprints, blood type, etc. are not recorded until a child is much older (older than Thorby was when he was abducted). Brisby and Stancke take Thorby's footprints, and his identity is known in less than forty-eight hours.

It is revealed that Thorby is actually Thor Bradley Rudbek of Earth. This name clearly means something to Brisbe and Stancke, and the reader is left to wonder why this name is significant. At the chapter's close, Thorby arrives on Earth to meet his family.

Chapter 16 Analysis

We learn that Thorby's share of the Sisu's wealth is one eighty-third of what was acquired during his stay on the ship. This indicates that there were eighty-three people aboard the ship including Thorby.

Thorby is clearly uncomfortable with this level of wealth, foreshadowing the discomfort he will later have when he acquires a significantly greater fortune.



At this point in the story, Thorby is obsessing over the identity of his biological family, believing that determining who they are will bring him a sense of purpose and identity. In subsequent chapters, Thorby will discover that the circumstances of one's birth are of relatively little importance, and it is one's life experiences and the people involved in them (including, in Thorby's case, parental figures such as Baslim, Captain Kraussa, and Grandmother) who ultimately influence the people we become.



Chapter 17

Chapter 17 Summary

Thorby is greeted on earth by a group of expensively dressed people who claim to be his family. They introduce themselves as Uncle Jack Weemsby, cousin Leda Weemsby, and grandparents Mr. and Mrs. Bradley. Thorby is disturbed when he doesn't immediately feel any familial connection to the strange people.

Thorby rides to his new home with Leda in a "transparent bubble" vehicle which allows him view the Terran landscape during the trip.

Leda is a self-controlled, socially adept individual, but she cannot conceal her contempt when Thorby tells her he was a beggar or her incredulity when he tells her he was a slave. Leda clearly thought slavery to be something that was eliminated centuries previously.

Thorby soon learns that Rudbek is not only the name of the mansion and its sprawling grounds, but also of the city adjacent to it. Upon his arrival, he has a luxurious bath (attended upon by several valets) and attends an elaborate family dinner, where he is introduced to more relatives and others connected to the family.

Although he quickly ascertains that he is part of an extremely wealthy and powerful family, he is unaware of his position within that family until a visitor named Joel de la Croix inadvertently clues him into the fact that he is the principal heir to the property and the corporate entity.

When he inquires about this, it becomes clear that Uncle Jack finds Thorby's newly discovered presence a threat to his position as de facto head of the family estate, and tries to convince the newcomer to sign over his legal rights to control of the company. However, Thorby's experience as a free trader has taught him to be cautious about signing documents when he doesn't fully understand them.

Chapter 17 Analysis

The irony of Thorby's relative difficulty in adjusting to a life of extreme luxury is the central theme of this chapter. Thorby was perfectly comfortable as a lowly grunt in the Hegemonic Guard, and he fondly remembers his days as a beggar as the happiest time in his life. Wealth appears to make him uncomfortable, however.

Thorby is uncomfortable with the idea that these people, who seem so unfamiliar to him, are his family. However, he instinctively seems to trust Leda over Uncle Jack and the Bradley's. Again, Thorby's intuitive judgment of character comes to his advantage.

Thorby is clearly not the sort of person whom Leda is accustomed to interacting with in her social circumstances. However, it soon becomes clear that her strong initial reaction to Thorby's story is not due to snobbery but to honest surprise and confusion. We soon figure that Leda, despite her wealth, privilege, and sheltered life, is at heart an unconceited and morally decent human being.

The future conflict between Thorby and John Weemsby over legal control of the Rudbek estate, is hinted at toward the end of this chapter.



Chapter 18

Chapter 18 Summary

Thorby is trying to make sense out of the legal documentation concerning his property rights and level of legal control over the Rudbek estate. Thorby asks Weemsby if he can see the authorization papers his parents signed detailing who should have control of the property in their absence. At this request, Weemsby, who had been trying to ingratiate himself to Thorby, grows suddenly hostile and uncooperative.

Thorby is given a luxurious office at Rudbek and Assoc. Ltd. where he is waited on hand and foot by his own personal secretary, and sets out to learn how the family business works. He is disappointed when he finds that he finds the entire enterprise rather pointless. He was used to handling the business of the free traders, where concrete items are bought and sold for a profit. He also suspects that Baslim would disapprove of his new life, but he isn't sure why.

He is distressed when he discovers that Rudbek and Assoc. owns a company called Galactic Transport, which builds spaceships. For the first time he is aware that his family enterprise may be contributing to the slave trade.

Thorby has dinner with his paternal Grandparents, the Bradley's. He learns that his father took his wife's name of Rudbek upon marriage, since it was necessary for the Rudbek estate to be occupied by Rudbeks. He learns how "Uncle Jack" is only his uncle by marriage, and that Leda is a Rudbek by birth, although she usually uses her stepfather's name.

The Bradleys refuse to acknowledge the existence of slavery, and disregard Thorby's account of being enslaved. They credit Thorby's "ignorance" to the fact that he lacks a formal university education.

Thorby's grandparents disapprove of his desire to rejoin the Hegemonic Guard. Calling themselves "pacifists" and looking down upon any profession would involve taking the lives of other human beings. When Thorby tells him of the proud moment on the Sisu when he destroyed a slaver ship, killing everybody aboard, the Bradleys are appalled.

Thorby decides that he wants to join X-corps and continue the work of Baslim, but first he wants to find the paperwork that his parents signed concerning who legally controls the company. He finds this documentation very hard to get a hold of.

Chapter 18 Analysis

It appears that Thorby has been given a comfortable office, a secretary, and some busy work in the interest of keeping him happy and out of his Uncle's way. While it all seems nice on the surface, Thorby has an intuitive sense that something is wrong—something



that Baslim would disapprove of. The explicit theme of slavery, which was rarely mentioned in the middle chapters of the novel, returns to center stage in this chapter. Professor Bradley's refusal to accept Thorby's account of slavery, based on Thorby's lack of higher education, is ludicrous. Heinlein makes a very effective statement about academic pretension here.



Chapter 19

Chapter 19 Summary

Thorby is finding it more difficult than ever to find the information he seeks concerning Rudbek and Assoc., and it is becoming more and clearer that Uncle Jack and Judge Bruder are sabotaging his attempts to find this information. They also continue to pressure him to sign documents admitting his own incompetence and ceding his controlling shares to his step-uncle.

Thorby examines the evidence and concludes that Uncle Jack is going to do whatever he can to maintain control of the company that he has put so much work into, and is not prepared to hand over his authority to a stranger who had been missing for fifteen years and knows nothing of the company's operations.

Thorby is sympathetic to Uncle Jack's predicament, and is tempted to sign control of Rudbek back over to him, if it weren't for his opinion of Judge Bruder. Judge Bruder has been trying to bully him into submission, infuriating Thorby and making him especially resistant to comply with his demands.

Thorby also begins to research the possibility that Rudbek and Assoc. is involved in the slave trade. He is unable to find any direct evidence (useful information seems to be mysteriously disappearing) but he marks places of interest to the slave trade, mysterious disappearances, etc. on a galactovue (map) and analysis suggests a likely connection.

Chapter 19 Analysis

Chapter 19 is by far the shortest chapter in *Citizen of the Galaxy*, but is a clear turning point in the action of the story. For the first time, Thorby genuinely is showing interest in reclaiming his rights to his property. While the lure of extreme wealth, power, and privilege did not interest him enough to make him want to leave his lowly position in the Guard. His desire to resist the control of Judge Bruder and the disturbing idea that the company he owns may be profiting from the slave trade motivate him to take an active interest in the business he has inherited.

Thorby was prepared to hand control of Rudbek over to Uncle Jack, but resists in order to spite Judge Bruder who has condescended toward him. It is ironic that Jack Weemsby who is clearly masterful at reading people, ultimately loses control of Rudbek due to his association with this man, his most trusted counsel.



Chapter 20

Chapter 20 Summary

Thorby confides in Leda, and learns that he is under constant surveillance. He also learns that his shares in Rudbek are being hidden from him, and that Joel de la Croix, the man who approached him in chapter 17, has been fired for going over the heads of Weemsby and Judge Bruder to speak directly to Thorby. He also learns that Uncle Jack is trying to arrange a marriage between Thorby and Leda.

If Thorby is going to demand that Weemsby and Bruder hand him over his shares, he is going to need a lawyer, and Leda refers him to James J. Garsch in New Washington. Thorby and Leda travel to New Washington together on the pretense that they are sightseeing.

They visit the Replica Lincoln Memorial, and Thorby believes that he sees a resemblance to Baslim in the statue of the great leader. He keenly observes that Lincoln, like Baslim, freed slaves.

Leda manages to distract the spies and bodyguards long enough for Thorby to meet with Mr. Garsch. Despite initial hesitations, Garsch agrees to represent him and help him claim his property. It is clear that this is going to be a very long and difficult task however.

Chapter 20 Analysis

Thorby becomes more aware of the extremity of the duplicity of Uncle Jack and Judge Bruder—the wiretaps, surveillance cameras, spies, arranged marriages, etc. However, to counteract their actions Thorby has to resort to equally deceitful practices, beginning with his guise of being in New Washington for tourist purposes. It is suggested that wealth and power of this level necessitates subterfuge.

Thorby finds Garsch to be a self-serving mercenary. He ultimately decides to trust him, however, at least partially due to lack of better options.

On a side note, we learn that the "System English" language that is used on Earth and referred to widely throughout the novel is very far removed from the twentieth century English that is familiar to the reader. The linguistically talented Thorby is entirely powerless to decipher the engravings on the Lincoln Memorial.



Chapter 21

Chapter 21 Summary

Thorby visits the Hegemonic Guard Headquarters. He introduces himself as Thorby Baslim, but wing Marshal Smith, the X-corps person whom he meets there, recognizes him as Rudbek. Thorby informs Wing Marshal Smith that he wishes to rejoin the guard, and specifically X-corps, after he settles his parents' estate. Wing Marshall Smith clearly finds it unlikely that Thorby, who is burdened with the responsibilities of being Rudbek of Rudbek, will be able to make the commitments necessary of an X-corps member.

Thorby also wishes to ascertain what role, if any, that Rudbek's Galactic Transport plays in the slave trade. Wing Marshal Smith is unable to tell him conclusively if his own company is involved, but finds Thorby's analysis of the available data (leading him to that conclusion) impressive. Thorby asks if, before leaving Rudbek and joining X-corps, he could make a trip, as Rudbek of Rudbek, and inspect his company's doings in the areas that might be connected to the slave trade. Smith informs him that his parents were on a similar mission when they were killed and Thorby was enslaved. Thorby meets again with Garsch, who suggests that Thorby should not be in residence at Rudbek. He, Leda, and their elderly Aunt Lizzie leave for Yukon.

Chapter 21 Analysis

At the Guard Headquarters, Thorby introduces himself as "Thorby Baslim" and rejects the name of "Rudbek of Rudbek". In chapter 16, Thorby thought that knowledge of his biological family would give him a sense of identity. Now he knows the names of his biological parents, but chooses to identify himself with his adoptive father's name.

He claims that he is hoping to get rid of the name of Rudbek, because he didn't ask for it and he does not want it. Wing Marshal Smith reminds him that nobody chooses the circumstances of their birth. He didn't choose to be Rudbek of Rudbek any more than he chose to be a slave or a beggar. The fact that he didn't choose his parents does not extricate himself from the responsibilities associated with being heir to a vast corporate empire.

Wing Marshal Smith is impressed by Thorby's skills, and admits that they would be an asset to X-corps, and accepts the sincerity of Thorby's wishes. However, he still isn't taking the possibility of Thorby ever leaving Rudbek and rejoining the guard. Wing Marshal Smith is evidently aware of obstacles to this plan that Thorby is not cognizant of.



Chapter 22

Chapter 22 Summary

Thorby, Leda and Aunt Lizzie travel to Yukon, leaving and going elsewhere when signaled. During this time, Thorby has a nightmare about persecution and whippings for the first time since he was a child on Jubbul.

In San Francisco, Thorby and Leda stage a public quarrel, after which they part ways, with Leda going to Nice with Aunt Lizzie, and Thorby to Australia.

Thorby returns to Rudbek estate for the first hearing. He and Garsch easily accomplish their first victory—having his parents declared dead. Garsch warns Thorby that there are still major challenges ahead.

After winning a second legal battle and acquiring the right to vote his parents stock, Thorby calls a stockholders' meeting for electing officers. Thorby controls 45% of the voting shares, and needs to pick up an additional 6% of the vote in order to have himself elected chairman of the board. In the end, it is Leda, who unexpectedly votes for Thorby rather than her stepfather, who turns the vote in Thorby's favor. Thorby's first action as chairman of the board is to fire John Weemsby and Judge Bruder.

Chapter 22 Analysis

This is a very eventful chapter. Most of the action in the final conflict between Thorby and Weemsby/Bruder are concentrated in this chapter. In this fast-paced segment of the book, Thorby goes into hiding, successfully wins several legal battles, takes control of Rudbek and associates, and removes Weemsby and Bruder from their posts. Within the pages of this chapter lies a fast-moving courtroom drama that is distinctive from the other chapters in the book.

Thorby claims his title, as well as his property and legal rights, as Thor Rudbek. He is beginning to understand that he is destined to be the master of the Rudbek estate.

Despite Thorby's general good sense when it comes to character judgments, he seems to be lacking when it comes to his dealings with the opposite sex. He is surprisingly quick to accept Leda's feigned coldness to him, just as he was unable to read between the lines when Mata clearly had romantic feelings for him.



Chapter 23

Chapter 23 Summary

Thorby finds the job of straightening things out at Rudbek and Assoc. overwhelming, and he is disappointed when he isn't able to straighten it out quickly and join X-corps. He finds that he is able to help X-corps in their quest to eliminate slavery, albeit in different ways than he initially planned.

Leda, while demonstrating no talent for business, is a constant source of support for Thorby. He considers proposing to her, but decides against it, since he worries his mission in the fight against slavery will render him a bad husband. Thorby receives a lot of support from Garsch and from Joel de la Croix (who has been rehired). Thorby remembers Baslim and Grandmother, and their memory inspires him to persevere in his quest.

Chapter 23 Analysis

If Thorby began this story on the lowest imaginable rung of society, he ends it on the highest. He has learned that life among the rich and powerful can be every bit as confining as life as a beggar in Jubbul.

While Thorby would like to dispense with his fortune and power, he finds that, for practical and (ironically) moral reasons, he cannot, and may never be able to. He also sacrifices any plans he may have had about starting a family of his own.

In the end, Thorby is able to continue Baslim's work in the fight against slavery, but not in the way he intended (as a soldier in X-corps). It turns out that he is able to do more good toward his cause as Rudbek or Rudbek. Thorby is never forced to compromise his principals or abandon his initial cause, but his destiny in life is very different from his original expectations and plans.



Characters

Thorby

The book's protagonist, initially introduced to us as "lot 97", is called Thorby Baslim, Thorby Baslim-Kraussa, and Thor Rudbek of Rudbek, at alternating points in the novel. Thorby is kidnapped by slavers at the age of three. We are given few specifics about his traumatic childhood, but it is clear that he has been severely abused by a series of masters. As the book opens, Thorby is being sold at a slave auction in Jubblepore. His exact age is unknown (he is described as "preadolescent"), but the reader understands that Thorby has been exposed to many hardships during his short life. The bidders at the slave auction clearly view Thorby, who appears, thin, frail, scarred, and unhealthy due to obvious abuse and neglect, to be an undesirable piece of property, and therefore nobody bids on him. He is finally purchased by Baslim the cripple for a paltry 9 minims.

Thorby, although initially distrustful, soon warms up to Baslim, who treats him kindly and raises him as his own son. Baslim trains Thorby in the trade of begging as well as in more traditional subjects such as languages, math and history. Thorby proves to be a quick learner.

It soon becomes very clear to Thorby that there is more to Baslim than meets the eye, but he never asks any questions. He trusts Baslim infinitely and is confident that Baslim will tell him what he feels it is important for him to know. It is surprising to see this level of blind faith in a character who spent many of his formative years in an abusive environment in which he could trust nobody. His trust in Baslim, therefore is not due to naiveté but rather to his keen intuitive ability to judge character. He easily concludes that Baslim deserves his complete trust, and similarly places trust in Captain Kraussa and Colonel Brisby (but with slight hesitation). He intuitively distrusts John Weemsby and Judge Bruder, however, and this intuition proves to be accurate.

Thorby proves to be extraordinarily adept at adapting to new cultures. He quickly learns new languages and adopts complex cultural nuances as his own. He manages to fully become a member of the underworld society of a Jubblepore beggar, and then blends into the cult-like Sisu clan effectively, joins the hegemonic guard, and then infiltrates aristocratic society on earth without major problems. This adaptability can only be partially accounted for by Thorby's youth. When Thorby makes this final transition, he is an adult, albeit a very young one. It is perhaps for this reason that the move to earth to assume the role Rudbek of Rudbek, a position of extreme privilege and luxury, is ironically the most difficult transition for him to make.

Baslim

When we first meet Baslim, he appears to be merely a simple beggar in an urban slum in a semi-civilized world that is literally light years from any cultural center. However, it



soon becomes very clear that Baslim is far more than he appears. Baslim chooses the life of a one-eyed, one-legged beggar as a cover for his covert operations, but the reader is left to wonder about what these covert operations actually are through most of the book. Thorby soon learns that Baslim has high quality prosthetic parts that make ample substitutes (both functionally and aesthetically) for the eye and the leg that he has lost. He possesses a wealth of high-tech recording and reading devices that he uses in educating Thorby. He also is clearly highly educated, and speaks no less than fourteen languages.

We learn that Baslim has served as a colonel in the Hegemonic guard, and that, at the end of his life, he was working as an undercover agent with Exotic Corps, on a mission to fight the slave trade of the nine worlds. At some point in his career, he rescued the free trader ship Hansea from slavers (which is how he lost his leg and his eye).

Everyone who has encountered Colonel Baslim in the course of his overt military career holds him in the very highest esteem (which makes the contemptuous way in which he is treated on Jubbul all the more ironic). This universal esteem for Baslim proves to be a great protection for Thorby. Both the free traders and Colonel Brisby are particularly accommodating to Thorby, due to his association with Baslim.

We are never explicitly told what Baslim was thinking when he went to the slave auction at the books opening, or what motivated him to purchase Thorby and rear him as his own son. Although we know that Baslim was on Jubbul for the purpose of combating slavery, we are led to believe that Thorby is the only slave he has ever purchased and emancipated in this manner. Perhaps he felt overwhelmed by the task. Perhaps he realized that he would never eliminate slavery in his lifetime, but could make a significant difference in the life of this one small boy.

Baslim is feared as a military leader. Even after he is dead, his former colleagues are afraid to challenge his will. The Baslim the reader sees the most of is, however, a kind, loving, and nurturing single father. Baslim dies in the fourth of 23 chapters, making him absent throughout most of the book, but he is arguably the most memorable character in the entire story.

Grandmother

Called "Grandmother" or "Chief Officer" depending on the situation, the matriarch of ship Sisu is a shrewd and stern elderly woman. She is the final authority in nearly all matters on the Sisu, which operates as a very small sovereign state, independent of the governments of any planet. Dr. Mader suggests that Grandmother's position, although one of power and influence, virtually enslaves her to the restrictions of free trader society.



Captain Fjalar Kraussa

The titular captain of the starship Sisu, Captain Kraussa manages all of his ships dealings with the outside world. In truth, all real power on this ship is held by the chief officer (a position initially held by his mother, and later by his wife). Captain Kraussa receives the message that Baslim sends, from beyond the grave, through Thorby. Captain Kraussa takes Thorby away from the grave danger he is in on Jubble, and eventually adopts him (thus becoming Thorby's second adoptive father). Captain Kraussa is devoted to his family, his culture, his responsibilities, and his role in the very restrictive free trader chain of command. However, perhaps because it is his job to deal directly with outsiders in trade and diplomatic concerns, Captain Kraussa appears more sympathetic to outsiders than the other free traders, and is sympathetic to the struggles Thorby experiences as he attempts to adjust to the ways of the free trader people.

Rhoda Kraussa

When we first meet Captain Kraussa's wife Rhoda, she is serving as Deputy Chief officer on the Sisu. This technically makes her second in command of the ship, but in practice, her job requires her to wait hand and foot upon her mother-in-law. After Thorby's adoption, Rhoda becomes his legal mother. Although she never does much actual mothering to him (since Thorby goes to live in adult bachelor quarters immediately after his adoption), she is kind and nurturing toward him as she is to her other grown sons. Later, when she inherits the position of Chief Officer, she proves to be as cold and cunning as her predecessor.

Fritz Kraussa

One of Thorby's adoptive brothers on the Sisu. Fritz is one of Thorby's roommates in the bachelor quarters. He mentors Thorby and tries to familiarize him with free trader customs and is of a generally kind and understanding disposition. However, since Fritz has little experience dealing with outsiders, he is occasionally frustrated by his foster brother's ignorance in the things he has been reared to take for granted.

Jeri Kingsolver

Thorby's adoptive nephew in the Free Traders, Jeri is the senior firecontrolman on the Sisu. Jeri is responsible for training Thorby as his replacement. Jeri has less patience with Thorby's unfamiliarity with Sisu customs than Captain Kraussa or Fritz.

Mata Kingsolver

Jeri's sister, and Thorby's adoptive niece, Mata is initially Sisu's Junior Firecontrolman, and later is promoted to Senior Firecontrolman. Mata has romantic feelings for Thorby,



but the customs of the Free Traders forbid the match (since Thorby, though no blood relation to Mata, is legally her uncle). Grandmother trades Mata to El Lido in order to avoid scandal.

Loeen Garcia

A young woman from the El Lido who was exchanged for Mata. It takes some time for Thorby to warm up to her, but he becomes attached to her when they are cast in a play together. It is later revealed that Grandmother is actively trying to marry Thorby to Loeen.

Dr. Margaret Mader

An anthropologist who studies Free Trader customs, Dr. Mader is the only other "fraki" on board Sisu when Thorby boards the ship. Evidently, they do not completely refuse to speak to her (the way they initially refuse to speak to Thorby) but Dr. Mader suggests that they never grow to be entirely warm and friendly to her. (The reader never actually witnesses any interaction between Dr. Mader and any of the Free Traders other than Thorby). Dr. Mader offers Thorby (and the reader) background information about the ways of the Free Traders as well as philosophical musings about the role of tradition in maintaining the integrity of a civilization.

John Weemsby

Related to the Rudbek clan through marriage, John Weemsby (or "Uncle Jack" as he introduces himself to Thorby) has been running the Rudbek estate since the disappearance of Creighton and Martha Rudbek. In truth, he has only one nominal share in the company, and must be motivated more by a desire for power and rank than for wealth. "Uncle Jack" is friendly and welcoming to Thorby, who turns up after being missing for fifteen years. Thorby sees through Weemsby affectations of friendliness, and is a little hesitant to trust him from the beginning, although he is somewhat sympathetic to the man. As expected, Weemsby is extremely reluctant to hand over control of the company to Thorby, the only significant heir to the Rudbek properties.

As Thorby tries to gain uncover information that is rightfully his, Weemsby's true nature is revealed, and this manipulative and megalomaniacal character becomes the chief antagonist of the final third of the book. At the end of the book, Weemsby has lost all control of, and connection to, the company he has poured his life into. It also appears that he has lost his family as well, since familial contact with Leda and other relatives will most certainly be permanently strained, if not severed completely.



Leda Weemsby

Thorby's cousin by birth, Leda normally uses the surname of her stepfather, John Weemsby. Leda is socially adept and an expert on matters such as fashion and etiquette. She helps Thorby adapt to life on earth, and makes him aware that he is being monitored and manipulated by John Weemsby. Leda casts the deciding vote that makes Thorby the new chairman of the board of directors, much to his shock. Thorby considers proposing to Leda but decides against it, since he believes his mission to fight slavery would make it difficult for him to be a good husband.

Colonal Brisby

Brisby is the commanding officer of the Hydra, a vessel of the hegemonic guard.

Auntie Singham

A fortune teller, Singham works in Jubblepore's red light district and informs Thorby that Baslim has been killed. She advises him to leave town.

Mother Shaum

A friend of Baslim's in Jubblepore, Mother Shaum is the only person whom Thorby feels he can solicit help from after Baslim's death. She helps Thorby deliver his message to Captain Kraussa and later assists in smuggling the boy aboard the Sisu.

James J. Garsch

An attorney on earth, Thorby perceives Garsch as opportunistic and self-serving. However, Thorby realizes that he is in need of Garsch's services and hires him, although he does not entirely trust him.

Professor and Mrs. Bradley

Thorby's paternal grandparents by birth, the Bradley's refuse to accept Thorby's account of his life as a slave. The professor goes as far as to say that Thorby's observations cannot be trusted due to his lack of formal education.

Peebie

Peebie is the petty officer on the Hydra who takes pleasure in tormenting Thorby.



Wing Marshal Smith

Smith is the hegemonic guard officer, whom Thorby contacts on earth to express his interest in joining X-corps.

Vice Colonel Stancke

Called "Stinky", Stancke is Col. Brisby's second-in-command on the Hydra.

Isadore Krishnamurti

Called "Kris", Krishnamurti is the ship's psychologist aboard the Hydra.

Judge Bruder

Although unrelated to the Rudbeks, Bruder has a position of great influence within the Rudbek corporate empire.

Lady Jennifer Wilkes

Thorby's Aunt, Wilkes lives in New Zealand.

Joel de la Croix

An ambitious young engineer who works for Rudbek and Assoc., Joel is fired when he goes above the heads of John Weemsby and Judge Bruder to speak directly with Thorby. At the end of the book, he is working for Thorby.

Aunt Lizzie

Lizzie is an aunt of Thorby's who travels with Leda and him to Yukon, and San Francisco.



Objects/Places

Jubbulpore

Jubbulpore is the capital of the planet Jubbul and the Nine Worlds, where the story begins

Stellars and Minims

Stellars and Minims are the currency in the nine worlds. Ten minims make up a stellar.

The free traders

A cult-like community of loosely connected family units that live on trading ships, free traders have no ties to any land-based government.

Starship Sisu

The Sisu is the free trader ship that Thorby lives on after he leaves Jubblepore.

Fraki

Literally, a fraki is a particular animal from an obscure planet with few qualities to recommend it. The Free Traders use it as a contemptuous term referring to people from outside of their culture.

Sargon

Sargon is the militaristic dictator who governs the nine worlds.

The Hydra

The Hydra is the military vessel of the Hegemonic guard, commanded by Colonel Brisby. Captain Kraussa delivers Thorby to Colonel Brisby and the Hydra at Baslim's request.

Joy Street

Joy Street is the nightlife district in Jubbulpore.



Losian

Losian is the first foreign planet that Thorby visits during his time aboard the Sisu. Losian is inhabited with insect-like creatures.

Woolamurra

Woolamurra is the planet visited by the Sisu and where Grandmother dies.

The Great Gathering

The Great Gathering is a social gathering of all the free trader ships.

Rudbek

Rudbek is Thorby's ancestral estate and the city adjacent to it. It's also the name of the corporate entity of which Thorby is the primary shareholder.

Hekate

Hekate is the planet which hosts the great gathering of the free traders.



Themes

Slavery

Slavery is a major recurring theme in *Citizen of the Galaxy*. The novel opens with a slave auction, and we are made to see how our hero is stripped of his humanity via the institution of slavery. The auctioneer does not even bother to address our hero by name (or even to acknowledge that he has a name). He is merely referred to as "lot 97". Throughout the course of the auction, the "piece of merchandise" is spoken of as if he weren't present. Thorby has clearly suffered greatly during his time as a slave, and it requires a lot of time and effort from Baslim to heal the young boy's physical and psychological wounds (and Thorby never completely recovers. Even at the end of the novel, when he has returned to his family fortune, Thorby carries the scars of the whip on his back and is haunted with nightmares of physical abuse).

Although slavery is rarely discussed in the middle sections of the book, it reemerges at the end, and the novel concludes with Thorby committing his life (and his newfound fortune) to the fight to eliminate slavery.

Heinlein suggests that it may not be possible to ever eliminate slavery, yet Thorby, like Baslim before him, devotes himself to freeing whatever slaves he can. He does this with full knowledge of the enormous difficulty involved in this mission—a mission that is hampered by the fact that most people on earth do not even realize that slavery is a problem. Most people on this futuristic earth view slavery as an evil of the distant past that has long since been eliminated (a viewpoint shared by the twentieth-century American audience that the book was written for). The author reminds us that, in 1957 (as well as in the present day) slavery is still alive and well in our world.

Individual Liberty

While *Citizen of the Galaxy* harshly condemns the institution of chattel slavery, he suggests that true freedom may not exist to anybody and that all of us, no matter how comfortable our lives may be, are enslaved to circumstances that are utterly beyond our control.

When Thorby joins the Free Trader community, he discovers that while the Free Traders enjoy freedom as a group (not only freedom from slavery but also freedom from government beyond that of the family unit) and enjoy a remarkably high standard of living, individual freedoms are almost nonexistent. Nearly every activity of an individual Free Trader's life is rigidly enforced by custom. Thorby leaves the Free Traders because he feels constrained by the lack of personal freedom within the colony, which is ironic since he came to the free traders from an oppressive, autocratically-governed planet where he lived as a slave (although, granted, Baslim never treated him as a slave). Here Heinlein challenges assumptions that both Thorby and the reader make about



wealth, power, and personal freedom (suggesting that the first two do not necessarily lead to—and can even be detrimental to—the third).

When Thorby arrives on earth to discover that he is, by birth, among the wealthiest and most powerful men in the entire galaxy, he discovers that extreme wealth and power to be a cumbersome burden. He finds himself strapped with overwhelming responsibility, and a lack of privacy that makes it very hard to escape these duties. When he argues to Wing Marshal Smith that he never chose to be Rudbek of Rudbek, he is reminded that none of us chooses our position in life.

Education

Thorby's growth and transformation (nearly universally for the better) is a direct result of the education he has received. When Thorby goes to live Baslim, the old man observes that his "interest in matters intellectual approached zero" Baslim feels he cannot begin to explain abstract concepts, such as ethics, to Thorby. However, when Thorby leaves Jubbul several years later he is well read, quick-witted, intellectually curious, and fluent in seven languages. Dr. Mader is highly impressed (and surprised) to find these qualities in a former slave and beggar.

Thorby's education is furthered after he leaves Jubbul and travels throughout the galaxy. He receives formal training, both on the Sisu and on the Hydra, as well as the additional learning that is gained through exposure to a wide variety of experiences.

Thorby's paternal grandfather, Professor Bradley, clearly places a high value on education, but on education as determined by degrees and titles from prestigious universities. He believes that Thorby is unqualified to make decisions for himself until he spends a few years at Harvard or a similarly prestigious institution. He refuses to give credence to anything Thorby has to say, even as he relates the experiences of his own life, due to his lack of a university education, although it is clear to the reader that Thorby is far better informed in all important matters than is his grandfather (thus, drawing a distinction between academic pretension and true learnedness).

Style

Point of View

The narrative of *Citizen of the Galaxy* is written in third person. This is Thorby's story, and thus it is usually (though not always) told from Thorby's point of view. More often than not, we are guided to experience the events of the story as Thorby experiences them and most of the critical information is made revealed to us as it is revealed to the story's protagonist.

There are a few exceptions to this rule. For example, very little of the first chapter is told from Thorby's point of view. These early pages give us the perspective of Baslim or that of an objective third party, and Thorby's thoughts and feelings remain somewhat of a mystery.

After Baslim's death in chapter four, the perspective of the novel rarely moves away from that which is witnessed through Thorby's eyes. There are a couple of exceptions to this, however. For example, the reader is allowed to understand the message that Thorby relates to Captain Kraussa in Mother Shaum's tavern, although Thorby does not understand them himself. The reader is also privy to confidential conversations between hegemonic guard officers that are clearly not revealed to Thorby.

Setting

Citizen of the Galaxy is set in our galaxy at some point in the future. We are not told exactly how far in the future the events take place, but we can assume that it is several centuries after the present day. Humanity is no longer bound to earth, but has spread throughout the galaxy, occupying many planets and moons. Earth is still proudly regarded as the birthplace of the human race, but many people are so far removed from earth, by both distance and time, that they regard the stories they hear of earth to be mere legends. Earth is also at the center of the Terran Hegemony, which at first appears to be one large government entity, but later turns out to be a loosely connected alliance of independently governed planets. The human race, while widespread throughout the galaxy, does not appear to be particularly mobile. We are told that less than 1% of human beings ever leave the planet of their birth. Therefore, while there are human beings occupying the far reaches of the galaxy, they are largely isolated from each other and unaware of the goings-on in other worlds.

The story begins on in Jubblepore, the capital of the nine worlds, in what appears to be an isolated region of space. During the second third of the book, the story leaves Jubble. These chapters focus on action that takes place within starships in outer space, first in the starship Sisu of the free traders and later in the military vessel of the Hegemonic guard (with occasional short visits to planets). At last, the story brings us to earth. The earth of the future largely resembles the twentieth century America in which



Mr. Heinlein lived. The Earth of this time appears to be more or less democratically governed (with large corporate financial entities controlling most of the real power), and while it is far from egalitarian, we see no evidence of slavery or abject poverty—all the earthlings appear to live fairly comfortable lives in blissful ignorance of the sufferings of people light years away.

Language and Meaning

Citizen of the Galaxy was published in 1957 as a juvenile novel. While the book deals with complex themes and is appropriate reading for adults, the fact remains that Mr. Heinlein was hired to write a novel for twelve-year-old boys and *Citizen of the Galaxy* was the result. While the writer never condescends to his audience, he uses straightforward language that is easily comprehended by an intelligent sixth grader—language that is common to everyday speech and rarely assumes that the reader is familiar with any literary or historical references. The only significant historical allusion in the book is to Abraham Lincoln, a figure with whom nearly every American schoolchild is infinitely familiar. The story moves along quickly, rarely stopping very long for lengthy descriptive passages or long-winded reflection, in order to keep pace with the attention span of a preteen or adolescent.

Heinlein uses Standard English vocabulary, with little of the complex technical terminology frequently found in science fiction. However, on occasion he flavors his language with vocabulary specific to the universe of the novel, such as "stellars", "minims" and most notably, "fraki". He invents words very rarely however, usually using familiar English words to describe alien customs. When he does use an unfamiliar word, such as "fraki", he makes a point to explicitly explain its meaning to the reader. The author also occasionally uses a Finnish word or two (such as "sisu") to paint us a picture of the unique, nuanced culture of the Kraussa clan.

Structure

Citizen of the Galaxy is an episodic epic tale that follows a single character, Thorby Baslim/Kraussa/Rudbek on his journey that takes him, over the course of several years, across the galaxy. During this time, Thorby meets many people and makes significant discoveries concerning who he is, where he fits in the universe, and how he is meant to spend his life and use his talents.

The novel also follows the classic "rags to riches" structure. Thorby begins the story at the lowest possible social status. Not only is he a slave on an isolated planet, he is regarded as a slave of very little value. When he is finally purchased by the kindly Baslim, the reader gets the impression that Thorby's fortunes are about to improve. Baslim frees Thorby, but his status as a professional beggar, as well as the stigma of being a former slave, keeps Thorby's social status on Jubbul very low. When Thorby leaves Jubbul on the Sisu, he occupies a moderately high position within a very affluent

society. When the identity of his birth family is finally discovered, Thorby is revealed the heir to an unimaginable vast empire of corporate wealth and power.

Citizen of the Galaxy is divided into twenty-three chapters, each of which is approximately ten pages long.



Quotes

Being a slave means having someone as your master, with no hope of changing it.
p.126

I want you to promise me two things...The first is that you promise never again to steal anything, from anybody. Neither from fine ladies in sedan chairs, nor from poor people like ourselves—one is too dangerous and the other...well, it's disgraceful, though I don't expect you to know what that means. p. 24

Pop, who maintained that a wise man could not be insulted, since truth could not insult and untruth was not worthy of notice. p.108

Freedom is a hard habit to break. p. 127

...most things are right or wrong only in their backgrounds; few things are good or evil in themselves. p.124

The people are free...at the cost of loss of individual freedom for each of you—and I don't except the Chief Officer or Captain; they are the least free of any. p.126

Life in Sisu had become more pleasant even though he was now conscious of the all-enveloping, personally-restricting quality of life with the family. p.137

The slave market lies on the spaceport side of the famous Plaza of Liberty, facing the hill crowned by the even more famous Praesidium of the Sargon. p.5

...the steel stays in the blood. The blood stays in the steel. You're still Sisu. p.161

Take a puppy, abuse him, kick him, mistreat him—he'll revert to a feral carnivore. Take his litter brother, pet him, talk to him, let him sleep with you, but train him—he's a happy, well-behaved house pet. Take another from that same litter, pet him on even days and kick him on odd days. You'll have him so confused that he'll be ruined for either role.
p.171

"You don't believe me."

"How could I?" There haven't been slaves for centuries." p.194

Son, people do odd things for money, but they'll do still more drastic things for power over money. Anybody sittin' close to a billion credits is in danger; it's like keeping a pet rattlesnake. p.230

Thorby thought of nameless little Thorbys out there in the dark, crying hopelessly with fear and loneliness and hurt, in the reeking holds of slavers—ships that might be his.
p.235

"Goodnight, son," the old beggar whispered. "Good dreams... and good luck!" p.253



Topics for Discussion

It could be argued that Thorby had the most personal freedom when he was a child living with Baslim in Jubblepore, even though he lived in abject poverty and was legally a slave. Do you think this is true? Why or why not?

Dr. Mader calls the Free Trader culture matriarchal, and we are given plenty of reasons to believe that the female chief officer is the final authority of the colony. However, the free trader men appear to have far more personal liberty than the women do? What is the author trying to say about the relationship between power and individual freedom?

What do we know about society on the planet Jubble? How is society structured there? What kind of government and economy do they have there? How is their social hierarchy reinforced?

Compare and contrast the societies of the planet Jubble, the Free Traders, the Hegemonic Guard, and the futuristic depiction of earth. How is each society governed? What kind of economic systems do they employ? What level of freedom does each society allow to the individual?

When Thorby arrives on earth, and tells his birth family about his sufferings as a slave, he finds that most people on earth are not aware that slavery exists in their day and age. What message do you think the author meant to convey to his twentieth century American audience.

The Free Traders could be said to resemble a religious cult. What do you know about modern-day cults? How do you think modern day religious cults resemble the free traders? Do you think the free traders are a cult? Why or why not?

Dr. Mader compares many of the Free Trader customs, such as the trade of women between ships, to slavery? Are the Free Traders slaves? Why or why not? In what ways does their situation resemble slavery?

Why do you think the book makes the reference to Abraham Lincoln in Chapter 20?