

The Dispossessed Study Guide

The Dispossessed by Ursula K. Le Guin

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



Contents

The Dispossessed Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Chapters 1-3.....	4
Chapters 4-6.....	7
Chapters 7-9.....	10
Chapters 10-11.....	13
Chapters 12-13.....	15
Characters.....	17
Symbols and Symbolism.....	21
Settings.....	23
Themes and Motifs.....	24
Styles.....	26
Quotes.....	28



Plot Summary

The *Dispossessed* was written by Ursula Le Guin. This novel is about the radically different societies on two close planets. On Urras, there are multiple states, each with their own government. On Anarres, there is no government or economic system. Shevek, a physicist on Anarres, wants to break the rules of his world and travel to Urras, not only to speak with other physicists who understand and are excited by his theories, but to promote friendship between the two planets. However, when Shevek spends a little time on Urras, he discovers that utopia is not all he thought it would be. The *Dispossessed* is a novel of anarchy and individualism, of utopias and paradise.

Shevek travels to Urras despite the mild protest of many on his home planet of Anarres. When he arrives, Shevek is treated like a celebrity, but he finds the customs of Urras radically different from those he has known before. As Shevek settles in his new home, he learns that his hosts have brought him there for a reason, so that he can help them get an advance on space travel that will allow them to dominate not only their world, but many others as well. Shevek is not happy with this, and he is also not happy with the violent way in which Urras is governed. Shevek wants to promote peace and friendship, not help one state and rule all the others.

Shevek grew up on Anarres, a world without a government. Anything Shevek could want is there for the taking. However, Shevek grows up without his mother when she is transferred to another city and does nothing to return to her partner and child.

Shevek stands out from other kids even when he is little. Shevek is often accused of being an egoist even when all he is doing is attempting to share his ideas. As Shevek ages, he continues to feel like something of an outcast, especially when he is assigned to manual labor while his other friends go to university.

When Shevek is finally able to settle down to study physics, it is quickly discovered that his ideas and theories are far advanced. Shevek is sent to another university where he can learn from someone who is in communication with Urras and the scientists there. However, when Shevek begins to come up with theories that are considered too radical, his communications with Urras are refused. Shevek quickly becomes frustrated.

Shevek partners with a childhood friend, and they have a child together. Shortly after this, Shevek tries to send a manuscript that did not have prior approval to Urras. Afterward, he sent away for a manual labor job only to return to find his partner and child shipped off to another city. It is four years before Shevek is reunited with his family. Shevek begins to believe that this was a punishment for his actions.

Shevek and a friend begin a new syndicate, the Syndicate of Initiative, through which he publishes several books and makes his own transmitter to communicate with Urras. Talk of accepting settlers from Urras begins, but there is fear among their dissenters. For this reason, Shevek and his friend decide they must send someone to Urras. Shevek is chosen. Later, he returns wiser.



Chapters 1-3

Summary

Chapter 1

At the Port of Anarres, a ship from Urras waits to take a passenger. This is highly unusual and some Anarrians are at the wall to protest. A man is killed by a rock as he escorts the passenger onto the ship. The passenger, Shevek, is an Anarrian physicist who is traveling to Uras to share his views with fellow scientists. The journey is long, and made longer by the need to inoculate Shevek against the many diseases that exist on Urras, but do not exist on Anarres. Shevek is left disoriented by the medical treatment and the customs of the Urras people that are so different from his own. When he finally lands on Urras, Shevek is greeted like he is a superstar and taken to a party at the university where he will be teaching. The lack of female intellectuals and the mode of dress at the party also confuses Shevek. However, he is pleased to finally meet the men he has been speaking to for years.

Chapter 2

Shevek is a baby. His mother has just been reassigned to a job in Abbenay, so Shevek is to remain at the nursery full time while his father lives in a dormitory. Shevek's father, Palat, however visits him often. As Shevek grows, he is often chastised for egoizing, for trying to put himself and his thoughts above others. However, Shevek makes good friends in the dorms. With one group of friends, Shevek plays a game in which they pretend they are Odo's jailers, an experiment that teaches them a powerful lesson. When Shevek is older, he gets into a discussion with his friends about the possibility of ever going to Urras. Shevek is dead set against it despite his friend's arguments in favor of it. Later, Shevek is disappointed when he is assigned to physical labor rather than a university setting. However, Shevek makes the best of it, even taking a lover for a time. When Shevek returns to the university, he proves himself to be far advanced, even more so than his professor. For this reason, Shevek's work is sent to another professor who agrees to have Shevek transferred to the bigger university. There is a party before Shevek is sent away, making him feel as though he was better liked than he thought.

Chapter 3

Shevek is instructed to remain indoors for three days. Shevek is disappointed because he wants to explore Urras. Shevek is visited by several of the scientists he communicated with for years before his arrival. They seem eager for Shevek to present to them a thesis on temporal theory, but Shevek has nothing for them. During this discussion, Shevek learns that women are not treated as equals on Urras, but are inferior to men. Shevek finds this disheartening.



Shevek spends a lot of time with the other scientists over the next few days, trying to learn as much about Urras as he can. Much of it makes Shevek uncomfortable because it is so different from his own world. Finally, Shevek is freed from house arrest and begins exploring Urras. He travels all over the area, seeing animals for the first time and trying to learn the customs of the people. Shevek visits the grave of Odo, the author of the revolution that led to the inhabitation of Anarres. However, when he asks to see the Fort in Drio where Odo was imprisoned, Pae claims it no longer stands. Shevek actually sees the building on a large hill, but he decides not to visit it. Shevek has come here to bring their two people together, but he begins to despair that this will not happen.

Analysis

The setting of this novel features two worlds, one created by a revolution on the other. One has no specific government, but a way of life in which all people are equal and live in harmony. On the other, materialism is valued above all else. The main character of this novel is a man named Shevek who is a physicist who has no equal on his own world. Shevek manages to speak to other scientist on the other world, Urras, and desires to meet them face to face so that they might share their theories and their work. Shevek also hopes to bring a peace between the two people.

Shevek's world, Anarres, is a moon that has very little vegetation or natural animal life. It also has no specific government. The people on Anarres are all equal. They do not need to fight or compete because there is no money system, no haves or have nots. On Anarres, everything a person might need is provided for them. If they need clothes or a place to live, they simply ask for them from the manufacturer or the landlady. Most of the people on Anarres live in dormitories where there are four or five people to a room. When a person wants to have sex with another, they simply go to a single's room. There are also domiciles for families. Everything is free. Everyone has what they need. All they are expected to do is do the job given to them by a computer.

Shevek, for reasons that are unknown at this time, feels that his world should befriend the people on Urras. Ever since Anarres' occupation, the people have been kept isolated from the people of Urras even though Urras sends ships to trade with them on a regular basis. The people of Anarres have been taught the theories of one woman who is responsible for the revolution that led to the settlement of Anarres. This people believe that the people of Urras are materialistic. For this reason, they are kept separate, but Shevek desires to share his scientific work with others who are on the same level as him and the only people he knows of who are live on Urras.

Discussion Question 1

Why do the people of Anarres not know how to protest? What does this suggest about them?



Discussion Question 2

Why does Shevek go to Urras? Why must he be inoculated against so many diseases to go to Urras?

Discussion Question 3

What is Anarres? What is life like there? How is this different from Urras?

Vocabulary

Lambent, domicile, familiarity, radiance, desperate, history, possibility, denied, foliage, remote, metaphysical, society, exiled, gleaming, harmony, harmonium, relationships, maintained, faithfulness, devotion, tinge, chauffeur, factories, ruinous, implacable, gorgeous, analogy, sympathetically, riverside, moribund, insurrection.



Chapters 4-6

Summary

Chapter 4

Shevek arrives in Abbenay and is immediately put to work learning how to read Pravic, the language of Urras. Shevek is unhappy, however, because he has been given a single room and he finds this rude, wondering if he did something wrong. He later realizes he has this room so that he will not bother others when he wants to work long into the night, but he still finds it uncomfortable. Shevek learns to read Pravic quickly and begins writing critics of the books he is given. One of these critics is printed into a book, the authorship shared with his professor, Sabul. However, Shevek's work begins to falter after this because he cannot concentrate. Shevek wants to send letters and works to Urras, as Sabul has done, but Sabul will not allow it. Shevek becomes frustrated.

Shevek becomes ill and must stay in the clinic. When he comes out of the delirium of his fever, Shevek discovers that his biological mother has found him. Shevek and the woman speak for a time, but Shevek is disheartened by the fact that she shows little emotion toward him. For this reason, Shevek sends her away and does not see her again.

Chapter 5

Shevek begins teaching on Urras, something that brings him some happiness. However, the students on Urras do not act like students on Anarres. Shevek finds it disheartening that the students want to take tests and be judged on what they have learned. Shevek also begins to publish articles on Urras and gets paid for them, but he does not fully understand the economic system on Urras. He also dislikes the shops from which he must buy his clothes.

One day the Thuvian scientist, Chifoilisk, asks to speak to Shevek. This man tells Shevek the only reason the A-lo people brought him to Urras was because of his theories. Chifoilisk warns Shevek he is being used and he will never make peace between the two worlds. A few days later, Chifoilisk disappears, apparently called home to Thu.

Shevek enjoys the company of the older scientist, Atro, and often goes to visit him. However, Shevek grows weary of the parties he is often invited to. When another scientist, Oii, asks Shevek to his home for dinner, Shevek agrees. Shevek is quite taken by Oii's children and enjoys meeting their pet, a land otter. It makes Shevek think of Takver, the mother of his children who studied the fish of Anarres. Shevek believes Takver would greatly enjoy the animals of Urras.

Chapter 6



When Shevek is released from the clinic, he becomes friends with his neighbor, Desar, who brings him his dinner each night until he recovers enough to do it himself. Shevek decides he has isolated himself too much and begins going out with Desar and his friends. It helps with Shevek's work, but he often runs into those who think his theories are too radical. Then one day he runs into a childhood friend, Bedap. Shevek and Bedap catch up on their separate lives. Bedap tells Shevek that one of their friends, Tirin, is in a mental hospital for unknown reasons, but Bedap thinks it is because of Tirin's radical ideas.

Shevek and Bedap begin spending a lot of time together, even becoming lovers for a short time. Then one summer, Bedap invites Shevek on a camping trip with several of Bedap's other friends. It is here that Shevek is reunited with a girl he once knew, Takver. Shevek and Takver speak to one another and realize that they are both looking for a lasting relationship. For this reason, they take a room in a domicile when they return from their trip and become partners and the center of their friends' circle.

Analysis

Shevek is transferred to another university where he can work with a professor who has a better understanding for his work. Here Shevek learns that academics have been communicating with their counterparts on Urras for years. Shevek is excited by this idea because he becomes aware that there are a handful of men on Urras who understand his theories and have taken them to a higher level. Shevek begins to want to communicate with these men directly, but his professor is very careful about what goes to Urras so that he does not lose the privilege of sending messages there. However, Shevek begins to realize that his professor is using Shevek to make himself seem more than he really is. This is disheartening to Shevek, especially since no one else wants to listen to his theories.

Shevek grows and changes in these chapters. The reader can see that the child who was annoyed at having to work with his hands has become a frustrated academic who has isolated himself. When Shevek meets his biological mother and realizes that she choose her work over her son and the man she professed to love, he decides he must not do the same to himself. Loneliness is a big part of Shevek's life. For this reason, he forces himself to go out, hoping it will improve his work and his sense of self. Not only does this help his work, but Shevek meets the woman who will be his life partner and the mother of his children.

On Urras, an older Shevek has discovered that traveling to Urras was not all he thought it would be. Shevek feels like a man with no home because he gave up all he loved for something he thought was important only to discover it is not. Shevek is also warned that he is on Urras for reasons other than brotherly love. Shevek has suspected this, therefore it is no surprise. However, Shevek continues to see things that cause him pleasure, but his love for Takver becomes more and more clear as each new discovery leaves him wishing she were there.



Discussion Question 1

Why are long term relationships not encouraged on Anarres? Why do people live in dorms and share themselves with many people? How does this relate to the revolution and the governing of the people on Anarres?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Chifoilisk try to warn Shevek about why the A-Io government has brought him to Urras? Is Shevek surprised by this?

Discussion Question 3

How does meeting his mother change Shevek? Is this a good change?

Vocabulary

Injustice, signature, jolted, intellectually, shelter, surrounded, vaguely, shiver, eternity, distance, interval, vantage, greasy, atrophied, uninhabited, settlement, plentiful, federation, crimson, possessed, peripheral, reverse, participation, colleagues, institute, celebrate, replacements, discards, creator, actual, distraction, companionship.



Chapters 7-9

Summary

Chapter 7

Shevek wants to learn more about Urras, but about the poor, not the wealthy and the intellectuals. However, when he approaches his servant, he only offends the man. Shevek goes to Oii's and speaks with his sister for a time about life on Anarres, then plays with the children. In the newspaper Shevek reads about a new revolution taking place. Later he learns that Thu has sent troops to support the state. Shevek grows weary. He keeps remembering Chifoilisk's warnings and realizes he is very near completing his General Theory, but he does not want to finish it at the university where I-Ao will take it to improve their travel. For this reason, Shevek goes into the city hoping to disappear for a time.

Shevek is confused and saddened by the ways of Urras. He decides to call Ve'a and go see her. Shevek and Ve'a talk for a while, taking a walk together. Later, a group of people show up and an impromptu party begins. Shevek drinks alcohol and becomes inebriated. In a moment alone with Ve'a, Shevek tries to have sex with her. Shevek then becomes ill and has to be taken home by two of the scientists. One of the men steals a paper from Shevek's desk even as he complains that Shevek has done little work since his arrival.

Chapter 8

Shevek writes a paper on Simultaneity, but Sabul refuses to publish or export it and writes a scathing analysis that he does not send to be published. Takver suggests that Shevek ask Sabul to put his name on the book as co-author. When he does, the book, heavily edited, is published.

Takver has a baby during a terrible drought. The baby is strong and healthy. Shevek finds he likes being a father. However, he is soon assigned to a new work project that will take him from Takver and the baby. Shevek is gone for a long while and while he is gone the drought gets worse, causing a famine. When Shevek finally returns to the city, he discovers that Takver has been given an assignment working on the famine. A neighbor suggests that Takver was sent away intentionally to break her partnership with Shevek. When Shevek goes to see Sabul, he learns that he is being kicked out of the university. Sabul insists that the work Shevek does is not needed. Shevek goes to find a new job posting, hoping to find one near Takver. However, there is nothing available. For this reason, Shevek takes a job in the dust fields he worked before.

Chapter 9

Shevek wakes with a hangover. He visits with Pae and discusses briefly the war. Then Shevek decides he needs to work. Shevek wants to go home and he knows they will not



allow it until he gives them what he wants. Shevek's servant keeps everyone out of his rooms for weeks while he works. When Shevek's health takes a bad turn, the servant nurses him, telling Shevek that he is a trained medic. Shevek finally learns some of what it is like to be poor in this world. Later, Atrio comes to visit and Pae quickly follows. They discuss the war and Shevek is shocked by their opinions.

After his visitors are gone, Shevek asks his servant about microphones in his rooms. When he is sure no one can hear them, Shevek asks the servant about the note he found in his jacket. The servant tells him who might have put it there and how to find them. The servant then calls him a taxi. Shevek finds the man the servant sent him to and explains that he wants to leave Urras; but, he does not think they will help him if he does not give them his scientific theory. Then, he shows the man the note he found. The man tells him they are rebels working with the Thuvians and that he has come the night before they plan a demonstration.

Shevek writes something for the demonstration that is quickly printed in the papers. Shevek then attends the demonstration and speaks. Unfortunately, the demonstration is attacked by the government and many people are killed. Shevek runs away with an injured man, taking him into the basement of a chemical factory. They hide there for three days before the man dies.

Analysis

Shevek continues to struggle to understand the customs of Urras. When he meets a woman he likes, he misunderstands the courting rituals of Urras and makes a fool of himself. At the same time, he becomes drunk and makes a bad situation worse. Shevek is clearly a fish out of water and struggling in his new world. It is also growing clear that Shevek is unhappy. Shevek, though, is not the only one. It becomes clear when Pae criticizes his lack of work that Shevek is not holding up his end of the deal. Pae is clearly anxious for Shevek to produce his theories, but Shevek is afraid to begin work on it because he does not want it taken from him.

Shevek is stuck in a bad situation and it only seems to get worse. For a while he seems to accept that he must finish his theory in order to go home. However, it also bothers his conscience to know that the people of I-Ao will use it against their own people. The growing war also bothers Shevek deeply. For this reason, Shevek finally runs away and joins the rebellion movement, not unlike Odo, the revolutionist Shevek was raised to honor as the founder of his world. It is a difficult situation, and the reader begins to wonder if Shevek will ever return home.

At the same time, Shevek recalls the day Takver had their first child. Soon after, they were separated when Shevek was called away on duty. All of this happens not long after Shevek publishes a controversial book and tries to slip the original manuscript to Urras. It clearly begins to look like punishment when Takver is sent away as soon as Shevek's duty ends and the job people cannot find him a job near her. It is a difficult



time in Shevek's life that clearly leaves him scarred, though the reader has yet to know what happened.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Shevek become drunk? Why does Pae criticize his lack of work when he takes him home? What does this suggest about Pae's motivations for having Shevek there?

Discussion Question 2

Why is Takver placed on a new famine assignment? Why does Shevek's neighbor suggest someone is trying to end their partnership? How is this idea confirmed later in the chapter?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Shevek not want the state of I-Ao to get his work? Why does he run away? What does he hope to accomplish?

Vocabulary

Description, evidences, abominable, ludicrous, rebellion, society, indulgence, physicist, admirable, possibility, reconnoitering, broaden, comprehension, conversation, pretense, classification, restrictions, equations, instantaneous, adrenalin, visitors, rational, possessive, secretive.



Chapters 10-11

Summary

Chapter 10

After four years apart, Shevek finally reunites with Takver. Takver is working in a hospital in Chakar. Shevek is happy to be back with his partner, but his daughter does not know him. They catch up on all that has happened. Shevek tells Takver that he ran into their old friend Tirin who had been hospitalized after trying to produce unapproved plays and music. As they talk about Tirin, Shevek compares his situation with what happened to him and Takver. He wonders if somehow they were forced apart as a punishment. Perhaps, Tirin was punished for going against the accepted norm.

Chapter 11

Shevek goes to the Terra embassy and asks to speak to the ambassador. When they learn he is seeking asylum, they immediately take him in. After rest and food, Shevek sits with the ambassador and tells her that I-Ao wants his theories so that they can perfect a type of instantaneous travel. Shevek warns them they can probably do it on their own eventually and that he has given them the calculations to create an instantaneous communications device. Shevek then tells the ambassador that he wants to give his theory to humanity to be used for good, not to I-Ao so they can use it in their wars. Shevek feels he made a mistake coming to Urras and that Anarres is so much better than Urras. The ambassador argues, saying that while Urras has its bad parts, it is still a beautiful place, a paradise compared to her own world. They finally agree to disagree.

Analysis

Shevek and Takver are finally reunited after four years. When they are, Shevek begins to wonder if they were punished for the book that he wrote. He had insisted that it be published. Shevek has met again with an old friend who writes plays and songs that were not approved. After a stint in the hospital, he is afraid to write anything other than this one play over and over. It makes Shevek wonder if his world without a government actually does have a body watching over it and controlling the people.

On Urras, Shevek survives his experience in the demonstration and goes to the embassy of Terra to ask for help. Shevek offers to give his theories to them if they will promise to use it for universal good instead of war. Shevek and the ambassador argue over what is good and bad. At this point the reader can see that Shevek has come to realize that what might have gone wrong with his own world was not as bad as the greed and lack of humanity on Urras. Shevek longs to go home and return to his simple existence despite the fact that he had wanted at one time to be around people who thought like him, people who challenged him intellectually, and to make his world



friendly to this world. Shevek finally understands that Anarres's isolation is not such a bad thing.

Discussion Question 1

Why does it take four years for Shevek and Takver to be reunited? Who does Shevek think is to blame for this?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Shevek go to the Terra embassy? What does he hope to find there?

Discussion Question 3

Why does the ambassador suggest that Urras is a paradise compared to her own world? How does her view differ from Shevek's? Why?

Vocabulary

Harmonium, machinists, artificial, mistrustful, curiosity, noticing, surface, intimacy, emotional, approbation, dormitory, flirtatious, indubitable, attendant, righteous, nursery, splendor, scintillation, brilliance, difference, provided, commons, electrocuted, abysses, separate, chronic, irritation, bronchial, endemic, malnutrition, hardship, adequate.



Chapters 12-13

Summary

Chapter 12

Six years have passed. Shevek and his friend Bedap have begun the Syndicate of Initiative to publish Shevek's books. This has caused a great amount of angst against Shevek and his family. Takver is having difficulties at work while their daughter is being bullied in the dormitories. Rulag, Shevek's own mother, is the syndicate's biggest heckler. It is a difficult time that only grows worse when Bedap and Shevek begin talking about sending an Andarre to Urras and bringing Urrasti to Andarre. That night, while talking about the treatment they have been suffering among their peers, Takver suggests that Shevek go to Urras. Shevek balks, telling her he is afraid he would not be allowed to return, but Takver thinks that this is what Shevek has wanted all along.

Chapter 13

Shevek is on a Hainish ship returning to Anarres. Shevek speaks with people on Anarres and learns that he has more supporters than he did when he left, but there are still people who are against him. Shevek does not know what he will find when he arrives, or even if he will survive the walk through the wall. Ketho, the Hainish first mate, asks to accompany Shevek to Anarres, claiming to always having been curious about the planet. Shevek agrees, but warns him he might not survive his arrival. The two men then set off for the planet on the landing craft.

Analysis

The reader discovers that Shevek began a new syndicate with his friend Bedap so that he might publish whatever he might like. Shevek explains to those who ask that theirs is a civilization based on revolution and it is their responsibility to fight for freedom, not security. For this reason, Shevek thinks each individual should be allowed to do as they wish, which goes against the rules against egotism on Anarres. Shevek's own mother fights against him, but the reader must wonder if she does this out of her beliefs or because she is frightened for him. Takver, Shevek's partner and the mother of his two children, is the first to tell him to go to Urras. Shevek is frightened he will not be allowed to return to them, but makes it clear that is his intention. Shevek is curious and rebellious. Though he is a unique person, he also has a strong sense of family.

Shevek returns to Anarres as he always intended to do. However, he learns that things have changed on Anarres and he might face opposition when he arrives. Despite this, he arrives with empty hands, hoping to see his family again after his long absence. At the same time, Shevek brings with him an alien, opening Anarres's borders singlehandedly for the first time. It is a monumental moment, leaving the reader wondering only if either man survives.



Discussion Question 1

Who is Rulag? Why is she such an outspoken opponent to Shevek? How has having Rulag in his life altered the way Shevek thinks?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Takver suggest that Shevek go to Urras? Does she want to get rid of him? What is Shevek's hesitation?

Discussion Question 3

Why is Shevek not afraid to return to Anarres? What might he face when he lands? How does this compare to what he left behind on the day he departed Anarres?

Vocabulary

Syndicate, opposed, exchanged, frustrated, anarchists, initiative, irresponsibility, society, welfare, confession, enemy, presents, transmitter, pseudo, enslave, experiment, exclamations, queries, persisted, individual, adviser, punishment, justice, quibbling, earning, involves, relationship, morally, obligation, evolution, tyranny.



Characters

Shevek

Shevek is a physicist who lives on a planet settled by the members of a revolution. On Shevek's planet, there is no government, no economic system, no laws or rules. Everyone is free to take what they need from the makers or manufacturers. Everyone is free to study what they want and do the jobs they enjoy most. Everyone is free to choose who they have intimate relations with and who they take as partners.

Shevek has some radical ideas in his work as a physicist. When Shevek discovers that his ideas are far beyond the understanding of the people on Anarres and that there are scientists on Urras, the neighboring planet, he wants to speak to those scientists. However, this right is closely guarded by his professor and the syndicate that controls these communications. Shevek is then sent away from his partner when he tries to send a manuscript to Urras that was not previously approved. For this reason, Shevek starts his own syndicate to publish his own works. This leads to unrest on his planet even though many people do not know how to protest. Eventually Shevek travels to Urras in an attempt to find minds like his own and to make some kind of peace between the two planets. Instead, Shevek discovers that the people who brought him to Urras only want to use him for his scientific theories.

Takver

Takver is a childhood friend of Shevek's. They meet again when Shevek is about to transfer to Abbenay. There is a party, and Shevek takes notice of a girl who joins in the conversation. He never learns her name. It is not until later that he realizes it is Takver.

When Shevek is in Abbenay and has renewed his friendship with Bedap, he meets Takver again on a trip into the mountains. Shevek and Takver have a conversation about their desires for the future. It is then that they both realize they want to partner with someone and have a steady relationship. They decide to move in together. As they grow closer, they find themselves the center of their friends, as well.

Takver has a baby a short time into her relationship with Shevek. During her pregnancy a drought begins. Shortly after the baby's birth, Shevek is sent away on an emergency manual job to help with the consequences of the drought. Just before he returns, Takver is sent away to help with famine relief. Shevek and Takver end up spending four years apart, and Shevek misses four years of his daughter's life. However, when they are reunited, they have another child and their bond seems stronger than ever. Takver even encourages Shevek to go to Urras in order to prove his theories of rebellion.



Tirin

Tirin is a childhood friend of Shevek's. When they become adults, Tirin pursues an artistic career. However, when Tirin tries to write original compositions and plays, he is given job assignments he does not want. In time, Tirin is put into a hospital. Bedap believes that this assignment is against Tirin's wishes even though it is common for people of Anarres to ask to be put into at times of emotional stress. When Shevek meets Tirin years later, he comes to believe that Tirin is frightened by his experiences, solidifying his ideas that the organizations who choose which jobs the people of Anarres have use their power to govern.

Bedap

Bedap is a childhood friend of Shevek's. As children they often play together. As older teens they have their first adult experiences together. When Shevek gets his first job assignment, he is disappointed to find it is a manual labor job. This separates Shevek from all his friends. Therefore, it is many years later when he runs into Bedap again. When Shevek does meet Bedap again, he has been ill and is trying to become more social so that it will help with his work. He and Bedap again become good friends and even become lovers for a short time. It is Bedap who reintroduces Shevek to Takver, a meeting that leads to their partnership. Bedap also helps Shevek publish his own works with the Syndicate of Initiative.

Rulag

Rulag is an engineer. As a young woman, she partners with Palat and has Shevek. Two years later, Rulag is reassigned to Abbenay and chooses to remain there. When Shevek goes to Abbenay to work at the university, Rulag searches him out after his first book is published. At this first meeting, Shevek is not impressed with his mother's commitment to her career and chooses not to see her again. However, when Shevek begins the Syndicate of Initiative with Bedap, Rulag becomes his biggest protestor.

Palat

Palat is Shevek's father. After Shevek's mother is reassigned to Abbenay, Palat moves into the dorms and leaves Shevek in the nursery. However, Palat remains in Shevek's life, encouraging his curiosity and his education. It is a little unusual for a father to remain as involved in a child's life on Anarres, but Palat clearly loves Shevek. Shevek is also aware of how much Palat misses Rulag, but he never leaves Shevek in search of his missing partner.



Sadik

Sadik is Shevek and Takver's first child. Sadik is only an infant when the famine comes and Shevek and Takver are separated. Shevek does not see Sadik again until she is four years old. Sadik does not even know who Shevek is. Sadik grows into a beautiful ten year old, but when Shevek begins a syndicate to get his own works published, she is bullied in the dormitories. This is part of what motivates Takver to suggest Shevek go to Urras.

Sabul

Sabul is Shevek's professor at the university in Abbenay. Shevek is initially excited to work with Sabul, especially when he realizes that he will be learning the language of Urras and communicating with scientists there. However, it quickly becomes clear that Sabul is using Shevek so that he might take credit for his works. When Shevek writes his Principles of Spontaneity, Sabul calls it heresy until Shevek agrees to allow Sabul to place his name on it as well. When several copies of the book are sent to Urras, Shevek sneaks in the original manuscript for Atro. Soon after this, Shevek is separated from Takver and fired from his position at the university.

Pae

Pae is a physicist who lives on Urras. Pae pretends to be a friend to Shevek, but it quickly is revealed that Pae's main concern is to get Shevek's General Theory so that he can build a new mode of transportation that will make I-Ao a leader in the universe. Pae is impatient, often distressed at Shevek's lack of progress on his work. Pae thinks Shevek does not know his motivations, but Shevek figures Pae out from almost their first meeting.

Oii

Oii is a physicist who lives on Urras. Shevek works with Oii when he arrives at the university in I-Ao. Oii is a quiet, reserved man, but when he invites Shevek to his home for dinner, Shevek finds that he is loving toward his family and appears to have great respect for his wife despite the inferiority of the way women are treated on Urras in general. It is Oii's sister Shevek meets and has a romantic encounter with on Urras shortly before he decides to leave Urras.

Atro

Atro is a physicist who lives on Urras. Shevek befriends Atro, not only because of their bond over their work, but because he enjoys the older man's company. However,

Shevek is bothered by Atró's opinions on the military and the way in which his state, A-lo, conducts war.



Symbols and Symbolism

Principles of Spontaneity

Principles of Spontaneity is a paper Shevek writes in his role as a physicist. However, the paper is not well received by his supervisor until Takver suggests that Shevek allow the paper to be published with his supervisor's name on it. Soon after, Shevek sneaks the original manuscript on a shipment to Urras to be reviewed by a scientist there. Shevek is then sent away and separated from his partner and child for four years.

Dormitory

All the children on Anarres begin living in dormitories as young children so that the children can learn to coexist with others and avoid egoizing. People on Anarres remain in the dormitories all their lives unless they partner and decide to live in a domicile.

Domicile

There are buildings that have larger rooms in them that two people can share as partners. Shevek and Takver take one of these domiciles when they choose to become partners and have their first child there.

Money

The people on Anarres have no concept of money because they do not have an economy on their planet. When Shevek travels to Urras, he does not understand the concept of money nor how to go about using it. However, he earns money by publishing papers there and does use it eventually to buy clothing and other items.

Syndicates

On Anarres there is a syndicate for each profession. These syndicates are groups of like-minded people who work together. Shevek and Bedap begin a new syndicate, the Syndicate of Initiative, to publish Shevek's books and to communicate with the people of Urras.

Production and Distribution Coordination or PCD

The Production and Distribution Coordination, or PDC, is the coordinating system for all syndicates and individuals who do productive work. It is the PDC who chooses what



jobs people will do and, in effect, choose which partners will remain together and which will be separated.

Clothing

Shevek struggles with the mode of dress on Urras when he first arrives. Shevek is used to wearing clothing that is designed more for its usefulness than fashion. When he is on the ship traveling to Urras, he is shocked when the pajamas he wore are thrown away. Later, Shevek finds the demeaning way in which women dress attractive, but not very useful.

Spaceships

Urras has an extensive number of airships they use to travel around their planet and to other planets. Anarres only has twelve spaceships, the spaceships that were used to bring the original settlers to the planet. These spaceships are well maintained and used for the protection of Anarres.

Fort in Drio

Shevek learns as a young man that Odo was once imprisoned at the fort in Drio. This captures the imagination of Shevek and his friends because such a thing does not exist on Anarres. As an adult, Shevek wants to see the fort in Drio, but is told it has been destroyed, his desire to see it ridiculed. When he realizes it still stands, he has lost interest in seeing it.

Wire Art

When Takver and Shevek first move in together, Takver brings with her art sculptures she has made of wire to hang above their bed. Shevek finds these items fascinating, especially since most people on Anarres do not have many belongings other than necessities.

Settings

Anarres

Anarres is a moon near the planet of Urras. Anarres is a world that has mountains and oceans, but there is very little natural plant or animal life on it. Anarres is settled by a group of revolutionaries from Urras who follow the writings of a woman named Odo. On this planet, they do not believe in a structured government. Instead, the people are encouraged to live their lives in peace and freedom, choosing the jobs they wish to do and the people they wish to be with. On Anarres, everyone is encouraged to avoid materialism and pride. The children live in dormitories so they learn to get along with others. Adults are free to choose the mate they want, but there is no marriage, only partnerships that can be dissolved as easily as they began. On Anarres, people are assigned jobs in their field of choice and are encouraged to take manual labor jobs from time to time. There is no economy, no money, as everything a person might need is free for the taking from the manufacturers, growers, and makers.

Urras

Urras is a planet that is much like modern day Earth. Urras is divided into multiple states, each with its own government. I-Ao is one of the largest. Materialism is common on Urras, as is marriage and infidelity. There is greed and hatred on Urras as well as wars and poverty. There are also many animals and different plants, aliens from foreign planets and far advanced scientists. Shevek thinks of Urras as some sort of paradise until he visits there, then he finds that it is more of a nightmare compared to his own organized, gentle society.

A-Io

I-Ao is the state in which Shevek lives when he moves to Urras. I-Ao is much like the United States, a democratic society that is a world leader and strives to be the best at all they do. I-Ao has brought Shevek there in hopes that he will give them a theory he has that will help them make huge advances in space travel. Instead, Shevek runs away from I-Ao after he becomes aware of the atrocities with which they fight their wars.

Thu

Thu is another state on Urras. In this state, the people follow a more Odonian type lifestyle. However, they also fight wars and do atrocious things to their people in the name of freedom.



Themes and Motifs

Anarchy

Shevek calls himself an anarchist because of his decision to go to Urras even though immigration between Urras and Anarres has been forbidden since the founding of Anarres. Shevek has always been a devoted Odonian, but he begins to question the actions of the PDC when he learns that a friend has been sent to a mental hospital because he dares to write music and plays that are different from what is acceptable. Later, when Shevek is forced to apart from his partner and his child because of his attempt to send an unauthorized manuscript to a scientist on Urras, this seems to underscore his belief that his government-less world is actually being controlled by the job posting methods.

Shevek's world was begun because of an anarchist. A woman called Odo once was persecuted for her beliefs on Urras and her writings became the basis for a movement toward revolution. Many of Odo's strongest believers made the decision to leave Urras and created their own society on Anarres. These people formed a society that they believe Odo would have done herself if it had been possible. Shevek believes by rebelling against the traditions of Anarres in communicating with Urras and eventually traveling there he is upholding some of Odo's strongest beliefs.

Anarchy is the act of being an individual, of attempting to overthrow a government. While Anarres has no government, Shevek is going against the accepted rules and the traditions of his people. Shevek wants to change the way in which his people think and to allow them the freedom of being an individual, rather than following the rules by rote. In the end, however, Shevek discovers that a world with a government is no better than one without. He returns home.

Utopian Society

A utopian society is an ideal state of place. Shevek has come to the conclusion that the ways of his people, that the PDC, is not an ideal way of living. Shevek is a physicist who wants to speak to other physicist who understand his theories and can share with him their breakthroughs and discoveries. The only people Shevek feels he can speak to are the scientists on Urras, but this is forbidden by his people. For this reason, Shevek stands up as an individual and fights the system, eventually traveling to Urras as the first Anarrarite to leave his home planet.

Shevek believes that going to a world with a government he will find a utopia that will provide him with all the things missing on Anarres. However, Shevek instead finds a world that is materialistic and a government that cares little for its people. Shevek discusses with a Terra ambassador what paradise really is. The ambassador feels that Urras is her paradise because her own planet has been damaged and the only livable



space is an inhospitable desert. Shevek, on the other hand, thinks of his own planet with nostalgia and decides that even with its flaws, it is a better place than Urras.

Family

Family is an important theme throughout Shevek's life. Shevek's parents are partners who at one time cared deeply for one another. However, when Shevek's mother is transferred to another city, she leaves her son and partner behind without a second thought. Shevek can see that his father is heartbroken without his mother, but he has no way to make the situation better without leaving Shevek behind.

When Shevek is older, he meets his mother and discovers that she was more concerned with her job than being a good mother and partner. For this reason, Shevek purposely attempts to be more social and to put other things before his work. Shevek partners with Takver, a childhood friend whom he cares deeply for. They have a child, but are separated for four years after her birth as an apparent punishment for Shevek's attempts to communicate with the scientists on Urras. This forces Shevek to miss four years of his child's life.

As Shevek's family grows, he becomes very close not only to his partner, but to his children as well. Shevek develops the opinion that the parents should bare more responsibility for their children than is traditional on Anarres. This is another of his controversial opinions. When Shevek goes to Urras, it is his family he often thinks of with each new experience. Returning to Anarres becomes important to Shevek because of his family, making family an important theme of the novel.



Styles

Point of View

The point of view of the novel is third person. The main character is a physicist named Shevek. The author remains focused on Shevek throughout the novel, never moving into the mind of another character.

The point of view of this novel works well with the plot. The point of view allows the reader to develop an understanding of the main character that makes them care about what happens to him. Although it does not have the intimacy of a first person point of view, this point of view keeps the reader focused on the main character, therefore allowing the reader only to know and understand what this character knows and understands. For this reason, the reader finds themselves rooting for the main character, deeply involved in his situation until the final sentence of the novel.

Language and Meaning

The language of this novel is a sophisticated English. The novel is set in an imaginary world, therefore the language includes many words that a modern reader might not know or understand. These terms are often explained by their use in the text.

The novel is of the science fiction genre, therefore many of the words or terms are made up or altered from recognizable form or use. The reader often comes across these words and does not immediately know what they mean, but will eventually learn their meaning by their use or a brief explanation within the text. The rest of the language of the novel is highly sophisticated, often tangled in the author's love of descriptions and literature. However, the language of this novel fits the characters and the genre of the novel well.

Structure

The novel is divided into thirteen chapters. The chapters skip back and forth between current time and Shevek's past. This switching of time in the chapters allows the reader to see not only where Shevek has found himself, but how he got there and what influences caused him to make the decisions he has. It can be a confusing structure, but the author connects the two time lines throughout the novel, making it all unite at the end of the novel.

The novel has one main plot and several subplots. The main plot of the novel follows Shevek as he travels to the planet of Urras to discover what a world with multiple governments is like. A subplot of the novel follows Shevek's friendships with Takver, Bedap, and others. Another subplot follows Shevek's relationships with both his own

family and his biological parents. All the plots come to a satisfying conclusion at the end of the novel.



Quotes

If the foreman had no experience in bossing a mob, they had no experience in being one.

-- Narrator (Chapter 1 paragraph 14)

Importance: This quote shows that the people of Anarres do not know how to protest, even when they want to.

Speech is sharing-a cooperative art. You're not sharing, merely eogizing.

-- Unnamed Teacher (Chapter 2 paragraph 33)

Importance: As a child, this is how Shevek is chastised while trying to share a physics joke he finds funny, but no one else understands. This introduces the ideas on Anarres against individualism, an idea that Shevek will come up against again and again in the novel.

This room was evidently for his sole use, as it opened off the bedroom, and contained only one of each kind of fixture, though each was of a sensuous luxury that far surpassed mere eroticism and partook, in Shevek's view, of a kind of ultimate apotheosis of the excremental.

-- Shevek (Chapter 3 paragraph 2)

Importance: This is Shevek's reaction to seeing the bathroom in his quarters on Urras. This reaction shows the distinct differences between bathrooms on Urras and bathrooms on Anarres.

For two hundred years after the first landing Anarres was explored, mapped, investigated, but not colonized. Why move to a howling desert when there was plenty of room in the gracious valleys of Urras?

-- Shevek (Chapter 4 paragraph 11)

Importance: This quote explains in part why no one from Urras was ever interested in settling on Anarres until the revolutionaries. It might also explain why there has been little interest in aliens coming to Anarres since it was settled.

What they were free to do, however, was another question. It appeared to Shevek that their freedom from obligation was in exact proportion to their lack of freedom of initiative.

-- Shevek (Chapter 5 paragraph 4)

Importance: Shevek sees the freedom that the people of I-Ao have is something they do not fully understand or appreciate. Shevek does not understand why these people behave as they do, especially in an academic setting.



His illness had made him realize that if he tried to go on alone he would break down altogether.

-- Shevek (Chapter 6 paragraph 9)

Importance: Shevek has recently recovered from pneumonia and has realized, especially after a talk with his biological mother, that isolation is not good for his emotional well being, his physical well being, or his work. For this reason, Shevek becomes social and eventually reunites with an old friend and finds a partner.

Shevek was kind, serious, honest, and told very good stories about the Moon; but there was more to it than that. He represented something to the child that Ini could not describe. Even much later in his life, which was profoundly and obscurely influenced by that childhood fascination, Ini found no words for it, only words that held an echo of it the word voyager, the word exile.

-- Ini (Chapter 7 paragraph 20)

Importance: This quote shows the influence Shevek has on those around him, especially the youngest child of Oii, his colleague.

It hasn't rained for eighteen decads. A hundred and eighty-three days to be precise. Longest drought in Abbenay for forty years.

-- Terras (Chapter 8 paragraph 28)

Importance: This quote introduces the drought that will eventually lead to a famine and separate Shevek and Takver. This quote also introduces the method of keeping time the Anarresites use, the decad.

He saw now-in detail, item by item from the beginning-that he had made a mistake in coming to Urras; his first big mistake, and the one that was likely to last him the rest of his life.

-- Shevek (Chapter 9 paragraph 8)

Importance: Shevek has had a bad night and has finally come to the understanding that he was brought to Urras under false pretense and that it is not the world he believed it to be. Shevek wants to return home, but he knows they will not send him home until he gives them what they want, something he is hesitant to give them.

She stood facing him. She reached out, as if to push him away or to take hold of him, an uncertain, unfinished gesture. He took her hand, and then they held each other, they came together and stood holding each other on the unreliable earth.

-- Shevek (Chapter 10 paragraph 46)

Importance: Shevek and Takver have been separated for four years. When they reunite, neither is sure where they stand with the other or how long they will be allowed to be together considering the experience they have just gone through.



Her arguments were good, and Bedap respected her. Sometimes when she spoke of the strength of Urras and the danger of bargaining with the strong from a position of weakness, he believed her.

-- Bedap (Chapter 12 paragraph 13)

Importance: Bedap is talking about Rulag, who he is not aware at this point is Shevek's biological mother. It shows that Rulag's arguments are strong and, perhaps, Bedap is not as committed to anarchy as he thinks he is.

But he had not brought anything. His hands were empty, as they had always been.

-- Shevek (Chapter 13 paragraph 44)

Importance: This quote is the final one of the novel. This quote seems to show the reader that Shevek feels he has returned with nothing and that he now appreciates that sometimes nothing is a lot.